

Gender Equity Project Colloquia and Workshops

Power and Politics Activities and Discussion

Read: *Power, politics and survival in academia* (Capaldi, 2004)
Managing the department chair and navigating the department power structure
(Penner, Dovidio, & Schroeder, 2004)
Differential access to opportunity and power (Kanter, 1979)
Gender, power, and influence (Valian, 2003)

Handout: *Unwritten rules and impossible proofs* (Caplan, 1994)

Activity 1: Academic life is full of challenges that extend beyond teaching and research. Bureaucratic and political problems can consume a lot of your time and energy, and may affect your work. We have listed below three categories of “power problems” that may occur here at Hunter or in any academic setting. In a group of 4-5, discuss one problem from the list below. Try not to dwell on the problem itself, but rather focus on the best way to address the problem. Is the problem one that can be addressed at the individual level, or will it require an institutional change or group effort? Who would be your best allies to help solve the problem (fellow faculty, department chair, dean, etc.)? How can you frame the problem in a way that will be non-threatening to others while also inspiring them to help? Report back to the larger group on how you decided to address the problem.

Problem#1: Unresponsive college staff (technical support, administrative support, other college office)

Problem #2: Your space does not suit your needs

Problem #3: You have received an unsatisfactory teaching schedule

Activity 2: Although dealing effectively with individuals who occupy positions of power comprises a large part of power and politics, navigating the power structure in academia also entails knowing how to build your own power. There are many ways to increase your prestige and visibility not only within your own department but also within the college as a whole. For each person in your group, generate one concrete suggestion for how she can increase her power either within her department or within the college. We suggest focusing on a project or issue that not only advances personal interests, but also benefits the department or college in some way. For example, volunteering to organize a short colloquium series may not require a large amount of work on your part but will be noticed and appreciated by others. Projects of this nature can also serve as valuable negotiating tools (more on this at our next workshop).

References

- Capaldi, E. (2004). Power, politics, and survival in academia. In J.M. Darley, M.P. Zanna, & H.L. Roediger III (Eds.) *The compleat academic: A career guide* (2nd ed., pp. 245-257). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Caplan, P. J. (1994). Unwritten rules and impossible proofs. In *Lifting a ton of feathers: A women's guide to surviving in the academic world* (pp. 34-46). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kanter, R. M. (1979). Differential access to opportunity and power. In R. Alvarez & K.G. Lutterman (Eds.) *Discrimination in organizations* (pp. 52-68). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Penner, L.A., Dovidio, J.F., Schroeder, D.A. (2004). Managing the department chair and navigating the department power structure. In J. M. Darley, M.P. Zanna., & H.L. Roediger, III (Eds.), *The compleat academic: A career guide* (2nd ed., pp.259-276). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Valian, V. (2003). *Gender, power, and influence*. Unpublished manuscript. Gender Equity Project, Hunter College