

Culture of Care Task Force Report - April 2019

During the Fall 2018 College of Arts & Letters (CAL) faculty meetings, attendees voiced a desire for identifying and developing a culture of care, and to the end the College Advisory Committee (CAC) sent out calls for self-nominations for the Culture of Care Task Force (CCTF). The CCTF chosen by the CAC is comprised of a wide swath of members from the college with representation from students, faculty, and staff. The CCTF was convened in late February and was charged by the CAC to examine several issues and make recommendations.

One important caveat in reading this report - the Culture of Care Task Force members feel strongly that to be successful, this process should be built by the CAL community and include individuals who are new to this work. For example, most of us who drafted these recommendations did so from our own places of care in wanting to make CAL better. Therefore, we would like to preempt the rest of the report below by asking for patience and understanding if there are any areas of overreach, misidentification, or duplication of existing programs.

During our first meeting, each CCTF member identified a recent moment when someone showed them the type of behavior that we would associate with a culture of care. In sharing these moments we began to define for this committee what a culture of care is: **active community empathy that leads with intention and kindness.**

We felt this CCTF could be an antidote to the barrage of decisions and news that make working at Michigan State University a challenging place related to trust in the institution and at times in one another. The importance and necessity of the work we were doing were clear to us. We also understood that the phrase "Culture of Care" for many has become fatiguing and/or an empty concept, and this drove our work.

PROCESS

The CAC charged the CCTF with four tasks, which were addressed over nine weeks.

Charge One

Reach out to each CAL unit's advisory council to foster conversations about how best to support units in building healthy relationships and a culture of care; this includes assessing the needs, concerns, and issues in the unit.

A survey was sent to Chairs and Directors who would in turn share with their Advisory Committee members if applicable. While some data was collected, the few responses received hinted at possible oversaturation as the survey followed the much more extensive "Know More"

university-wide survey. The CCTF (if reconvened in the fall) should create more intentional ways of collecting data from each unit. The motivation for collecting the work that each unit is doing to create a culture of care is clear-- we want to see what our colleagues are doing to identify gaps where assistance is needed, gather inspiration, reduce redundancies, and perhaps expand great ideas to college-wide programming. The CCTF understands the need for such data collection and recommends using the "Know More " survey results, as well as CAL specific data gathering to move forward in an informed manner.

Charge Two

Reach out to each CAL unit's chair or director to foster a conversation about current dynamics in the unit and how best to support units in building healthy relationships and a culture of care.

The CCTF then addressed the second charge by talking with several chairs to pilot a unit-based fellows program that will encourage faculty to articulate specific values and investments that work in their programs. An area for future consideration is to continue participating in existing CAL efforts to think through rewards and review structures.

Charge Three

Gather existing materials around current approaches, practices, and policies for addressing conditions of conflict.

The CCTF created a collection of resources currently at MSU. The importance of these resources cannot be underestimated but access and visibility should be heightened. The CCTF recommends this set of resources be publicized on the CAL and departmental websites.

Charge Four

Produce a report and set of recommendations for CAC to consider in moving forward.

In the past nine weeks since the CCTF has convened, much headway has been made in examining a culture of care at CAL, but we also recognize there is much more work left to do. The remainder of the report includes a variety of recommendations and suggestions for what could be done moving forward.

We believe that the CCTF should continue next year to help establish processes and address the following recommendations. The collaborative strength in having a variety of points of view was energizing and educational for all involved, so if the CAC chooses to move in this direction, the demographics of the CCTF should reflect the CAL community and include members from across the unit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The CCTF has identified six areas that could benefit from increased attention moving into the future. These include Orientation, Community Building, Peer Review, Academics, Conflict Within the Work Environment, and Adaptable Resolution Models. There are likely more than these, but we believe this is a good place to start.

ORIENTATION

Several recommendations from the CCTF are related to welcoming students and employees to CAL. From their first moments, we want new members of CAL to feel welcome and included. We realize that many harmful encounters happen when students, staff, and faculty first enter the institution and they do not yet have a community of support, thus making this entry point a strategic site for changing the culture. What should not be lost here, however, is the intention to proactively welcome new faculty, staff and students into a healthy, caring, and empathetic environment. This means that whatever the best practices are for the department, we recommend they be evaluated with regards to how well they serve this goal and intention.

The CCTF made several recommendations including changes to CAL's interaction with New Student Orientation and other early entry points for new students:

- New Student Orientation - we recommend that language/discussion of care be included in College-wide New Student Orientation sessions beginning this summer. We are waiting for further development of the campus-wide New Student Orientation sessions but have reached out to the CAL Undergraduate Affairs area for partnership on this.
- CAL Colloquium - we recommend that examples of Spartans caring for Spartans be visible at the CAL Colloquium on the day before fall classes start as a role model of how we expect ourselves to behave toward others in our CAL (and broader) community.
- AL 101 - we recommend that the AL 101 instructors consider the possibility of hiring CAL students as Teaching Assistants to coach and mentor incoming students through that entry point into CAL discussions of resources, student success, community building, goal setting, purpose, etc.

We believe that with the adoption of these rather simple best practices we can create a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for students and employees which also contributes to a culture of care. We began here because these are quick adjustments that can easily be implemented at both the College and Department levels. We suggest creating more intentional, thoughtful, and regularized introduction practices for all new employees entering CAL including graduate students, staff, and faculty. While this may look different depending on the culture of the department we offer the following as suggestions that could help jumpstart our imaginations as to simple shifts that we can already make in order to do this. For example, for all new employees, we suggest that CAL

- partner with the WorkLife Office to create a welcome packet that includes information on things to do in town, resources from housing to childcare to doctors, etc.
- offer monthly CAL newsletters with things to do on campus.
- offer CAL sponsored event nights-- include unique activities from sports to lectures
- offer child-care during these events and all CAL events outside of regular hours
- gather information on already existing support groups in CAL and MSU to offer expanded social opportunities like Women of CAL or Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Faculty and Staff Association Association (GLFSA).
- facilitate a more meaningful and intentional introduction of new faculty to the CAL community to result in partnerships related to possible synergistic or unexpected research areas. Only CAL has the knowledge of what each new hire specializes in.

These best practices can also be augmented and modeled within departments to introduce new employees to the culture of the department, from the practical (where they might choose to live) to the academic (a list of MSU-specific acronyms and clear expectations for what the department values in terms of recognized contributions), to the interpersonal (what are the values that guide our communication with one another). Many faculty may be teaching for the first time and as such syllabi, FAIS, D2L, EASE reports and more can benefit from a thoughtful and regularized orientation. This could take the form of a sustained, ongoing cohort model where those new to CAL meet regularly to engage in trainings and workshops to support their transition to CAL. For example, new faculty, instructors, grad students, etc. could meet once a month for a half-day workshop to explore best practices for teaching or how to navigate the institution.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Studies suggest that many Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM) incidents happen soon after entering a new environment where there is a high level of anonymity and as a result a lack of accountability. Given this, the value of real substantive mentorship and building communities of support cannot be overstated in terms of harm reduction and creating a sense of inclusion. With this intention in mind, the CCTF recommends the creation of a college or departmental mentorship program for students. Incoming students would be paired with current MSU students to answer questions and link incoming students to opportunities in their interest areas. CCTF members reached out to the CAL Student Council; they are interested in facilitating one on one mentoring for new students. They are also interested in serving as the first line of communication for students with questions about MSU and CAL. In this situation each CAL Student Council members' contact information would be given to around 30 incoming students as a way to contact them. This would be the first step of the mentorship program and students would be assigned a one-on-one mentor within their major (not necessarily a CAL Student Council Member, but a CAL upperclassmen) before they arrive on campus for move-in. The CCTF suggests partnering with the CAL Student Council to create a toolkit for effective

mentorship for students as well as create mentor/mentee CAL or department sponsored events are recommended.

The CCTF also recommends the creation of a cross-unit support system for incoming faculty and staff of all categorizations. The voluntary program would pair incoming faculty (for their first year) with established MSU employees for monthly meetings. The aim of these pairings is not simply academic but also to expand their network of support for a life well lived. The pairings could certainly discuss professional concerns and seek MSU advice but they should also focus on work/life discussions and assist in expanding social connections. The CCTF recommends that mentors and mentees meet monthly and that MSU food vouchers be provided.

Most of MSU's language to new employees is related to success in the academic field with little empathy related to personal life. The committee suggests a review of such documents to offer more compassionate language that recognizes that employees also have lives beyond MSU.

The CCTF also discussed the need for structured student and employee discussions hosted by CAL or the CCTF to gather new ideas or offer peer to peer advice. These can be both more intimate circle discussions within or across units as well as more public conversations around the culture of care which could be modeled at the college level for use in departments. CCTF members recommend connecting senior students with similarly focused alumni using the extensive alumni network from CAL to create student networking opportunities prior to graduation. We also recommend identifying and pairing more experienced employees invested in shifting the culture with newcomers needing support. These activities prioritize a culture of care as a life skill for students and employees.

PEER REVIEW

While the committee discussed how to create a more inclusive and welcoming atmosphere we also recognize there are inherent issues within the academic atmosphere that breed anxiety and fear. The lack of job security for one-year appointees causes both professional and personal stress. We recommend clearer timelines related to reappointment decisions, discussions of expanding contracts to multiple years for excellent hires and frank discussions from CAL to Chair to employees about their paths at MSU.

Another area to address involving mistrust and lack of transparency at MSU is the peer review process related to raises. The CCTF contacted Terry Curry, Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for Academic Human Resources, about alternatives to the Peer Review process; he confirmed that a few units do not use peer review. The Faculty Handbook says...

For merit salary increases, peer review advice also is required, but procedures may range from faculty advice to the chairperson or director on standards and criteria to specific commentary on individual faculty by an elected peer review committee. In all

cases the academic unit administrator at a minimum is required to obtain the advice of the unit faculty on merit salary standards, criteria and procedures.

However, Curry “believe[s] the merits of having peer review outweigh the difficulties in doing so.”

The CCTF recommends that CAL reexamine peer review as suggested by Dean Christopher Long in another communication with the CCTF. These options can include HuMetricsHSS which is an initiative for rethinking humane indicators of excellence in academia, focused particularly on the humanities and social sciences or [Epistemic Exclusion Initiative](#) about which Dean Long notes, “If we are going to truly create a culture in which scholars doing innovative interdisciplinary, and intersectional scholarship thrive, significant reform of the Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure process will need to be undertaken.”

The role of tenure and its metaphorical ticking clock is another area that also causes anxiety for many. It is hoped that a culture of care would understand and offer active empathy with the person experiencing the run-up to submission for tenure and the waiting game related to the decision for tenure.

ACADEMICS

The CCTF discussed how CAL might reward the labor and good citizenship of students and faculty. We suggest a deeper examination and redefinition of service to include and reward a commitment to active empathy through faculty initiatives and programming. The CCTF recommends incentivizing care through fellowships for faculty and scholarships for students who have ideas related to or who have modeled active empathy. CAL’s current focus on Citizen Scholars and the Excel Network could incorporate intentional language and activities that promote and expand a culture of care. The CCTF recommends building language and activities related to a culture of care into AL 101, experiential learning, and department capstone courses as well as rewarding emotional intelligence that encourages empathy within existing courses. These would contain explicit learning goals that model a culture of care. Perhaps CAL or the CCTF could create suggested syllabus language and/or pedagogical strategies that promote the ideals necessary for active empathy. This will be particularly useful in training graduate students who are first learning how to teach.

CONFLICT WITHIN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The CCTF recommends that supervisors and chairs (as well as faculty and staff) could benefit from trainings or workshops on workplace bullying, hostile work environments and interpersonal conflict. Trainings in identifying microaggressions or hostility in oneself and others could raise awareness and prevent some disputes within departments. These trainings could create/develop ways to resolve conflict stemming from microaggressions. Additionally, trainings or workshops could be provided on how to reframe certain types of conflict or disagreements from being perceived as volatile to being a foundation for healthy debate and a place for growth.

Michigan State University attracts a variety of people, and therefore the CCTF suggests that extra care and consideration be put toward bringing people from all backgrounds into an equitable working environment. Occasional conflicts between staff or faculty members are inevitable in a working environment, but when cultural differences are added, there can be greater misunderstanding as cultural norms may be crossed. The CCTF suggests that a conflict resolution model be considered that would encourage and train mediators to ask questions and offer advice to help each party understand the other's values, as well as the deeper offenses caused by unmet cultural expectations. Encouraging someone to see how their actions may look different to someone with a different cultural lens could bring better understanding to coworkers and allow them to avoid future grievances.

Finally, CAL should make room for self-care and/or coping mechanisms during or after disagreements and conflicts that are not resolved. CCTF members have experienced situations where resolution seems impossible and attempts for resolution may actually make things worse. Toolkits for unresolved conflict should be provided; partnership with campus and local experts is desired.

ADAPTABLE RESOLUTION MODELS

The CAC also mentioned they were interested in the CCTF, "suggesting alternative ways of intervening in harmful behaviors (other than Title IX/OIE reporting.)" Discussions within the CCTF related to Restorative or Transformative Justice were offered. The following is a list of recommendations informed by a Transformative Justice philosophy.

It is evident that many departments and chairs throughout CAL are in need of support for dealing with RVSM between parties at all levels. The need for support is particularly acute during the Title IX investigation period where chairs, faculty, staff, and students are left with too few resources to manage the interim day-to-day encounters while waiting for a determination. This period continues to be prolonged by the campus-wide backlog of Title IX cases. The CCTF suggests developing a toolkit for campus community members who find themselves in this situation. The goal of the toolkit would be to prevent further harm and escalation from happening during that investigation period while also identifying resources that can contribute to healing. It would also assist in identifying and promoting communities of support and accountability for the parties involved in order to prevent further harm from occurring during the interim period. These toolkits will also support units in cases where Title IX has determined that no Title IX violation has occurred but it is evident to those affected that something harmful has occurred. In these cases, the department is left in the position of dealing with the fallout with little to no support or training.

The taskforce also recommends building a network of diverse local facilitators who can support units in building personalized community agreements and can assist units when there are

communication challenges that do not rise to the level of a violation but need to be addressed, lest they escalate unnecessarily. This is part of the preventative work that will yield healthier units and will provide a model for resolving lower stakes issues. Establishing a network of diverse facilitators who can help units resolve small-scale interpersonal harm will contribute to units having the bandwidth and skill sets to resolve more serious cases of RVSM as they arise. Unhealthy units rife with conflict cannot and do not respond well to cases of RVSM.

Finally, our consultant recommends incentivizing a Transformative Justice Fellows program for faculty and staff where participants are given the time and space to build up key skill sets for intervening in conflicts. This can be a pilot program run out of strategically identified units asking for support. The TJ Fellows pilot could provide course releases and/or reduced workload for 8-10 participants in a unit that will meet 6 times over the course of a year. The goal of the Fellows program would be to:

1. Cultivate a community of support and accountability within the unit
2. Create a space for building shared language, values, and trust
3. Bolster participants facilitation and skillful communication skills (so that they do not always have to rely on outside facilitators to solve problems in the unit)
4. Assess conditions in department that lead to harmful behavior
5. Develop personalized prevention, harm reduction, and response strategies for the unit.

A parallel version of this can be created for students and staff in the unit. Students can be provided with free credit hours and course credit (independent study structure), while staff can be provided with reduced workload and/or extra stipend to bolster their salary. Consider the impact on the culture of a department, if we ran a one-year pilot that ran 3 simultaneous fellows programs (faculty, student and staff). We would like to suggest that this would contribute to the CAC's request to discover "methods of building trust and care within units and across ranks, roles, and responsibilities."

However, this last charge will require more discussion and we will continue to explore methods should the committee continue. In our discussions, we examined the "What's in it for me?" attitude that prevents buy-in to the concept of active empathy. We also discussed that many people eye-roll when hearing the phrase "Culture of Care." These two elements prevent a true culture of care from spreading. This territory also crosses into ethical and moral behavior that are simply too personal to address through this CCTF. It is imagined that future CCTF members could gain expertise through more research on the topic and/or by hiring facilitators for such work.

PLACES TO OBSERVE EXISTING CARE

The CCTF applauds the [CAL resource page](#) as a real example of a culture of care, and suggest a similar resource page be created students and for employees. The resources collected by the CCTF should also be included on this page. The CCTF suggests that open letters authored by a

variety of CAL community members be included on this page to create a more inclusive atmosphere.

CAL's assistance and commitment to student basic needs are also a place where empathy can be made more obvious and be expanded with intentional information related to the MSU Food Bank, the CAL Emergency Fund, and other resources. The CCTF recommends that these resources be made more visible to students and employees new to CAL. Students do not always realize that they may be eligible for non-academic assistance and can feel anxious about asking their academic resources (faculty, advisors, department staff, etc) for such help.

The CCTF has several suggestions on how we might be able to celebrate where cultures of care exist in CAL:

- Large art installation where people can share examples of a culture of care by writing or posting their gratitude in a central location.
- Departmental bulletin boards where such examples could be posted is a similar idea on a smaller scale.
- Similar to the Humans of New York project, collect stories, photos or interviews of people who have been affected by a culture of care.
- CAL video stories of care for use on CAL and department websites.

CONCLUSION

The CCTF in its short time has examined the college-wide issue of a culture of care, but the real work has only just begun. These recommendations are not fully developed but if the CAC feels that the work should continue; we in the CCTF and many others in CAL will be ready to serve and support this important topic that can positively affect the well-being and productivity of the citizens of the College of Arts and Letters.

Respectfully submitted,

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