

# Mediation on Campus: A History and Planning Guide by Bill Warters

*NOTE: This article is reprinted with permission from the June/July 1991 Issue (Vol 33) of **The Fourth R**, The Newsletter of the National Association for Mediation in Education (now the Conflict Resolution Education Network of the National Institute for Dispute Resolution). A lot of growth has occurred since then, with current 1998 estimates indicating 165 programs underway.*

Mediation programs on college campuses are becoming more common place all the time. Over 35 colleges and universities in North America now have formalized mediation projects, and the number is increasing with each passing semester. Networking among existing centers has improved (our oldest campus programs now boast over a decade of experience resolving campus conflicts), and it is easier than ever to find information and contacts that can assist someone in starting a center. In addition, the work of NAME members in elementary and secondary schools is now bearing fruit at the college level, as students who have had experience in mediation in junior high or high school are showing up at college and plugging into existing centers or pushing for the creation of new programs.

The oral history of formal campus-based mediation programs actually begins around 1981, when the earliest recorded programs at UMass in Amherst and the University of Hawaii got under way. In 1983, a 2 1/2 day colloquium at Oberlin College on conflict resolution in higher education helped propel the field, and things really got going in 1985 when the Mediation Project at UMass/Amherst, with the help of the National Institute for Dispute

Resolution, published Peaceful Persuasion: a Guide to Creating Mediation Dispute Resolution Programs on College Campuses (still the best resource on the subject, available through NAME) and hosted a Student Affairs Administrators workshop on the topic. By 1989, workshops in the higher education track at the North American Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution were attracting a great deal of interest, and it was agreed that it was time to host a National Conference on Campus Mediation Programs, which was held in March of 1990 by the Campus Mediation Center at Syracuse University. The second Annual Conference on Campus Mediation Programs was held this May at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, and the third is already being planned for Eugene, Oregon in 1992. Program growth has been swift, with the approximately 21 known programs in the Spring of 1990 increasing to 35 by the spring of 1991.

All is not rosy for campus mediation programs, however. The fiscal condition of a growing number of colleges and universities is in a downturn, with 10% across the board budget cuts not at all uncommon. In an effort to cope with sagging enrollments due to the declining number of potential college age students and drastic reductions in government funding, schools are tightening their belts and many are adopting increasingly centralized decision making structures that make innovation increasingly difficult and which put in jeopardy newer, less firmly established programs on campus. There remain many good reasons why a mediation sense for a college program makes community, however, not the least of which is that if stress and tensions are going up on campus, the need for skilled conflict resolvers will certainly increase as well. What will be required is an increasing sophistication among campus mediation personnel as they tailor-make mediation services that will fit within the constraints of their environment. While innovators are

continuing to do good work establishing new programs, it is becoming apparent that existing centers have to do more creative and consistent evaluation research that can help "sell" programs to decision makers, and which can help promote more effective coalition building among the many potential allies that exist on any given campus. I also would like to encourage individuals with an academic interest in the field to join me in exploring the changing "organizational culture" of colleges and universities and the actual and potential impact of mediation on these culture (A good resources in this area is the special "campus culture" issue of a journal called New Directions for Institutional Research no.68, Winter 1990, Jossey-Bass, Inc.)

**Questions to Consider When Planning:** What follows is a list of questions that people starting new programs will need to answer when planning their program. While the list doesn't provide easy answers, it helps to paint the contours of the problem and can provides a basis for dialog when talking with staff from existing centers.

What population will the program serve?

- 1) Students who live in university affiliated residences;
- 2) all students;
- 3) the university population including students, staff, and faculty;
- 4) students and the non university community with whom they frequently interact - landlords, merchants, residents of close by neighborhoods.

What types of problems will be appropriate for the program to handle? What are the boundaries you would need to set on types of cases handled?

- 1) roommate problems;

- 2) vandalism;
- 3) harassment;
- 4) noise;
- 5) violence;
- 6) use of drugs, including alcohol;
- 7) problems around work shifts, ethnic and lifestyle tensions;
- 8) family disputes, if residents of married student housing are part of the population;
- 9) student/faculty conflicts;
- 10) co-worker disputes among university staff members;
- 11) off campus landlord/tenant cases;
- 12) inter or intra group conflicts;
- 13) policy disputes.

Who are your major sources of support on the campus?

- 1) Residence Life staff;
- 2) Dean of Student/University Judicial System;
- 3) Student Activities staff;
- 4) Security officers;
- 5) Fraternity/Sorority councils;
- 6) Student government groups;
- 7) Chapel staff;
- 8) Counseling and Guidance staff;
- 9) Academic Programs, department heads, Senate;
- 10) Chancellor or President's office;
- 11) Student Legal Services;
- 12) Ombudsman's office.

From where are you likely to get referrals? (See above list.)

Who is most likely to feel threatened by the program? How will you involve them in the project? (See above list, being aware of potential boundary/turf conflicts)

Is there a big enough core group to get the program off the ground?  
(3-5 committed, active people is probably a minimum)

Where will the program be housed, both physically and organizationally? (An image of objectivity and impartiality is important here.)

What are some options for funding the program?

- 1) Chancellor's office;
- 2) Residence Life;
- 3) Campus Judicial System;
- 4) Academic programs interested in a "clinic" for student interns;
- 5) Student fee-funded groups;
- 6) Multi-party funding from student/faculty/ staff groups;
- 7) External funding sources, program development funds.

Will participation be completely voluntary, or will it be a mandatory first step in various grievance/disciplinary procedures?

What model of mediation makes the most sense for your setting?

- 1) single mediators;
- 2) co-mediation with teams of two mediators for each session;
- 3) a panel using 3-5 mediators.

Who will do the mediation?

- 1) paid staff;
- 2) volunteers (students; staff, faculty, community members)

How will training of mediators be achieved?

Are there on-campus resources' or must outside trainers be brought in?

How will the program be evaluated and who will do it?

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