Conflict Resolution on Campus

As the economic downturn widens, many students and staff alike will experience greater pressures related to financial worries. We may see an increase in troubled students whose behavior may be disruptive in class or campus offices. Following is a short guide on how to de-escalate a situation with an angry student and how to calm oneself during conflict.

**Conflict-resolution with an angry or disgruntled student**

**Check in with yourself:** What is my reaction to this situation/student? Acknowledge your feelings and take a deep breath.

**Remain calm:** No matter what you are feeling inside, it will be important to remain calm on the outside.

**Listen to and acknowledge the complaint:** Acknowledge the student’s frustration through reflective listening. “I really hear your frustration about this situation. You registered for your classes on time but because financial aid did not come through you were not able to pay your registration fees and were dropped from...”
all your classes. Now the classes are full and you’re worried about what’s going to happen. I know that this is a stressful situation."

Often when a person feels acknowledged and cared for, the anger softens. Conversely, blaming the student, even if you believe they caused the problem, will not de-escalate the situation. Likewise a student who does not feel their problem is being acknowledged will continue to feel uncared for and their anger will escalate.

Assist the student with problem solving by positioning yourself as an ally: Let the student know how you can help them as well as what your limitations are. “I can... (express what you can do for the student)” and/or “Unfortunately, I can’t/am not authorized to (express your limitations on what you can do to help the student).”

If the problem is not immediately solvable, you can continue to empathize with the student while acknowledging that the situation will take time to resolve. Some students may need assistance in developing a step-by-step plan of action.

Enlist help if you need it. This may include asking another staff person or supervisor to help you deal with the conflict.

Give referrals: This may include walking the student over to another office, setting up an appointment with someone who can assist them, etc. If a student is severely distressed they may benefit from talking with a counselor.

Don’t forget self-care. A charged up, angry student can be emotionally challenging for anyone. After de-escalating a conflict you may need to take a 10-minute break to decompress by taking a walk or de-briefing with a colleague or supervisor.

Adapted from The Texas State University Counseling Center.