Case Study 1: Affinity Spaces

Students of various ethnicities, with the urging of several faculty members, have expressed the need for students to have access to dedicated “affinity” living spaces on campus. The proponents of such spaces have argued that the spaces will provide an opportunity for students to affiliate and live with one another in a safe place where they feel free to express themselves culturally. Proponents argue that it is very difficult for students of color in particular to feel welcome at a historically white, privileged institution, and such spaces will provide students with comradery and engagement in ways that they cannot otherwise express themselves with the greater campus community.

Questions for discussion:

- What are the core principles that should guide us in navigating this controversy?
- How do we respond, and who guides and participates in our response?
- If the response includes a statement, what should it say, who participates in its preparation, and how widely is it disseminated?
- How do we reach out to and support the identified student groups?
- How should the College engage the faculty members who support these students?
- After the immediate controversy is past, how do we turn this into an occasion for learning and growth?
- Consider the roles of different members of the on-campus and off-campus communities in navigating this controversy: e.g., faculty, students, chief diversity officers or diversity offices, EEOA offices, counseling services, communications, legal counsel, security, alumnae, and the board of trustees.
Case Study 2: Questioning the Gender Binary

Your College’s residence hall bathrooms were declared co-educational thirty years ago; now those bathrooms are described as Gender Neutral. In the past two years the College has agreed, to the extent possible, to provide Gender Neutral Restrooms in all buildings on campus. This policy, developed by a multi-constituent task force, was established in order to meet the safety and health and wellness needs of transgender and gender non-conforming members of the community. To meet the College’s goal in the student center, a male/female restroom pair has been converted to a pair of “Gender Neutral Restrooms” by changing the signs on the doors from “Men’s Room” on one and “Women’s Room” on the other to “Gender Neutral Restroom” on both. Signs directing individuals who are looking for gendered restrooms, available on the floor below, are clearly visible.

During the summer months, your College hosts programs for children of elementary school age. Throughout the day the summer programs use rooms that are located near the Gender Neutral Restrooms mentioned above. To align with the expectations of youth program participants, the Gender Neutral Restrooms are re-labeled “Boys” and “Girls” rooms for the duration of summer experience. One of your College students protests this change in signage, claiming that their right to a Gender Neutral Restroom has been compromised.

Questions for discussion:

- What are the core principles that should guide us in navigating this situation?
- How do we respond, and who guides and participates in our response?
- How do participants/administrators navigate the different expectations and norms of community constituents?
- Under what conditions do we no longer uphold our own institutional rules and/or standards so as to accommodate particular groups, thereby compromising the beliefs those standards/rules reflect?
- Should institutional policy go beyond legal requirements, and if so under what circumstances? Does this leave the institution vulnerable to accusations of having double standards when practice reverts to what is legally mandated rather than following institutional policy/standards?
- Consider the roles of different members of the on-campus and off-campus communities in navigating this controversy: e.g., faculty, students, chief diversity officers or diversity offices, EEOA offices, counseling services, communications, legal counsel, security, alumnae, and the board of trustees.
Case Study 3: Title IX Controversy

An online magazine has published a student’s account of her alleged sexual assault by another student on campus and her disillusionment with the Title IX investigative process, which found that the preponderance of the evidence did not support the allegation. Other students, along with members of the faculty, organized a campus rally in support of the reporting student, after which they presented a list of demands to the college president for increased staffing and policy changes in several areas related to sexual assault investigation, support, prevention, and counseling.

Due to the choice of complainants, respondents, and other members of the campus community to engage in social media and other outlets about this and other cases, you are regularly asked as an educational leader to comment on behalf of the institution. You have been steadfast in abiding by college policy – to not comment on specific cases so as to preserve confidentiality of the process and to protect the privacy of those involved. Pressure is mounting for the college to say more on this case and more on the broader topic of sexual assault.

At the same time, some critics suggest that these are crimes and should only be processed via our legal system, and not through a college process. There is also considerable concern among sexual assault prevention advocates that the administration of the new U.S. President will seek to alter prior guidance and mandates put forth by the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, and the Office of Civil Rights with regard to college and university approaches to addressing sexual assault. In short, despite considerable effort and allocation of resources by the college, Title IX compliance and adjudication continues to be an evolving set of issues for higher education institutions.

Questions for discussion:

- What are the core principles that should guide us in navigating this crisis and the complex Title IX terrain?
- How do we respond, and who guides and participates in our response to this particular case? What is the role of the faculty in this response?
- If the response includes a statement, what should it say, who participates in its preparation, and how widely is it disseminated?
- How do we reach out to and support the individuals involved?
- After the immediate crisis is past, how do we turn this into an occasion for learning and growth?
Case Study 4: Trump Election Aftermath

Donald Trump is elected president – an outcome foreseen by few and prepared for by none. To many students on our campus, his ascendancy as president seems a rejection of their values and a threat to the College’s efforts to build a diverse, inclusive, and supportive community. Increasingly visible misogyny, xenophobia, and climate change denial seem like existential threats. Students want the faculty and administration to help them resist. There are calls for declaring the campus a sanctuary for undocumented students, providing funding for travel to protests, and signing on to public statements condemning particular policy proposals and pronouncements of the new president and his administration.

Questions for discussion:

• What roles might faculty play in channeling student unrest into productive learning and effective citizenship?
• What student constituencies feel particularly vulnerable at this time? What are your options or ideas for supporting them?
• Does your institution communicate anything broadly to the campus or beyond? If so, who shapes the message and what do you say?
• What about the Trump supporters in your extended community (students, faculty, staff, students’ families, alums, Board?) How does your messaging, programming, and faculty response balance their support for the new president with the concerns and needs of other members of your community?
• How is this presidential transition playing out on your campus in terms of student activism and engagement?