

MANAGING WHEN DIFFERENCES MATTER

email is the best way to communicate with me this winter

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Winter 2015

Description

This intensive course takes as an assumption that real differences in interests, needs and standpoint often create tangible and important barriers to successful management and public policy. Sometimes these create actual conflicts. At other times the result is better described as an inability to do our best work. Either way, in this course, we will work on ways to grow and gain and not just suffer in the presence of difference.

To learn about working through specific conflicts, we will study the particular dispute resolution procedures commonly used in doing the public's work. Underpinning these day-to-day procedures is a wide variety of legal and constitutional traditions, which impact governance, the ways we set priorities and the ways we define issues. We will spend some time on those deeper structures. Finally we will pay careful attention those professional practices which help to create an environment that is hospitable in the presence of difference.

So as to make the experience directly useful, there will be opportunities both during class and in individual work, to nurture and draw on the particular talents and agendas of students enrolled this year.

Activities during class

The weekend's work will be a mixture of relatively formal lectures, interactive lecture/discussions and workshops. We will spend our first evening on conflict styles and on a basic discussion of temperament and the "natural" or "emotional" sides of our responses to challenges in the workplace. Lectures and case-studies of the ethical and legal traditions shaping our work our professional relations with colleagues, with citizens, the media etc. will take up our second day. Our third day will be spent on the specific procedures — mediation/arbitration/administrative hearings/legislation etc. that shape the ways work in the public interest is managed. Some components, still to be finalized, will involve shared activities with the MPA elective on Food Policy.

Individual Projects

Our intensive weekend takes place mid-quarter, so you need to begin work on your individual project before we meet. This project will involve a "difference" or "dispute" in which you have a personal investment, either at the office or in some other part of your public life. It should not be a strictly private personal or family/intimate issue. In past classes, the issues covered have ranged from disputes about the precise words used in official letters, to racial profiling by public officials, to the harm that results from ambiguities about jurisdiction and/or responsibility. The difficulties that you chose to address must be not simply a result of a communication breakdown.

The project will NOT conclude with a standard research paper, but it will depend on your completing a description of the specific events leading up to the difficulty, as well as a clear statement of the forces/factors at work. Details about the schedule and specific requirements for this project will be emailed to students registered in the class. Once projects are defined each student will receive suggestions from me about specific readings or topics which should receive further analysis.

Readings and resources

This course is focused on practical applications, however, it is also important that you develop and/or deepen your conceptual grasp of the material. Both Friday night and Saturday night of the weekend we meet you can expect to do a little reading in preparation for the next day's activities. At the beginning of the quarter you will also receive an annotated bibliography describing a few key written resources to use during the course and also over the long term.