A Theory and Framework for Navigating Entangled Consultations: Using Case Studies to Find Common Ground

Michele DiPietro
Carnegie Mellon University

Therese Huston
Seattle University

Instructional consultations are often challenging, but some are frustrating for reasons that are unrelated to teaching per se. *There is a prolific literature on consultations, but most of it assumes that the instructor is ready, willing, and able to take suggestions. In the authors' experience, this is not always the case, and consultations can become "entangled" in a web of interacting, compounding factors exogenous to teaching. They analyze entangled consultations to identify common themes and strategies for responding appropriately. The compounding factors that the authors consider include defensiveness, personal problems, cultural reasons, or departmental politics. The authors also present four case studies condensed from their own experiences in entangled consultations and offer suggestions for using them to build the scholarship of educational development.*

All instructional consultations require faculty developers to draw upon their skills as communicators, their knowledge of teaching, and their sensitivity to contextual factors. Working with a faculty member on a compelling teaching question often requires us to turn to the literature or to our colleagues to learn new things.

But some consultations become much more entangled and embroiled than others. Occasionally, we find ourselves in over our heads because the situation goes far beyond a teaching question. Perhaps the personal problems of the instructor bear heavily on the consultation. Or the instruc-

tor asks for help and then staunchly refuses the advice, even though his or her teaching problem has deeply troubling implications. These experiences can be draining and worrying for teaching center personnel. The very words and phrases we use with the instructor often need to be carefully scripted and mapped out, as though we're navigating a minefield. We may discover additional layers of complexity with each new interaction, and because we see how much is at stake, we channel extra time and resources into the consultation, sometimes conferring confidentially with another faculty developer to finesse our response. We find ourselves bracing for the next conversation or dreading e-mail messages from the instructor. For many developers, it's almost impossible to leave these consultations at the office at the end of the day.

The purpose of this article is to provide a theory and framework for navigating such situations. We begin by defining two types of consultations: *ordinary consultations* and *entangled consultations.* In an ordinary consultation, the faculty developer and the faculty member devote their energy to instructional, organizational and/or assessment issues. Ordinary consultations encompass a wide range of possibilities: from the consultation with the teaching superstar in a department to the consultation with a new teacher in a class riddled with problems. Without question, ordinary consultations can be challenging—there may be a large lecture with persistently disruptive students or a discussion class in which almost no one participates—but there is a substantial literature that explains why these instructional and behavioral problems arise and how to resolve them (Bergquist & Phillips, 1975, 1977; Edington & Hunt, 1996; for an extended list, see Piccinin and Knapper, 1999). Although an ordinary consultation may require a lot of time and research, it is typically an energizing experience. Faculty developers learn new things about teaching and learning that they can readily apply to other situations.

In contrast, some consultations are what we call "entangled consultations." As we've already characterized, these consultations are layered with complexity, and they extend far beyond pedagogical questions: The dynamics and interplay of the consultation process itself are difficult. Entangled consultations are also personally stressful and draining for the faculty developer. Of course, even the most pleasant, straightforward consultation can be stressful if the developer does not have time for it, but an entangled consultation is stressful at any time of the year. Furthermore, there are few publicly available resources to help developers deal with problems surrounding the consultation process itself.

Individual consultations lie at the core of faculty development, yet this process, by necessity, takes place behind closed doors. The confidential

nature of these conversations makes it difficult for faculty developers to learn how their peers navigate entangled consultations. In order to better understand consultation dynamics, faculty developers must talk honestly and openly about them, but entangled consultations are often particularly sensitive in nature, which limits our opportunities for constructive and timely dialogue with others. Elbow (1980) pioneered this practice by sharing some of his consultation logs, but this practice of reflecting openly on the consultation process is still infrequent. Of course, an important obstacle to sharing our stories is the need to protect the privacy of the people we work with. But just as we advocate opening the doors of college and university classrooms in the spirit of the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990), we should open our centers' doors, share our successes and our frustrations, and collectively reflect on our professional roles. We hope to advance this conversation at both a theoretical and a practical level. We describe a general theoretical framework for understanding and dealing with the source of conflict when a consultation becomes entangled, and we connect our framework to the existing theoretical body. We also offer four sample case studies of entangled consultations and illustrate some of their uses for faculty development training. The case study approach provides a way to bring these entangled and complex situations into a common conversational space while preserving the confidentiality of our individual consultations.

The article is divided into five sections. We begin by classifying the compounding factors that can make consultations entangled. The second section reviews five models of communication between the faculty member and the faculty developer that can powerfully determine the success of a consultation. We then introduce four cases that show how these compounding factors can interact with the expectations that both parties bring to the consultation. Once we have located the challenge in this interaction, we offer a principle and some concrete strategies to reframe the consultation to be more productive. In the last section, we conclude with lessons learned and their implications for educational development.

## The Compounding Factors of Entangled Consultations

The current literature offers minimal research on entangled consultations as we've characterized them. Most of the existing publications describe a single difficult interaction or a single issue common to many difficult consultations. For instance, Brinko (1997) describes an example of a difficult interaction in which, among other problems, a client blamed the students entirely for problems with his course. Brinko speculated that

this particular consultation might have been more effective if she had challenged the client's negative attitudes rather than accepting them. Smith and Smith (2001) also describe a case study of an entangled consultation, and Lucas (2001) emphasizes the challenge of reaching poor teachers who are often resistant to change. These authors illustrate that faculty developers must be creative, adaptive, and resourceful when difficult consultations occur. What is missing from the literature, however, is an overview of the different factors that can foster entangled consultations and a systematic framework for understanding which creative, adaptive, and resourceful approaches are likely to fit the problem.

Reflecting on our own experience as educational consultants, we have realized that compounding factors can impact a consultation and make it challenging on two different levels: the instructor level and the departmental or institutional level. These factors are summarized in Figure 1. Factors relating to individual instructors can be grouped into three subcategories: personal problems, cultural differences, and difficult or resistant attitudes. Personal problems can create an entangled consultation if the instructor is overwhelmed by his or her own personal situation and, as a result, is not receptive to feedback or feels incapable of making decisions on how to proceed. Likewise, cultural differences can, in some circumstances, lead to perplexing or frustrating consultations because the instructor and consultant might have very different expectations about appropriate norms for student performance, the respective roles of the instructor and student, and so on. Lastly, an instructor might approach the consultation with a difficult or resistant attitude. This can lead to an aggravating experience for both parties because the instructor is outwardly seeking advice but refuses input when it is offered. When we have presented conference sessions on these consultation dynamics, other developers have immediately resonated with this classification and have been quick to generate examples of related faculty behaviors from their own practice (for example, instructors claim that student ratings are just a popularity contest so there is nothing they can do, seek inappropriate help from the consultant—such as therapy—that the consultant cannot provide, refuse to be reflective about their teaching, or take a defensive position rather than an explanatory one).

In addition, a consultation can become entangled as a result of departmental or institutional politics. For example, there may be philosophical differences between an instructor and his colleagues about how a particular course should be taught or which topics a course should cover, and these disagreements may limit an instructor's options and ability to make changes. Likewise, the faculty member could be grappling with

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Figure 1
A Classification of Compounding Factors That Impact Consultations

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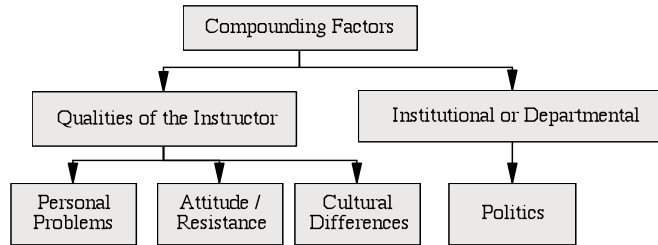
a departmental culture that discourages time spent on teaching, so that a consultant's well-intentioned suggestions to improve the learning experience for students could create other kinds of trouble for the faculty member. Departmental or institutional politics can put the instructor in a no-win situation.

Models of Consultations

We have listed several factors that impact consultations, but we feel we need to make an important clarification. We are not claiming that any one of these factors, by definition, creates an entangled consultation. For example, we work with many instructors from other cultures or from departments with political problems, and most of these instructors are pleasant colleagues in the consultation process. Likewise, we successfully consult with faculty who are initially resistant to change but who, through the course of the consultation, become more open to feedback and become willing to consider different teaching strategies. So when do these factors lead to memorably entangled consultations? In our experience, it is important to consider another determinant of consultations, namely, the philosophy with which the consultant and the instructor approach the consultation itself.

Brinko (1997) reviewed several models of consultative interaction from various disciplines and found that five such models apply specifically to instructional development. These models describe the expected roles of both parties in the consultation process.

1. **Product.** In this model, the consultant has a product to sell, for instance, a list of teaching solutions or best practices that the instructor needs. The instructor knows what he or she needs and retains control of the process.

2. **Prescriptive.** In this model, the consultant is the expert and decides what the instructor needs, assuming all authority and responsibility. The instructor simply follows instructions. Also known as the "medical" model, it is the polar opposite of the product model in terms of expertise and control.

3. **Collaborative.** In this model, the instructor and the consultant are both recognized as experts, about content and process, respectively, and they work together in a problem-solving fashion. The consultant contributes hypotheses, data, and suggestions, but the instructor retains the power to accept or reject them.

4. **Affiliative.** In this model, the focus is on identifying and solving the root of the instructor's personal problems that impact her performance in the classroom. The desired result is an overall growth of the instructor as a person, so this interaction is very similar to a therapeutic model.

5. **Confrontational.** This model postulates the consultant's role as that of "challenger" or "devil's advocate." Especially useful if the instructor is in denial about problems in the classroom, this kind of interaction promotes change by systematic questioning of the instructor's assumptions and practices.

The consultation models and compounding factors listed in this and the previous sections are still rather vague and abstract, but the next section presents a set of case studies that illustrates how these factors can combine in powerful ways to stifle the effectiveness of the consultant and the consultation process.

Four Case Studies

In order to reach a compromise between protecting the confidentiality

of the consultation and engaging the profession in this important dialogue, we chose the case study approach. The case studies were developed over several months in a series of stages. Initially, we collectively identified a set of entangled consultations that we had experienced as particularly taxing, worrisome, or aggravating. After outlining the features of these cases, we decided which four cases should be the central stories. Details from the remaining cases were folded into the four central stories to create composites. As a result, the case studies are fictional, but they are based on real accounts and illustrate the complex interacting conditions, experiences, and factors that occur in entangled consultations. We disguised the identities of the individuals whose stories contributed to each case by removing the institutional affiliation and by modifying certain demographic variables (name, gender, ethnicity, course, department). In the next stage of the process, a professional playwright not affiliated with either of our institutions was hired to write the four cases. The playwright corresponded with the authors on several occasions during the writing and revision process to ensure that the cases were believable and authentic.

The four case studies are included in Appendix A. Case #1 revolves around a professor who is overwhelmed by such grave personal problems—medical, psychological, financial—and has such weak personal boundaries that the developer starts feeling pulled into the vortex. Case #2 describes an egotistical professor who publicly makes sexist and homophobic remarks and becomes indignant when the developer addresses them. Case #3 discusses a consultation fraught with departmental politics and cross-cultural issues, with few degrees of freedom left to the developer. Finally, Case #4 discusses a professor who gets very poor ratings but blames the students for them and is resentful of having to work with the teaching center to improve them.

Each case is divided into two parts to simulate what often happens in an actual consultation: an initial consultation (or observation) and a follow-up. In our experiences with entangled consultations, there are typically early indicators that a consultation is going to be troublesome based on the first meeting or classroom observation, and the consultant then chooses a course of action or approach to use with the instructor. These early indicators are depicted in Part I of each case study.

In our real-world consultations, thankfully, the most difficult part of the consultation sometimes resolves itself because the consultant can diffuse the problem or because the instructor brings a new attitude to the consultation process. One could say that the consultation becomes untangled and becomes an ordinary consultation where the focus is on a compelling or challenging teaching issue. Sometimes, however, the consultation process

actually becomes more entangled when the consultant and faculty member have a follow-up meeting. The instructor might bring new information or additional resistance. In each of these four case studies, Part II introduces a new complication. These complications are also based on actual situations, stripped of identifying details but not of their awkwardness, egregiousness, or complexity. To facilitate discussion, a short set of discussion questions has been included for both parts of each case.

A Principle and Some Strategies
to Address Entangled Consultations

The most entangled consultations seem to be those in which an instructor with a teaching problem seeks out the services of the teaching consultant but conceptualizes the consultation and the consultant's role very differently from what the consultant is qualified or willing to offer. For this reason, each case has been designed to incorporate two important elements: Each case involves mismatched expectations between the consultant and instructor, and each case has a layer of compounding factors that aggravate the problem (see Table 1 for a classification of the cases). For instance, James in Case #1 clearly comes to the consultation expecting an affiliative or therapeutic approach. While it is not unusual in some consultations to talk about personal or family life as an ice-breaker, the number and severity of John's problems put undue pressure on the consultant/instructor interaction. Likewise, in Case #2, John uses the consultant to get a "product" (in this case, to make a point in class to his students) and, when the consultant challenges his model by making suggestions, John's sexist and homophobic attitudes close the door to any meaningful communication. In Case #3, Heideko expects the consultant to take charge and solve her problems, but the consultant operates under more collaborative assumptions. Cultural differences, as well as departmental politics, make this type of situation exceptionally difficult to navigate. In Case #4, Peter seems to operate under a very confrontational model, finding fault with every suggestion. His resentment toward the students makes it almost impossible to get through to him.

The consultant in all four cases tries to approach the instructor with a collaborative model in mind, although one might question how well the consultant's behaviors reflect a collaborative approach. In our practice, and especially in dealing with entangled situations, we find it often useful to refer to the collaborative model. Brinko (1997) presents it as one of many in her classification and advocates flexibility among models in each individual consultation. Other authors single out the collaborative model

	Table 1 **Classification of Cases by Consultant's Model and Compounding Factors**	
Case	*Faculty Member's Model for the Consultation Process*	*Compounding Factors*
1	Affiliative	Personal Problems
2	Product	Attitude/Resistance
3	Prescriptive	Cultural Difference & Politics
4	Confrontational	Attitude/Resistance

as the best for consultation (for a full review, see Paulsen and Feldman, 1995). DiPietro et al. (2009) argue that the collaborative model contains elements of all the others and is, therefore, more flexible for praxis. We favor this conceptualization, and in fact we believe in the collaborative approach so strongly that, like Lunde (2001), we do not call the instructors "clients," but "colleagues."

Reframing Entangled Consultations to Be More Collaborative

Keeping the collaborative model in mind, it is possible to extrapolate a common principle to deal with entangled consultations: Entangled consultations can begin with a mismatch between the instructor and the consultant's models. This mismatch in expectations, aggravated by an array of compounding factors that the faculty member brings to the process, can lead to a frustrating consultation.

Who is responsible for resolving the mismatch in expectations? Instructors lack a frame of reference for what a typical consultation looks like, making it difficult for them to step back and see the conflict. Faculty with resistant attitudes may also perceive that such interactions are inherently challenging because they did not want to change in the first place. In sum, instructors are not likely to be reflective about the whole process or, even if they are reflective, they lack the tools for changing the consultation process. This means that the onus for resolving the impasse falls on the consultant. If the consultant succeeds in reframing the interaction so that the instructor adopts a more collaborative outlook on the consultation process, both parties will be better positioned to tackle the underlying teaching problems. The compounding factors will still be present, but the alignment of both models now allows for more effective problem solving.

Not all attempts at reframing succeed the first time, but the consultant can keep trying.

However, there may come a point when it is no longer possible to try, because the instructor withdraws from the consultation or simply because the consultant decides his or her energies would be spent more productively in a different endeavor. This process is represented graphically in Figure 2. Of course, we are aware that consultants, too, can bring issues to the table, such as time, money, or resource pressures, that can complicate the consultation. Our suggestion is that the consultant monitor the consultation process for red flags and reframe it accordingly.

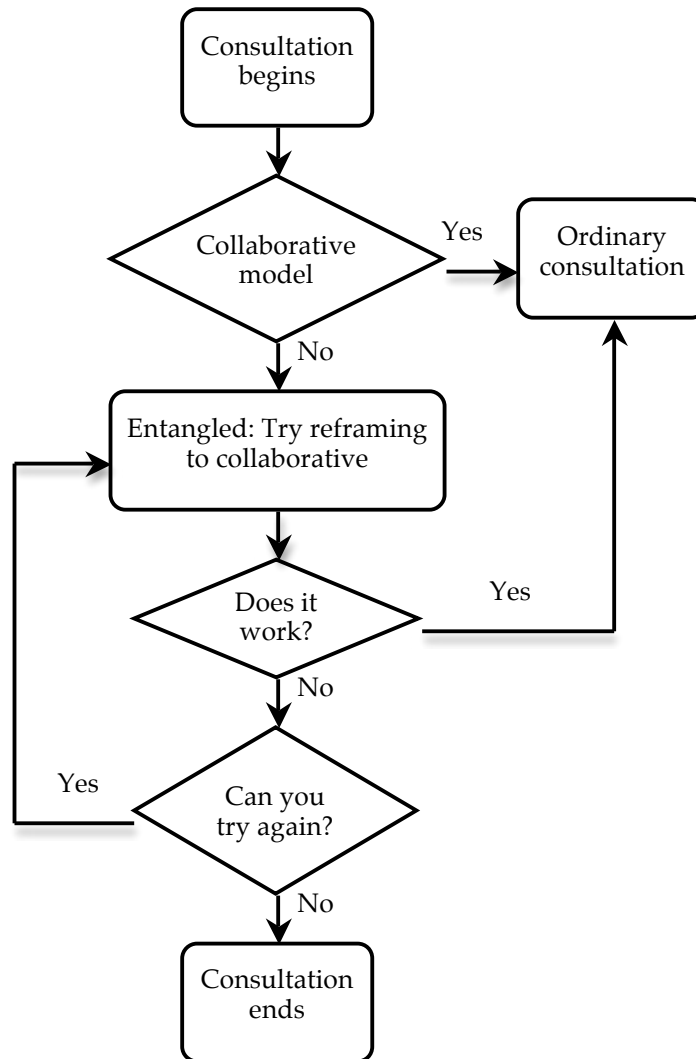### *Potential Strategies and Language to Reframe*

The key step in the process that we described in the previous section is the ongoing attempt to reframe the consultation to be more collaborative. Every consultation is different and will require different strategies, but we have grouped the most common "reframing strategies" in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, the most effective strategy for reframing the consultation will depend, in part, on the compounding factors introduced by the faculty member. Instructors who are weighted down with political problems in their department will probably require a different approach than instructors with arrogant or resistant attitudes.

As we draw attention to the differences across the most taxing consultations, it is also important to recognize what most entangled consultations have in common: The instructor is typically in some kind of trouble. Therefore, at the same time that we set limits and establish boundaries, we ought to be mindful of the embarrassment that the instructor is facing by sharing his or her problems. Regardless of the circumstances, the consultant should always act with tact. This is especially true in the case of cross-cultural differences, where the appropriate strategies will be culture-dependent.

Implications for Educational Development

We do not presume to have had the last word on entangled or problematic consultations. The principle of reframing consultations to be more collaborative might make sense in the abstract, but it can be challenging to enact. The line between an entangled consultation that can still be turned around and one that should be terminated because it has become hopeless is inevitably blurry. Therefore, it is important for our profession to find creative ways to continue the conversation and exchange models,

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Figure 2:
Consultant's Steps to Handle Entangled Consultations

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                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Consultation │
                    │    begins    │
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                    ╲    model     ╱                │ consultation │
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                           │ No                            ▲
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              ┌────────────────────────┐                  │
   ┌─────────▶│ Entangled: Try reframing│                 │
   │          │    to collaborative    │                  │
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   │                 ╱─────────╲          Yes              │
   │               ╱  Does it   ╲─────────────────────────┘
   │               ╲   work?    ╱
   │                 ╲─────────╱
   │                      │ No
   │                      ▼
   │   Yes           ╱─────────╲
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                   ╲  try again? ╱
                     ╲─────────╱
                          │ No
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                   ┌──────────────┐
                   │ Consultation │
                   │     ends     │
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principles, and strategies. We hope that our cases will continue to foster this kind of reflection.

We have utilized these cases in a number of ways. We have used

Table 2
Possible Strategies to Reframe Entangled Consultations

Compounding Factors	*Possible Strategies*
Personal Problems	• Establish or remind the instructor of boundaries as soon as the instructor discloses too much. • Empathize, but explain that you are best qualified to help the instructor in her teaching. • Refer the instructor to appropriate resources on campus. • Monitor the instructor's self-efficacy; it might be appropriate to take charge of the consultation temporarily.
Attitude/ Resistance	• Establish your credentials in terms of experience and expertise. • Be firm in your suggestions, and explain how pedagogical and cognitive research supports them. • Point out that the instructor is finding ways to reject all of your feedback; then ask what the instructor expects from the consultation. • Be straightforward about the consequences of not taking your feedback. • As a last resort, set limits on the kinds of interactions that you will have with the instructor. • Keep records of interactions and communications.
Cultural Differences	• Clarify expectations and roles up front (many universities in other countries do not have teaching centers). • Check communication both ways to make sure it is received the way the sender intended. • Be alert to cultural differences in values and behaviors. • Partner with appropriate resources on campus (e.g., intercultural communication center) if separate from teaching center.

Politics	• Assure confidentiality and explain the center's policy in detail.
	• Keep in mind all your stakeholders (instructor, students, department), but avoid taking sides.
	• Present yourself as someone who will help the instructor frame the situation and strategize, but who will not advocate publicly for him or her.
	• Emphasize the data collection and interpretation phases of the process.
	• Discuss the realistic outcomes of the consultation.

them at our centers as opportunities for professional development and training on how to prevent and handle difficult consultations for our junior colleague consultants. We have also used them in job interviews as a way to understand our candidates' consultation philosophies and their ability to react in challenging situations. Finally, we have presented them at several educational development conferences as a way to ground our discussions of entangled consultations with our national and international colleagues.

Naturally, typical case discussions start with suggestions about how to "solve" the case—what to tell faculty in order to move the consultation forward. But we have found that the cases are rich enough that teaching centers can use them for other purposes as well. Cases #1 and #3 are particularly appropriate for defining the roles that a faculty developer can play during the course of a consultation. Likewise, Cases #3 and #4 can be used to launch conversations about a center's confidentiality policies and when exceptions to that policy might be considered. In particular, when is it permissible for colleagues at a center to share information about their consultations? Case #1 can be used to explore what our obligations are to the instructor: In particular, are we obligated to report all the information from a small-group instructional diagnosis (SGID), including feedback that students think the instructor is an addict? How do we judge which information should and should not be reported? Any of these cases could be used to discuss how the consultant's various social identities impact the consultant's perceived authority and credibility and, therefore, the success of the consultation. For instance, in Case #2, in which an older, male faculty member makes homophobic and sexist comments, would the gender, age, and sexual orientation of the consultant change the likely outcome of the consultation?

The answers to these questions are not straightforward. In fact, we have dialogued with several developers who hold a variety of principled, strongly held perspectives about some of these issues. In our work we are always reminded that consultations never occur in a vacuum but are instead embedded in institutional contexts with specific cultures that must be taken into account. Nevertheless, we believe that these cases of entangled consultations represent an opportunity to reflect on the rationale behind our practice and to articulate it to our colleagues, and we hope that this process will lead to progressive refinement of our collective praxis.

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Author Note

Michele DiPietro *is an associate director at the Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence at Carnegie Mellon University. He served on the core committee of the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education. He is a co-author of the forthcoming book* How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching *(Jossey-Bass, 2010).* **Therese Huston** *is the director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Seattle University. She works with over 200 faculty and administrators annually to find creative and sustainable ways to improve the teaching and learning experience. Her first book is* Teaching What You Don't Know *(Harvard University Press, 2009).*

Appendix A
Four Case Studies

Case #1: Too Much Information?

James Kopans, Art
Multi-Level Painting

Part I

James Kopans was the nicest junior faculty member—no, the nicest faculty member, period—that Stefano had ever counseled. He was warm, personable, sincere, and he received Stefano's feedback with the utmost interest and respect. It amazed Stefano that such a nice, talented young man could be in such an anxiety-provoking situation—enough anxiety to keep Stefano awake for two nights running.

The initial session had started slowly, as initial sessions were wont to do. James had been tentative—no surprises there. Then the details came. James was in serious trouble. Complaints had gotten as far as the dean; according to student evaluations, James hadn't shown up to several classes. A few students had said he'd fallen asleep. The department considered James a real catch—he'd developed a devoted following in the African-American art community for several years, and with the recent successful exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, he was definitely starting to "cross over." But he clearly needed a lot of help.

> "Usually, I'm fine when my meds are working," James told Stefano.
>
> Stefano nodded. Meds?

Apparently, James suffered from something that combined elements of depression and social anxiety disorder. And there were other problems, most of which Stefano learned in great detail. Money problems. Girl problems. He'd even tried a dating service, but that had just led to more debt, and now he was both lonely *and* owed the Art Department for their short-term loan. He'd met someone in AA, but social interactions were discouraged outside of meetings. Oh yes, he was also a recovering alcoholic.

> "I can't lose this job," James said, near tears. "Creatively, I've been blocked for weeks. Teaching is the only thing keeping me going, you know? If I don't have that, I just don't know. . . ."

he trailed off, shaking his head. Then he seemed troubled by another thought: "But maybe I have no business being here, and maybe the students know it, too."

Stefano nodded again. Imposter syndrome, too.

"All I know is, if I'm out after this semester, it's the final straw, if you'll forgive the cliché. I mean, I don't know what I'll do."

And Stefano, lying awake at 3 a.m., didn't know what to do either. He'd agreed to attend James's next class, which was standard procedure. What if Stefano said the wrong thing? Was there even a right thing to say?

"If I give him the wrong advice, what's going to happen?" Stefano had asked his colleague, Margaret. "I feel so responsible for this guy."

"You're putting way too much pressure on yourself," Margaret had said.

Stefano considered the problem as 3:30 a.m. rolled around. Was it just a matter of becoming too emotionally involved? James seemed to welcome Stefano as a confidant, and maybe even as a friend. Did Stefano need to detach himself?

Dawn soon came, but answers did not.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do you judge whether an instructor or teaching assistant has disclosed too much information? Are there exceptions?

2. What are Stefano's responsibilities in this case? What are James's responsibilities?

3. What strategies help set reasonable boundaries with instructors?

Part II

"You've seen his class?" Margaret asked Stefano in the office early the next week.

"Two of them," Stefano confirmed. "I sat in on a regular studio class and a critique. A real mixed bag. When he's on, he's on,

but. . . ."

Stefano elaborated. James was not only a fine artist, but he had the ability to inspire and encourage his students as well. He even showed a playful sense of humor when he used a student's discarded grapefruit peel as a paintbrush. But.

> "It's a small class—16 students—and after four weeks, he's still not getting their names. And sometimes his feedback is great, but other times he won't give it at all. As for the sleeping, well, he denies it, and maybe he's just concentrating very hard, but I can see where the kids might think he's nodding off."

> Margaret nodded sympathetically. "Did you get to talk to the students?"

> "His class ended early, so I could do a SGID," Stefano replied.

> "And?"

> "Two of them think he's an addict."

And that wasn't all. James had trouble taking charge, even though it was a comparatively small class, presumably with kids who were genuinely serious about painting. There was also a serious issue of academic integrity.

> "James confided in me about one student. Apparently there was an assignment to review the Matisse exhibit at the Art Museum, and a student lifted most of the review from the Internet and passed it off as his own. James hasn't done anything about it."

> "That's his job," Margaret said.

> "Sure. I told him that. But it ties into the imposter issue. James thinks he's fooled everyone into thinking he's a ground-breaking artist, that he's fooled everyone into thinking he's a valuable instructor. And now he's afraid he's been caught."

> "A self-fulfilling prophecy," Margaret summed up.

> "Absolutely." Stefano sipped his espresso in irritation. "Plus the money problems, the dating problems, all that stuff I didn't want to hear about. I'm so afraid of hurting his feelings, that even in my e-mails, instead of closing them 'sincerely,' or 'thanks,' I'm saying things like 'gently' or 'genuinely.' That's just not me."

> Margaret studied Stefano a moment. "Think about how you're best equipped to help this man as a teaching consultant," she said.

Stefano smiled. "Can't argue with that," he admitted. "But then what?"

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you prioritize the issues that need to be addressed in consulting with James?

2. How would you plan the feedback meeting given that you have additional bad news for James?

Case #2: Learn Anything?

John Goldman, Management Sciences
Advanced Business Management

Part I

John Goldman was a bit past 70, but he could still leave people half his age and younger in the dust. As Margaret watched him from the back of the classroom, at times she couldn't help but be impressed. On his first day of teaching, he was confident, calm, and he moved among the students, asking questions from different parts of the room. Clearly this man could still not only hold his own, but come out a clear winner in the corporate world. And for the past 30-something years, that's exactly what he had done. He was a real feather in the departmental cap.

> "My wife passed last year," he had told Margaret at their first meeting. "I don't need money. I need fulfillment. Want to give something back, you know."

It was a bit unusual for the consultant to sit in right off the bat, but Goldman was not one to waste time, and he knew how to make an effective presentation. As he introduced her to his class, Margaret realized she was there for effect.

> "I'll tell you one thing from the git-go," he began. "You want the initials 'CEO' after your name, then you recognize your resources, and you use them. The little lady in the back is Margaret. She's a teaching consultant. She's a resource. I'm using her. Okay? Let's move on."

Margaret wasn't sure if she'd missed a cue to nod or wave, and the "little lady" reference was less than encouraging.
Goldman proceeded with a brain-storming activity.

> "This will be real interactive," he told the class. "That ought to impress the T.C., huh?" he added, with a grin at Margaret. Margaret, still a good sport, grinned back.

He asked the students to call out some qualities that made for an effective chief executive.

> One student called out, "Ambition."

> "Ambition?" Goldman repeated, loading the single-word response with two tons of contempt. "What do you mean by

that?"

That student was quickly deflated, as was everyone else. When Goldman asked the students for other qualities, there were no volunteers. Margaret made some mental as well as written notes. Some obvious problems, but she'd seen worse.

Then came the story. Goldman's point, as far as Margaret could tell, was the power the CEO had to determine corporate culture.

> "One of my junior executives was sporting this purple hand-kerchief one day. You know, I guess he wanted a 'dash of color,' or something. So I made an off-hand comment about gay guys and their purple handkerchiefs. Needless to say, no one in the firm ever brought in purple handkerchiefs again--or any other color but white," he added with a laugh.

There were a few nervous laughs, but mostly embarrassed silence. Margaret was also embarrassed. If Goldman had noticed the depletion of energy in the classroom, he gave no sign.

After class, he approached Margaret.

> "How was that?" he asked. "Learn anything?"

> "I sure did," Margaret said. "Do you want to meet at the end of the week?"

> "Why?" Goldman asked. He clearly hadn't expected a real consultation.

> "Just a few observations I have," she hedged a bit. "I can e-mail you some preliminary notes, and you can look them over before we meet. Think of it as an added resource."

Goldman didn't look entirely convinced, but they agreed to meet on Friday morning.

> "Now where do I start with this guy?" Margaret thought.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do you give feedback to someone who clearly doesn't want it?

2. Should Margaret have done anything differently so far?

Part II

When Goldman arrived for their next meeting, Margaret thought he seemed a bit more subdued—ready, perhaps, to defend himself against any perceived attacks.

> "As I mentioned in my e-mail," Margaret noted, "I think your efforts to engage the students got off to a good start. Brainstorming is a very effective way to launch a discussion, as I'm sure you know already."

> "You think I'm being too hard on them," Goldman said, referring to his copy of the e-mail.

> "I think you might want to explore other ways of challenging them—being hard on them, if you like—without stepping on their impulse to participate."

Goldman nodded in a noncommittal sort of way. Margaret decided to move forward.

> "A more pressing concern. . . ." she began.

> "The story," Goldman finished. "Saw that one coming. I know it wasn't P.C. Wasn't meant to be."

Margaret decided to feel Goldman out a bit.

> "What was it meant to be?"

> "Just what it was. A true story. Look, Margaret, I'm not quite the dinosaur you think I am. I know the world's changed—but the world I'm talking about hasn't changed so much. If you want to be a CEO, you keep up with the boys—and that includes the successful women I've worked with. If you're a girl, you laugh at dirty jokes and you make fun of girly-girls. If you're a—well, a homosexual—and I don't doubt I've met plenty—but you laugh at fag jokes and you don't make a federal case out of 'coming out.'"

Margaret wore her placid face and nodded.

> "If these kids want that kind of life and want to succeed, that's what they need to know going in," Goldman went on. "Now I was under the impression that's what I'm supposed to be teaching."

Margaret knew her response would have to be nothing short of brilliant.

Questions for Discussion

1. How should Margaret decide when to press on and when to cut her losses?

2. John's views are reinforced by the dominant disciplinary culture. How can consultants be heard when good teaching practice contradicts the perceived culture?

Case #3: Blindsided

Heideko Izumi, Environmental Engineering
Environmental Engineering Community Project Design

Part I

When Sally received an e-mail marked "Extremely Urgent" from the young environmental engineering instructor, she managed to squeeze in an appointment during Thanksgiving week. Heideko Izumi arrived for their morning meeting the next day poised, dignified, and a bit formally dressed. Her native Tokyo accent lent even more formality to her presence. Five minutes into their meeting, however, when she began to mumble and shake her head, she looked as though she was struggling not to cry. Sally leaned in closer to listen, and it sounded as though her mumbling was, in fact, in Japanese. Sally then noticed that Heideko was holding a letter.

> "Just take your time. . . ." Sally began.

> "I apologize for losing my composure," Heideko said after taking a breath.

> "Has something in that letter has upset you?" Sally asked gently.

> "I am being sabotaged by my colleague," Heideko said with restraint. "And I do not know why. If you read this, you will see what I mean. But . . . ." she hesitated. "What we discuss in your office, Miss Sally. It will remain confidential?"

Sally nodded. Heideko, hands slightly trembling, gave her the letter.

The letter was written by the other instructor in her team-taught Environmental Engineering class--a senior capstone course that required students to complete community projects. In essence, the co-instructor, Gary Apicella, had written that he had talked with her students about their projects in private. Based on his own focus group, he had determined that she was ill-prepared, disorganized, high-handed with her students, and generally incompetent. He would not, he wrote in conclusion, recommend Heideko for tenure. For a first-year tenure track professor, such a letter was particularly devastating. According to the list of recipients at the top, the letter had been sent to her department head as well as her Dean.

> "And what is your assessment of the situation?" Sally asked.

> "My own assessment was quite positive," Heideko replied. "The six clients in the community, the six technical advisors, they are

all supportive, and the students—I work well with them."

Impulsively, she produced another envelope and handed it to Sally.

"Another letter?" Sally asked.

"Well, it was I who wrote this one. It addresses Dr. Apicella's criticisms point by point. Could you read it also? Perhaps you could suggest improvements? Or do you think such a letter is a good idea?"

"I'll be happy to read the letter, but I think we should hold off on a direct response for the time being."

Sally was concerned that her reply sounded ambiguous, but Heideko nodded and seemed grateful for the attention and direction that Sally was providing.

"What's the story on Apicella?" Stefano asked after Sally filled him in.

"Sterling reputation. Nice, honest, dependable. Tenured. Everybody likes him—students, former students, faculty. Friends with his Dean, the Provost, even the Director of our center. . . ."

Sally sighed.

"Everybody's first thought is to take Apicella's side. And maybe he *is* right. I just don't know what my level of involvement should be," Sally went on. "I mean, is all this digging worth it? Is it even appropriate, given my responsibilities? And even if Heideko's right, what can I do if someone is simply out to get her?"

"Politically, it's very tricky," Stefano admitted.

"Politically, it's a minefield," Sally said. "Any ideas?"

Questions for Discussion

1. It looks as though this case would require a substantial amount of work in a concentrated period of time. How do you decide if you should get involved and to what extent?

2. If you decided to get involved, what is (are) your role(s) as a consultant in this case?

Part II

Sally arranged to conduct a focus group the Tuesday after the holiday weekend. At least one student from four of Heideko's six teams was present. At first, it looked as though Apicella's worst accusations were right on the money.

> "She totally ignores us when we ask questions," an athletic young man with a laptop said. "Doesn't seem to have it together. Just really scattered, you know? And if we, like, disagree or argue? She doesn't take control. We might spend a full meeting on one small point and she says nothing. Then we find out that we didn't cover the important issues. It's her job to guide us and she just sits there."

Sally nodded. She resigned herself to hear the worst.

> "Just a minute," a copper-haired woman to Sally's right spoke up for the first time. "Were you even at any of the group meetings? Our group meets after yours and I haven't seen you around."

> "I was at the first one," the athlete said. "And now. I'm really busy and I can't always make it. But that's not the point."

> "That's what I thought," the girl said with a dismissive talk-to-the-hand gesture.

Sally worried that she might have to take control of a mass argument, but the redhead continued without incident.

> "Look," she said to Sally, "Heideko's first day, yeah, she was still learning the projects and that, right? It took her a couple weeks, but she's cool." Several other students agreed.

> "And some of the stuff she does seems a little cold; I think that's like a cultural difference," a soft-spoken African-American man added. "Sometimes Heideko comes off as a little formal—I could see where it might put some people off, if they didn't get to know her."

It proved to be an enlightening session. Heideko had been unable to leave Japan until just a couple of weeks before classes started. Apicella had spent the summer setting up both his projects and hers, and consequently, he was able to hit the ground running and knew more about her projects than she did at first. And, as Sally soon learned through separate meetings with Heideko's clients and the project advisors, Heideko had been in the awkward position of familiarizing herself with her projects during the

first weeks of class. But there was no doubt that she had done a fine job. In fact, she had done so even with six teams—Apicella had only three.

> "He said that was only fair, since he'd done all the summer legwork," Sally explained to Stefano later. "Heideko tried to maintain contact with Apicella throughout the summer, but he kept saying not to worry about it."

> "So everyone has only positive things to say about her?" Stefano asked.

> "Good news from everybody on down," Sally confirmed.

> "Geez," Stefano said, impressed. "You've certainly done some real detective work. Any ideas why Apicella has it in for her?"

> "No," Sally admitted. "And I still don't know what to do about her letter of defense." She shook her head. "That just puts us back to where we were before, right? I mean, great, we've got data confirming she's competent. But is there any way I can be of help to her? Real help?"

Stefano didn't have an answer.

Questions for Discussion

1. Here's one dilemma: Sally's sources indicate that Heideko is a good teacher, but the teaching center's policy is one of confidentiality. What options should Sally consider?

2. Heideko was initially grateful when Sally took charge of the situation. At what point in this process should Heideko come back and contribute more equally in deciding what to do?

Case #4: Statistics for Dummies

Peter Thackeray, Biostatistics
Experimental Design for Clinical Trials

Part I

Jim's three colleagues at the center were being considerably less than helpful as he tried to go over a file.

> "Pete Thackeray?" Sally was looking over Jim's shoulder. "I was consulting with him—let's see, about a year and a half ago. Trying to consult with him, I should say."

> "Thackeray? God, don't remind me," chimed in Margaret. "Last semester. I think he's been through everybody. Stefano?"

> "Semester before last," he replied.

> "See?" Margaret said triumphantly. "Everybody."

> "I know all about it," Jim said, a bit fatigued. "There's at least one memo from each of you in his file. And you all make variations on the same suggestions. If you could sum him up in five words or less. . . ."

> "Stubborn," said Margaret.

> "Doesn't like teaching," said Stefano.

> "Doesn't like the students," said Sally.

Jim nodded.

> "Yeah, I just met with him yesterday. Looks like we're on the same page."

Peter Thackeray knew statistics. Top pharmaceutical executives sought out his advice, and the department had sought him out as well. But now, after three years of almost uniformly bad student evaluations, Thackeray's own statistics were spelling termination. Jim knew that he would most likely be the last teaching consultant Thackeray would visit on this campus.

> "Resentful? Yeah, you could say I'm resentful," Thackeray had told Jim. "I think I have a right to be. You might not know it, but I'm actually respected in my field."

> "I do know that," Jim said.

"So imagine how I feel having to kow-tow to my students. My future is up to them! You think that's right? That I'm fired unless I get them to like me?"

Jim was familiar with Thackeray's point of view. Faculty sometimes viewed the faculty and course evaluations as a popularity contest.

"I understand your frustration. . . ." Jim began, and he decided not to let a dismissive snort from Thackeray interrupt him, "But we've already lost if we look at it that way. Let's just take a few specific strategies."

"I know all the strategies. If I get fired, I could be one of you guys. I could say it for you," Thackeray said in the voice of an angry person who knew that getting angry was pointless. "Just come to my class, say what you've got to say, and try to come up with something I haven't heard a million times."

After the meeting, Jim leafed through the file again. The suggestions were simple enough. More challenging exercises. More relevant examples. Building student rapport. Lots of e-mails back and forth between Thackeray and the other teaching consultants. There was a definite pattern. For example, Stefano had made one simple suggestion regarding facing different sets of students throughout the lecture, instead of just looking straight ahead. Thackeray had responded with a two-page reply explaining, in the intricate detail that perhaps only a biostatistician could compile, just how and when he implemented Stefano's suggestion, and exactly why it wasn't working.

Clearly, the guy was on the defensive, and, Jim had to admit, understandably so. He couldn't help but wonder: Was Thackeray just plain unlucky? Or was he just going through the motions of utilizing the counselors' advice, just to get approval without really changing anything? Jim had an idea what the answer was already, and that was part of the problem. He wanted to go to Thackeray's class with an open mind. Would that even be possible?

Questions for Discussion

1. Peter's reputation precedes him. What are some of the difficulties of this situation? How can consultants work effectively anyhow?

2. If Peter does not change, there is a strong possibility that he will lose his job, but his defensiveness is an obstacle

to change. What factors should Jim weigh as he earnestly tries to help Peter?

Part II

After observing Thackeray's class and one exchange of e-mails (Jim's was half a page; Thackeray's was two-and-a-half), Jim knew the next meeting with the statistics expert was going to be less than fruitful.

> "Hey, you're the one who kept talking about engaging the students. Using concrete examples relevant to their lives and all that garbage," Thackeray groused.

> "You had the students rolling dice," Jim said. "And yes, that's a form of engagement," he added quickly. "I just have a question about the relevancy of the exercise."

> "It's a good introduction to probability," Thackeray insisted.

> "And if you were teaching an intro. probability class, that would be great," Jim said. "But your students know the basics. They need something germane to the medical world."

> "They can't handle real-life examples. Not one of them is bright enough. Hey, I just learned stats through formulas in poorly written textbooks. If they don't like rolling dice and dissolving chocolate chips in their mouths, I could just read to them for two hours like my professors did. Besides, I was just following your orders—active learning or death!" Thackeray concluded with a hint of dismal triumph.

Rather doggedly, Jim plunged ahead.

> "There's also the time issue. The students can't stay late consistently. Not even for five minutes."

> "You think I want to stay?" Thackeray asked, appalled at the thought. "You think I enjoy their company? If there's an important concept we have to cover that day, I have to make sure it's covered."

And so it went for the next 45 minutes. Thackeray had proof, usually typed or in writing, that he'd followed every plan and every strategy Jim suggested or was about to suggest.

> "I mean, I'm doing everything you guys have been saying, right?" Thackeray demanded. "If you can confirm that in your report, maybe the department will ease up on me next semester."

Thackeray waited a beat. "Or do you think I'll even be here next semester? Have you heard anything?"

Jim could see just how vulnerable Thackeray was.

Questions for Discussion

1. Peter is in dire straits. How can Jim help him and still retain his professional integrity?

2. At this point, Peter is a considerable drain on the center's resources, but he doesn't internalize any feedback. What are some alternatives Jim could consider for structuring his interactions with Peter?