

**From Silos to Bridges:
Creating Avenues for Collaboration**



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A Note to You

Thank you for taking part in this session today. We appreciate that you have decided to share one hour of your precious life with your colleagues and us.

During this session, you will *begin* to explore a number of strategies and *begin* to generate important questions that relate to student and life success issues.

We use the word *begin* intentionally. In their coursework, we often ask our students to take what they get in class, practice it, and apply it to their lives. The same with our session today.

The real work *continues* when you leave today's session. Perhaps you can initiate a question-storming process with a facilitated conversation group on campus.

Pay attention to the genuine questions that you and your colleagues have. Too often, we look for quick answers at the expense of the eloquence and power of authentic inquiry.

Build bridges, my friends!

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Opening Thought Provoker: What Questions Should We Be Asking?

For this exercise, consider your institutional and campus cultures. More specifically, consider the level of collaboration between you and your colleagues. What questions do you and your colleagues currently address or need to address when it comes to institutional silos?

The following questions provide a place to start your conversation. Feel free to move directly to others if they are more pertinent to your situation.

- What does “silo” mean to you, your campus, and your institution?

- Are you “silo-ed” on your campus?

- What group dynamics exist in your institutional culture that encourage collaborations and/or hinder them?

- When it comes to collaboration—moving from silos to bridges—what would you like your institutional culture to look like?

- What other questions do you and your colleagues need to raise?

The Seven Rs of Success (Steve Piscitelli)



From Steve Piscitelli, *Stories about Teaching, Learning, and Resilience: No Need to be an Island*. Atlantic Beach, FL: The Growth and Resilience Network™ 2017.

Scenario 1: Get Control of Your Class!

A faculty member enters the counselor's office. He is feeling frustrated and anxious about one particular student in his class. Every other day it is the same scenario: The student interrupts classmates with strongly opinionated and conceivably offensive remarks. This typically leads to a divided class that at times edges towards combative.

"I love that the class gets so into the discussion," the professor said, "but I'm concerned that it could turn aggressive. Sometimes, I think this student wants things to turn aggressive, but that is just a hunch. Can you come join us in class and subtly observe the student? He seems a little odd and I'm just not sure which direction to take."

The counselor agrees and quietly sits in the back during the next class. She observed a "heated" discussion. Afterwards, the faculty member and counselor meet to discuss possible options moving forward.

"It seems to me that your class is just out of control," the counselor says forcefully. "That's your greatest issue. Get control of your class and everything will be fine!" The counselor then walks out of faculty member's office.

Reflect on This

- What challenges appear in this scenario?
- How would you respond (in class and to the counselor) as the faculty member?
- Can the situation with the counselor and faculty ever become collaborative after this exchange?

Scenario 2: “I’ll Call You Later Tonight”

Professor Copperfield gently rapped on Ms. Drew’s office door. “Hey, Nancy, I’ve got a bit of situation here.”

As he spoke, Ms. Drew could see that the professor had a student by his side. She had her head bowed and it was obvious she was crying. The counselor motioned them into her office.

“This is Ms. Drew, our campus counselor. She will be able to help you.” The professor led the student to a chair. Turning to Ms. Drew, “This is Johnita. She told me that she was assaulted by the father of her child this morning.” Turning back to his student, “Johnita, Ms. Drew will take good care of you. I have to get back to class. But I will check in on you tonight. I will send you an email and I will follow that email up with a phone call, as well. Thank you for coming to me. We are here for you.”

As he leaves the office, Ms. Drew called to him and followed him into the hallway.

Reflect on This

- If this situation were to happen on your campus, what resources would be available for faculty and student?
- How would you handle (or have you handled) such a situation?
- What do you believe Professor Copperfield did well? Would you advise him to do anything differently?
- What do you think Ms. Drew wants to talk to the professor about when she calls to him at the end of the scenario?

Scenario 3: An Attention-Getting Fake?

“I’m going to shoot myself,” stated the student to the physics professor. “Without the extra credit I’ll fail and then everything is over.” The faculty member, concerned about the statement, contacted the campus Student Affairs counselor. The faculty member and counselor already had a collaborative relationship and quickly agreed upon a plan regarding the student. Shortly after, the faculty member informed the Student Affairs director about the situation. Within minutes, the faculty member and counselor are called to the director’s office. “This is an attention-getting fake,” he bellows. “Next time a student tries a stunt like this you tell him to wait outside my office until I’m available. You look like weak faculty and staff when you let students get away with threats.”

Reflect on This

- If you were the faculty member, would you seek support from the counselor again given the director’s response in the scenario? Please explain.
- In what ways might the faculty, director, and counselor’s relationships be effected by the director’s response?
- Why do you believe the director was so upset?
- What can be done to repair the fractured relationships between the director and faculty, faculty and staff, and director and staff?

Call-to-Action #1

Return to the Opening Thought Provoker on page 3. As soon as practical, review and add to your thoughts. Perhaps you could ask a colleague for input.

- Identify one area on your campus that could benefit from a little “bridge building”—a bit of collaboration and “silo busting.”
- What assumptions exist as to why this area needs “bridge building”? What evidence do you have to support your assumptions?
- What resources will you need to start (or continue) your “bridge building”? This includes people as well as financial and logistical support.
- Please write and explain one action you can take immediately to initiate (or maintain) a silos-to-bridges initiative on your campus.
- When will you start?
- When do you realistically believe you can finish?

Call-to-Action #2

Bonus Scenario*

Collegial Collisions—Building Bridges for Collaboration

[NOTE to participant: We encourage you to continue the conversation about building bridges on your campus. The scenarios you have discussed in our session today represent one strategy for raising questions. Perhaps you can use the following scenario when you get back to campus. And, consider drafting your own scenarios that represent issues from your institution and campus.]

The dean began the faculty meeting with the first agenda item: “Silos or Bridges.”

“Our students are fortunate to learn from the finest faculty in this part of the state. And they have access to more resources dedicated to their success than they will ever see again in their lives. They do have three challenges, though, with these resources. They have to know about the resources, locate them, and then use those resources for their benefit.” He then pointed to a woman sitting in the back of the room.

“I’ve invited Dr. Armstrong, our Dean of Student Affairs to visit with us today.”

As the Dean of Student Affairs made her way to the front, Professor Stone leaned over and whispered to her colleague, “Geez, what are they gonna ask us to do now? I’m overloaded already.”

“Thank you for allowing me, faculty colleagues, to speak with you today,” started the dean. I need your help. I’ve been on this campus for a little over two years, and something troubles me. We seem to have two very large silos here. One silo says ‘FACULTY’ and the other, ‘STUDENT AFFAIRS.’ We don’t communicate like we need to. I would like us to come up collaboratively with a plan that will encourage meaningful collaboration between our faculty, counselors, and advisors. Ideally, I would love Student Affairs representatives to visit each of your classrooms within the first two weeks of the semester—just for ten or fifteen minutes—to tell the students about resources that we have for them. I think this will be a great way to begin building bridges and breaking down the silos. But we need your help. How can we make it happen?”

She stopped, looked at the gathered faculty, and waited. No one spoke. No one smiled. Nothing. After what seemed like an eternity, Professor Stone raised her hand. “I appreciate your comments, but I don’t have time for this. My curriculum does not allow for nonacademic stuff like this. I already provide, in the syllabus, the location of

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the Student Affairs Center. If the students can't take a little initiative to find these resources on their own, then shame on them.”

A few faculty nodded in agreement. Stony silence followed.

Reflect on This

Your dean asked you to chair an institution-wide committee that will evaluate whether or not silos actually exist on your campus has approached you. He wants an assessment of what you and your colleagues do at your institution to increase the opportunities for collaboration. He told you recently, “If we are to help students connect with resources, then we need to know about those resources as well. We all need a working knowledge of all the moving parts of this institution.”

Your dean has asked you to give recommendations on the following:

- Who should serve on this committee with you? What departments or areas need to be represented?
- Will you have student representation on the committee? Why or why not?
- How will you determine if there is collaboration or not? And how can you determine the current degree of collaboration?
- For your institution, identify three “bright spots” that currently exist. That is, where do you find shining examples of colleagues reaching beyond their comfort zones and “space” to work with and understand the operations and strengths of a department or area other than their own?
- Identify three “not-so-bright spots” that currently exist. That is, what challenges exist that may or do hinder collaboration? What can you and your colleagues do in these cases?

* Excerpted from Steve Piscitelli, *Stories about Teaching, Learning, and Resilience: No Need to be an Island*. Atlantic Beach, FL: The Growth and Resilience Network™ 2017. All rights reserved.

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