

## Mentorship Conflict Protocols

A mentorship conflict protocol document outlines clearly for graduate students and faculty how to recognize and respond to mentorship conflicts. It addresses signs of conflict, common types of conflicts, conflict resolution information and resources, and reporting information. Some graduate programs decided to combine this resource with the Finding a Mentor Guide which proved useful. [Sample Mentorship Conflict Protocols](#).

### Student/Faculty Feedback

We also collected faculty feedback if the graduate programs distributed the conflict protocol resources to faculty as well as graduate students. When graduate students and faculty were asked if they had a good understanding of where to go when experiencing a conflict with a mentor or mentee prior to using this resource, the results were evenly split. Around 50% indicated they knew of conflict resolution resources, while the other 50% indicated they did not. A majority (93%) reported that their understanding of conflict resolution resources improved after receiving the conflict protocol resource. A majority also indicated they would reference the resource when experiencing a conflict. Resources they found most helpful included definitions of conflict, signs of conflict, resource lists, flow charts, and example scenarios.

*"I found the examples of types of conflict helpful. Since the graduate student/mentor relationship is such an odd one (and unhealthy has been normalized for SO long), it can at times be hard to gauge 'normal.'"*

The feedback indicated resources could be improved by discussing conflicts involving post-doctoral scholars, protocols for faculty to address mentee performance issues (absenteeism, unsatisfactory progress), and guidance on some common difficult conversations surrounding issues such as, "mastering out," unreasonable workload expectations, and funding.

### Summary

Faculty and graduate students do not consistently understand how to recognize or approach mentorship conflicts or where to find the best resource for their issue. In creating this resource, it is clear faculty need a protocol resource as well as graduate students. The feedback also illuminated that a majority of faculty and graduate students are going to the Graduate Program Chair and Graduate Program Coordinator with their mentorship conflicts. Graduate Program Chairs and Graduate Program Coordinators should then continue to receive conflict mediation training and resources as they serve in this critical role.

When graduate programs provide written guidance on conflicts, they normalize conflict within the program's culture and empower mentors and mentees to address issues early. Since unaddressed conflicts can result in major barriers to a graduate student's success and well-being, discussions of common conflicts (in conjunction with a written guide) should be discussed at orientations, student seminars, and faculty meetings to educate members of the programs on conflict resolution best practices.