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# Departmental Fights: Finding Solutions and Maintaining Sanity as Chair

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## Academic Chairpersons Conference 2017 Proposal

### 1. Title of Presentation

Departmental Fights: Finding Solutions and Maintaining Sanity as Chair

### 2. Primary Presenter Information:

Dr. Ethan Krase

Title: Chair of English

Institution: Winona State University

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Additional Presenter Biographical Sketch: Dr. Ethan Krase is Professor and Chair of the Department of English at Winona State University in Winona, MN. He has served as chair for six years and has also previously directed his university's Writing Center. Dr. Krase's teaching interests center on applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and rhetoric and composition. He is the co-author of *Theory and Practice for Writing Tutors* as well as articles in *Across the Disciplines*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *Journal of Teaching Writing*, and *The WAC Journal*. Dr. Krase has presented at ACC and other chair-training venues on multiple occasions.

### 3. Additional Presenter Information:

Dr. Gian Pagnucci

Title: Chair of English

Institution: Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Postal Address:

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Department of English

Humanities and Social Sciences Building, Room 506L

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Primary Presenter Biographical Sketch: Dr. Gian Pagnucci is Distinguished University Professor and Chair of the Department of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He has served as chair for six years and also served as Director of Graduate Studies in Composition and TESOL. Dr. Pagnucci's teaching specialties are technical writing, composition, technology-based pedagogy, and comic books. Dr. Pagnucci is co-author of *Enter the Superheroes: American Values, Culture, and the Canon of Superhero Literature* from Scarecrow Press. His past books include *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making* and *Re-Mapping Narrative: Technology's Impact on the Way We Write*. Dr. Pagnucci has presented at ACC and other chair-training venues on multiple occasions.

#### **4. Presentation topic theme**

Operating the Department

#### **5. Presentation type**

Best practice presentation

(Dr. Pagnucci and Dr. Krase will co-present, so please treat us as if we were one presenter. We plan to share the 45-minute time slot for a Best Practice Presentation.)

#### **6. Target audience**

All department chairs

#### **7. Learning objectives of the presentation**

- Participants will learn a variety of strategies for managing conflict among colleagues.
- Participants will learn ways to minimize the likelihood of conflict breaking out in public venues (e.g., department meetings).
- Participants will examine steps chairs can take to help their colleagues pick up the pieces at the conclusion of a departmental conflict.

#### **8. Abstract for Program and Website:**

While circumstances of departmental conflicts are variable, one constant is that as chairs we end up involved. Although chairs cannot prevent conflict from occurring, there are steps we can take to minimize the consequences. This session offers strategies chairs can use to lead their departments through conflict more productively.

#### **9. Keywords:**

- conflict
- personnel
- leadership
- management
- dispute resolution

#### **10. Description of the Session:**

Every academic department is a little different, due to differences in context, faculty, and university setting. Yet, despite the differences across institutions, departments, and disciplines, as chairs we do face a lot of common problems. In this session, the presenters will focus on one of the toughest problems of all: the public departmental conflict. This session won't focus narrowly on handling difficult colleagues, since other sessions cover that topic. Instead, this session will look broadly at responses chairs need

to take during and after public flare ups between colleagues. This session aims to help chairs restore peace when things get out of hand.

### Description of the Problem

Given enough time, even the most harmonious department will experience public discord. And while department chairs and others can certainly work conscientiously to avoid public disputes, the stressors of academic work still tend to make departmental conflicts all but inevitable. While the causes of departmental conflicts are always variable and contextual, there are some critical steps all chairpersons can take to help their departments contain and process conflict. Unfortunately, like many aspects of a chairperson's job, virtually no chair comes into the leadership position having received training in techniques for conflict management.

### Presentation Focus

This session will address departmental conflicts from two perspectives: 1) the chair's responsibility during the conflict; 2) the chair's role in the aftermath. Drawing on their own experiences navigating departmental strife, the presenters will share strategies for minimizing the likelihood of public conflict and also for helping to ensure that when conflict does occur, it is handled professionally and productively. The session will also examine how chairs can work to repair damage done when tempers have risen and harsh words have been exchanged. Drawing on their combined twelve years as academic chairs, the presenters will share their experiences with conflict in their own departments and the ways they worked to guide colleagues through the difficult issue. The presenters will draw key strategies from these experiences to be used when facing a variety of departmental conflicts. The session will also offer attendees the opportunity to talk through their own experiences with departmental conflicts in a supportive atmosphere.

### Audience Engagement

The presenters will take attendees through the following hands-on exercises:

- Attendees will be divided into groups and given a sample departmental conflict to discuss and brainstorm solutions to; the presenters will then extrapolate from this brainstorming further strategies for addressing these departmental conflicts
- Attendees will also have an opportunity to discuss specific departmental conflicts they have experienced and to brainstorm further potential solutions

### **Audio-visual Equipment:**

Nothing needed beyond standard computer projector