CARNEGIE MELLON
Community
ThinkTank

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The Challenge of Leadership and Dialogue

Our Public Talk,
Personal Experience,
Individual & Community Response

*A report on Rival Hypotheses,
Options, and Outcomes
from the* CARNEGIE MELLON
COMMUNITY THINK TANK

This Think Tank inquiry was designed to investigate difficult situations in which students face barriers establishing themselves as leaderships.

- How are microaggressions handled on campus?

- How do students communicate between themselves and staff members?

- How do students seek help? From whom?

- How might we respond as individuals and as a community?

The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank
Carnegie Mellon University
www.cmu.edu/thinktank

The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank

- Creates dialogues among problem solvers seeking workable solutions to problems of teaching, learning, and meaningful working lives.

The Think Tank's structured, solution-oriented process:

♦ Opens cross-institution, cross-hierarchy, intercultural dialogue in which students, educators, administrators, service professionals, researchers, and community supporters meet as collaborators

♦ Structures this conversation into a problem-solving search for diverse perspectives, rival hypotheses, and collaborative solutions

♦ Draws out untapped expertise from those rarely heard in policy discussions to build more comprehensive understandings of problems and community-tested options for action

♦ Offers a scaffold for Local Action Think Tanks in individual schools and workplaces.

Please visit our web site to explore the Findings *of other Think Tanks, research on intercultural problem solving, and our guide for developing your own dialogues as an educator, human resource developer, or community group. Figure 1 at the end of this report diagrams how these inquiries are structured*

Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank

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Part 1:

Supporting Student Voices

An Introduction

We are a collection of graduate and undergraduate students at Carnegie Mellon looking to explore some questions surrounding student leadership on campus. The question we are seeking to answer is why students feel that there is a disconnect between themselves and the administration. We spent a semester gathering information through interviews with various stakeholders and came across consistent themes. We asked participants to delve into critical incidents in which students had communicated with administration and the outcomes of those events.

Throughout these interviews we found that many students felt a sense of discontentment with administration's response to certain issues. We also found that the experience varied greatly department by department. This is most likely due to Carnegie Mellon's decentralized structure. This is a potential problem for both the University and students, both parties benefit from an open dialogue and trust. So, we've assembled a round table to discuss this potential issue as well as dive deeper into means for solving it.

For our roundtable we've created two different scenarios illustrating the problem to ground the discussion. The end results from this deliberation and research will be posted within the briefing book.

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Victoria Avery
Peter Zaccardi

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What's the Problem?

The "Student Voices" Think Tank was focused on amplifying student voices and empowering students to enact change within the CMU community, with a particular focus on students whose voices may otherwise not be heard. As you may or may not know, there are a number of student-led institutions and organizations on CMU's campus celebrating activism and engagement with student-centered problems. Nevertheless, we still see numerous barriers to student engagement, and multiple factors that make CMU an environment wherein students struggle to take charge and make change. The significant problem is twofold:

First, there is a lack of transparency of communication and administrative process that creates a divide between students and administration, making the administration and the help and/or resources they may be able to provide feel inaccessible. Many students feel that they not only do not know how to go about reaching out to the administration, such as who to contact about their issues or what to say, but also feel that even if they succeed in talking with administration, that they are not confident that the administration will really "listen" to what they have to say.

Secondly, in conjunction with the first point, there is a felt lack of understanding and support from faculty and administration when it comes to processing student testimony. A clear process for handling complaints, problem-solving initiatives or new ventures on campus lacks clear administrative paths, and as a result, students do not know what will happen with their testimony after it is shared with administrators. Students would like to feel incentivized by the university to take action to make the community better but feel that CMU does not provide clear avenues to do so, or at the very least does not make these avenues known to the general student population before conflict arises. In sum, students do not feel that Carnegie Mellon empowers them to take action to solve campus issues facing the student body

The Question

Our investigation started with a felt difficulty—why do students feel that they lack a voice on campus and cannot advocate for the changes they want in their community? Why have other student-run organizations struggled with setting an example for independent students to initiate change both inside and outside of these organizations? Why do students feel that administrative backing is necessary to implement change on campus, and why do students presently feel disconnected from these administrators and the resources they may provide?

Through our critical incident interviews, we saw that the larger question was not about the ways in which individual students can make a change on their own, but rather how the existing privatized environment at Carnegie Mellon necessitates a mutual relationship between students and administrators that enables students to enact change as they otherwise would at public or liberal arts universities. that existed for an independent student – whether they were to leave or not. To investigate this issue further, our framing question is as follows: *How can CMU empower students to initiate and implement sustainable change efforts?*

Problem Scenario 1

"Students and Microaggressions at Carnegie Mellon"

A glimpse into the experience of a student dealing with racially motivated microaggressions on campus.

The Decision Makers

Mike

First generation, African American freshman at Dietrich. He plays on the varsity men's tennis team, on which he is the only POC.

Coach Smith

The Head Coach of the varsity men's tennis team entering his 12th year. Given his coaching experience and status as a CMU alumnus, he is very comfortable coaching in the university setting.

Kevin

Mike's roommate, also a freshman at Dietrich. He played on the football team in the Fall.

The setting is the University Tennis Courts, located on Carnegie Mellon University's campus. It is a cold Monday night in late January. This is the first official tennis practice following winter break. Over winter break, Mike decided to change his hairstyle from a kept style in cornrows to a natural style in an afro. After losing his first set back, Mike tries to talk to Coach Smith about his performance.

Mike approaches Coach Smith, who has just called for a water break.

Mike: My serve was so off that match, do you see anything off in my form? It doesn't feel right.

Coach Smith: I didn't see anything too different other than your hair. (Jokingly) Maybe it made you a bit top heavy today. Your serve looks fine, just follow through a bit more and you should be fine.

Mike: (Surprised) My hair? I don't think my hair has anything to do with my serve.

Coach Smith: (Still joking) I just noticed that as soon as you changed your hair your serve changed with it. But hey, get out there, you're doing fine!

Mike: Okay coach, sounds good. (Mike shakes off his coach's comments, he has to get ready for his next set)

A couple of days pass, but Mike is still bothered by his interaction with his coach, so he shares his experience with his roommate Kevin, who plays on the football team.

Mike: You know, what my coach said the other day is still bothering me. I am almost positive that he wouldn't have said the same thing to a white player. Am I reading too much into this? Has anything like this happened on the football team?

Kevin: I don't think that's an unreasonable reaction, even if your coach was joking. I remember a coach made fun of a black offensive lineman for "eating too much fried chicken" in the off season.

Mike: (Surprised) Did anyone ever say anything?

Kevin: I remember that some players were talking about it after practice, but I'm not sure what they did.

Mike: Thanks for letting me know. Do you know the names of anyone that saw what happened?

Kevin: (Writing down names on a notepad) Yeah, I think it was these guys.

Options and Outcomes for Scenario 1

Decision Point

Mike has observed that other students have experienced microaggressions similar to his own. Indeed, our research suggests that microaggressions of this nature continue to occur at CMU.
*NOTE: Most of the time for the Round Table discussion focused on Scenario 1.

Option #1

Better educate and train both staff and students on the importance of maintaining a safe and considerate collegiate environment.

A Student-Athlete says:

It is great to do education, education is necessary for action, but we need to move beyond the education of those on the other side of the power dynamic. There needs to be some sort of remediation to hold people accountable.

A Coach says:

Everyday colloquialisms, much of the sort seen in racial microaggressions, have unfortunately become a part of the common lexicon but are nevertheless steeped in racial transgressions. Just because they are part of common language, does not mean that they are okay under any circumstance, and cultural competency training is necessary to allay this problem.

An Athletic Administrator says:

It is important that we bring these issues to the forefront so that we create opportunities to discuss, educate and learn. From this, we seek to utilize these experiences to create a culture of discussion and feedback.

A Student Administrator says:

We must have education and training absent conflict, because doing that educational work could interrupt the moment the harm was caused. To an administrator with more training, the "it's not my hair" comment could signal that they have created harm, thereby engaging them in the moment to provide an immediate solution. Education should sensitize individuals so they can check themselves in moments like this.

Option #2

Education is not enough; CMU needs to punish bad actors in order to achieve wide adoption.

A Student-Athlete says:

Education can make the experiences of minoritized students "learning lessons" for the majority when they themselves are paying to get an education at this institution. Hold people accountable the same way students are held accountable with the Office of Integrity and Standards.

A Coach says:

Students are less likely to raise issues if they know that time and time again in the past nothing has been done to solve the problem. Words without action are meaningless. We need to incentivize people to change, perhaps by making such inappropriate behavior an action item in an administrator's performance management. If you have another incident within the next academic year, it will then negatively affect your compensation.

An Athletic Administrator says:

It is up to the administration to provide a culture of discussion and opportunities for feedback. Options 1 and 2 are an important component, but so are 3 and 4.

A Student Administrator says:

It is hard to provide transparency about action taken when such action involves someone's personnel record. If there is a policy violation, the outcome will not be known to others because it is part of a private personal education record. Hopefully, we can solve this problem through intercultural dialogue, and restorative justice practices, which is a more public process of providing understanding.

Option #3

Microaggressions are not the only systemic issues that students encounter on campus. The university needs to establish avenues in which students feel empowered to speak out regarding these issues.

A Student-Athlete says:

While racial identity is visible, other forms of identity such as gender identity are not. The university needs to address the impact of these situations on individuals, and leverage resources to fix the system.

Another Student-Athlete says:

It is challenging to go through the proper channels to see any changes in behavior, especially given the power dynamic that exists between coaches and administrators and students. In addition, the process can be isolating for the student pursuing justice. There need to be clear channels, as well as clear repercussions.

A Coach says:

Situations like the one above breaks the trust between students and coaches and administrators. Students can get oppression fatigue knowing that they have raised these issues through different channels at different times and still nothing has been done. It is tough to make an example of someone, the first perpetrator, but a line needs to be drawn somewhere and then consistently upheld for students to understand that the administration has taken some level of responsibility. If not, it will taint the students' perceptions of an entire department and only add to the issue.

An Athletic Administrator says:

It is the responsibility of departments to perpetuate a culture of discussion and provide opportunities for feedback. If these systemic issues occur and the administration does not know about them, then they must create an environment where people will come forward to share their concerns.

A Student Administrator says:

Whether the bias is unconscious or intentional, it is up to the institution to ask how these situations could be read. The problem in this scenario is that the coach did not pause to think about his words, and thus leaning into training and education is that much more important to stop these situations before they occur and cause harm.

Option #4

These microaggressions are relatively minor issues, and offended individuals should simply speak with the individuals that offended them to resolve these issues without administrative intervention.

A Student-Athlete says:

Minoritized students don't feel they have anyone to confide in about these issues and approaching a coach can feel uncomfortable because there is not enough faculty of color, and therefore no community of shared experience for students to turn to.

A Coach says:

Some students feel uncomfortable conversing with their coaches directly because they are afraid that their coaches' perceptions of them will then taint their perception of students with shared identities. Students feel that they are made to speak for their entire race, and therefore feel uncomfortable confronting the issue directly with coaches for fear of widespread negative ramifications impacting other minoritized students.

An Athletic Administrator says:

The power dynamic between coaches and players adds a more challenging layer to simply confronting a coach alone. This option is the least beneficial because it minimizes the issue at hand.

A Student Administrator says:

It is the sad reality that in our society and at our school, BIPOC students constantly have to ask themselves if a comment made to or about them had something to do with their race. It is exhausting for minority students to feel that they constantly have to name these things. Hopefully, through education and training we could raise the collective consciousness of those within the university so that someone who is not the affected party, such as a white teammate, can speak up and call out behaviors that are inappropriate.

Problem Scenario 2

"Students as Organizational Leaders at Carnegie Mellon"

The experience of a new club sports team attempting to establish legitimacy at CMU.

The Decision Makers

Sarah

Junior at Tepper. She is a captain on the club women's field hockey team. She is excited to finally play her favorite sport in college, as this is the first year of the team's existence.

Michelle

Freshman studying computer science. The other captain of the field hockey team. She played field hockey in high school and partnered with Sarah to establish the team this year.

The setting is the CMU Soccer Field, located on campus. It is a windy Tuesday night in early March. The first official field hockey practice of the season just concluded. Sarah and Michelle are discussing the outcome of the practice together after dismissing the rest of the team.

Michelle: What did you think of the practice today?

Sarah: I thought that it was good. We were able to go over a lot of the basics and the girls that were here seemed eager to learn. I'm also happy that we had enough girls to scrimmage 11 v 11.

Michelle: Yeah, that was key. A lot of the concepts wouldn't have made sense without a scrimmage. Hopefully we can scrimmage again next practice too.

Sarah: I doubt it.

Michelle: Why not? Didn't we find out that most people could come to the 8PM-10PM time slot on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

Sarah: That's the thing actually. I got an email before practice today about that. It looks like our practice schedule won't be very consistent at all. I tried to get the two best times that I could each week, but it's all over the place. Next week, we have practice on Monday and Thursday night, and the week after that we have Tuesday night and Friday morning.

Michelle: That's pretty weird, why is that?

Sarah: From what I understand, the varsity sports are the only ones that really get consistent schedules. The rest of the club sports fill in the gaps of whatever is left over each week.

Michelle: Huh, that's a bummer. Hopefully we can keep our attendance up still.

Sarah: I don't know. I know a bunch of people on the team have other clubs and commitments, but we will see.

Michelle: Alright well, see you at the next practice.

A month passes and Sarah and Michelle are meeting to discuss the progress of the team before their first tournament next weekend.

Sarah: Do you think we are ready for the tournament? You've played in them before, but this is going to be my first one.

Michelle: Honestly, no. Our defense definitely isn't ready. We needed to get more 11 v 11 reps in after learning the system.

Sarah: Our attendance has only gone down since starting. We barely had 11 yesterday.

Michelle: Well yeah. Varsity soccer wanted our practice slot, so we got pushed from Thursday night to Friday morning. I still can't believe that they are allowed to do that.

Sarah: Me too, I get it that they are a varsity sport, and we are a club team, but I feel like being able to straight up take our reserved practice time goes a step too far.

Michelle: That's on top of our already inconsistent practice schedule too. I don't know how we can properly develop a competitive team with this schedule.

Sarah: Some players were complaining about it yesterday morning too. I told them to try to just move on and play, but they had a point. It does suck to have to play with half of our roster.

Michelle: A lot of the players are new too. If they get frustrated, I wonder if they will stick with the club.

Sarah: I'm worried about that too. Let's see how the tournament goes, but I think that we have to do something moving forward, because this doesn't seem sustainable.

Options and Outcomes for Scenario 2

Decision Point

Sarah and Michelle are frustrated with their inconsistent practice schedule. This inconsistency stems from the relationship that exists between club sports and varsity sports.

Option #1

Varsity sports are rightly given preference over club sports. The members of the club field hockey team simply have to be more committed to the team if they desire better attendance.

A Student-Athlete says:

Students at CMU are often drawn in many directions thanks to their multiple clubs and interests. It would be better if students in general focused on doing less better.

A Coach says:

Varsity athletes often have to miss classes due to other commitments during the week. Practices with full rosters are rare, even on varsity teams.

Option #2

Administrators should not prioritize varsity sports when scheduling field space.

A Student-Athlete says:

While priorities may have to exist, the University needs to do a better job of clearly communicating their decision-making process regarding their priorities both athletically and academically. There is no room for elitism at CMU.

A Coach says:

The university can't be all things for all people. They need to be strategic in their offerings due to limited resources. Varsity sports often compete with each other for field space. Naturally, most teams want consistent, prime practice slots. Almost every team compromises in some way.

An Athletic Administrator says:

These decisions are very difficult to make. The University wants to validate the experiences and interests of their students; however, varsity sports do sometimes need priority over club sports. The entire process of determining field space is very complicated and can take into account everything from seasonality to championship ambitions.

Option #3

Varsity sports will always have some power of club sports, but the relationship between varsity teams and club teams should be improved. This would result in a mutually beneficial relationship in which the teams would consider each-other's needs before making decisions.

A Student-Athlete says:

> The different teams at CMU need to do a better job of community building. Specifically, if student to student relations could be improved, students would understand and sympathize with each other more effectively.

A Coach says:

> Teams should do a better job of communicating the necessity of practices to each other. In most circumstances, doing this would allow for some sort of compromise.

An Athletic Administrator says:

> The athletic department has attempted to develop this dialogue through employees that specifically represent and speak with certain sections of the student population. Hopefully, students feel comfortable speaking with these representatives, as many of their issues could be addressed by speaking with them.

A Student Administrator says:

> The University truly wants to hear the voices of all students. In order to effectively draw out these voices, the University should better utilize campus leaders and mentors that students feel comfortable speaking with.

Option #4

The bottleneck is field space, so the University should invest into creating more field space.

A Student-Athlete says:

> The addition of new spaces would help alleviate many of the issues that students face currently. Additionally, there are some University spaces which are inaccessible to most students due to administrative complications or restrictions. These spaces should be easier to access in general.

An Athletic Administrator says:

> The University is continually trying to find new ways to accommodate student's interests. Currently, a new athletic space is in the first stages of planning.

Part 2:
Student & Administrator Communication

An Introduction

We are a collection of graduate and undergraduate students at Carnegie Mellon University that were brought together as part of a course called Leadership, Dialogue, and Change to form a Think Tank. At the start of the semester, we were tasked with addressing the challenges students face in taking leadership on campus. In the course of our inquiry, we decided to focus ourselves on the question of why the student community; be it student leaders, student organizations, or individual students; feel that there is a disconnect that prevents them from communicating with members of the administration about issues or problems that affect campus and the student body.

We spent a semester gathering information and through interviews with leaders of various student groups at Carnegie Mellon and Allegheny College and members of the Carnegie Mellon administration. We asked participants to delve into critical incidents in which students had communicated with administration and the outcome of those events. We hoped to find a variety of different viewpoints to gain a better understanding of the problem from multiple perspectives and to gain insight into different stakeholders' understanding of the issue.

Throughout these interviews, we found that many students felt a sense of discontentment with the administration's response to certain issues. We also found that members of the administration face multiple problems at different levels that make communication with students about issues difficult. The information that we gathered was used to create two representative scenarios depicting decisions in the communication process that can lead to a feeling of disconnection or division between the students and the university.

The purpose of this round table is to bring together student leaders and members of the administration to foster an open dialogue about the problem. We hope to create a better understanding of the problem to help identify possible solutions that haven't been considered or to refine solutions to better solve the problem.

This course and think tank were overseen by Dr. Linda Flower, who has been the key supporter of the Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank throughout its various iterations.

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Brontë Arreola
Charles Mansfield
CJ Nilson

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What's the Problem?

Our iteration of the Think Tank was meant to look at why student leaders on campus fail to succeed in tackling issues on campus that they want to address. Through our inquiries into that problem, we discovered that a failure in communication between students and the administration was resulting in a discontentment and feeling of disconnection between students and the university when it came to important issues that faced the campus where students felt the administration's response was inadequate.

The issue of communication failing between students and the administration is a problem that everyone at Carnegie Mellon University has a stake in. The success and satisfaction on campus requires an environment where everyone feels included and heard. It should be a place where people can come together, and nobody gets left behind. This problem can be seen as an urgent issue where a strong, viable solution can smooth the way for solving future issues that arise on campus and create a more inclusive and more uplifting environment for everyone.

The Question

There were many questions that we asked at the beginning of this inquiry. Why do students feel that there is a sort of barrier preventing them from communicating with the administration about issues that they care about or believe need to be solved? How clear or daunting is the process of communication with the administration since Carnegie Mellon's decentralized model allows every department to operate differently? Do students believe that communication with the administration will achieve any real change or solution?

We did our best to pare the problem down to a singular open question to drive a dialogue with the purpose of finding a solution. *What is the best way to facilitate communication between students and the administration?* Our critical incident interviews and Round Table discussion revealed that both sides know that there are flaws in the systems of communication and that they can be improved. Our following problem scenarios, story behind the story, and options and outcomes represent the information we have gathered from both these interviews and discussions.

Problem Scenario 1

"Microaggressions at Carnegie Mellon University"

A look at students deciding the value of trying to communicate a problem to CMU

The Decision Makers

Rodney

An African American student who has experienced a microaggression from his professor in his class

Danny

Rodney's friend who believes the university has good intentions

Amelia

Rodney's friend who believes the university doesn't care about its students

The setting is the University Center on campus. A group of friends are sitting at a table overlooking the pool while they eat their lunch. Rodney is talking to them about how frustrated he is that professors are still committing microaggressions in the classroom, like one he experienced earlier.

Amelia: What did he actually say to you?

Rodney: He wanted me to give a monologue on racism. I got picked to do it because I'm the only black kid in the class.

Amelia: This school sucks. They never do anything about stuff like this.

Danny: Did you say something to your professor?

Rodney: I didn't get a chance. He got right back into the lecture and as soon as class was over he was out the door.

Danny: Are you gonna talk to your advisor?

Amelia: Have you ever spoken to your advisor?

Rodney: Just to make sure that I'm on track to graduate. I don't think that really counts.

Danny: So I'm gonna take that as a no? You're not gonna tell her?

Rodney: Why would I tell her? I don't know her.

Amelia: I mean, your professor is bound to say something else to another student. They'll probably say something.

Rodney: Right. Someone will say something.

*** *A few weeks later they are at lunch again.*

Amelia: They still haven't done anything about your professor?

Rodney: Nothing's changed.

Danny: Why haven't you said anything to him in class?

Rodney: He hasn't said anything to me since the last time. I don't want to say something and get in trouble now.

Danny: You should talk to someone in the administration. This is a serious problem if they're not doing anything about it.

Amelia: Like that's gonna do anything. If they haven't done anything about him yet then what's one more complaint gonna do?

Rodney: This school sucks.

Amelia: I told you before. They just want to take their money and then forget about us.

Danny: I don't know about that, but it's really not great that the university isn't doing anything about it.

Amelia: That's what I've been saying.
Danny: You really should say something to someone.

* A few weeks later Rodney is in a meeting with an administrator from the Office of Community Standards and Integrity.

Rodney: A few weeks ago Prof. Sellars committed a microaggression against me.

Administrator: Okay. I have a form here that I'd like for you to fill out so that we can get all the details.

Rodney: How do I know this form is gonna do anything?
Administrator: What do you mean?

Rodney: Why haven't any of the other reports about him done anything? He's still making microaggressions to other kids in class.

Administrator: Nobody has reported any microaggressions from Prof. Sellars.

Rodney: Really?

Administrator: We look through all of the reports. He hasn't been mentioned before.

Rodney files the report and the Office of Community Standards and Integrity reach out to Prof. Sellars. They discuss the events that occurred, and he actively works to not commit microaggressions.

The Story *Behind the Story*
Whose Problem is This — the Student's, the Teacher's, the School's?

A Student says:

> Rodney probably feels uncomfortable because he was singled out and expected to know information based on his identity as an African American. Because he isn't close with his advisor or anyone in the administration, he probably doesn't know who to tell. It can be really hard to find the right administrative department that deals with the issues or problems that you are facing when you know so little about all of the departments and what they do.

An Administrator says:

> Rodney should have reported his professor's behavior to someone. You just have to ask someone to point you in the right direction about where to go to report things and you'll find what you're looking for. The university takes matters like these seriously because we want to have an environment where everyone feels that they belong. Rodney and his friends let the problem perpetuate by not saying anything.

A Professor says:

> All Rodney had to do was say something to the professor. While it might be nerve racking or awkward to confront a professor about something they said or did, most professors will listen and take heed of what you said. We don't want to hurt the students at all.

Options & Outcomes for Scenario 1

Decision Point #1

Students must be able to report actions or statements that hurt the campus experience for themselves and others like microaggressions, even if they distrust the administration or if they aren't close with members of the administration to speak to.

Option #1

Students should be encouraged to build relationships with members of the administration, either through outreach from advisors or a department ambassador type of role, in order to make communication more of a comfortable experience.

A Student says:

> This could work but it could just end up being like the weird ice breakers at orientation that nobody wants to do. Also, if it's just being encouraged then most likely people just won't do it anyways.

An Advisor says:

> We try to be as involved with students as we can, but sometimes it just doesn't take. I'm not really sure how much more encouragement the university can give where it would really sway the minds of the students who aren't making lasting relationships with us anyways.

An Administrator says:

> Students are always encouraged to speak with their advisors or members of the administration. Communication between students and the administration is the best way to find what needs to be done to improve the university and we will continue to encourage it.

The Think Tank says:

> This option, while probably being the most noninvasive method of encouraging communication, doesn't really ensure that any effective change is made. It is entirely likely that this would lead to simply maintaining the status quo.

Option #2

Students should be required to meet with their advisors at least once a semester so that every student has at least one contact within the administration that they can go to if they would like to talk about an issue.

An Advisor says:

> Forcing students into a relationship with us won't be much more effective than not having a friendship at all. We would like it if the students came to us regularly because it makes our work more enjoyable, but we don't want it forced on anyone.

A Student says:

> I think it makes sense to make freshmen see their advisor once a semester, but beyond that I don't think every student needs to. At some point it becomes forcing a meeting that you may not want to go to onto your schedule.

The Think Tank says:

> The intention behind this idea is good but forcing people to attend meetings could just raise a whole new issue for students that feel that the school would be trying to control a bit of their lives.

Option #3

Students should be able to anonymously report or raise issues or problems.

An Administrator says:

> Students should be able to speak out and talk about problems that they are facing on campus. I don't know how useful it would be if students could do it anonymously. It would be a lot harder to verify the information and tell whether it was true or get more details.

A Student says:

> I think we should be able to raise problems without needing to be anonymous. If we need to be anonymous to do it then what are we going to do in the real world?

A Professor says:

> I'm not really sure why this would be necessary. If the students just came to me to tell me how they felt, I would be thankful for their advice and would do my best to do better.

The Think Tank says:

> The anonymity may raise concerns about how honest the report is to members of the administration. Is it possible to make a reporting system available that is easy to access and easy to fill out? That might be a better system than an anonymous one.

Decision Point #2

Students need to know where they can go within the greater administration in order to talk to the right university department in order to truly be heard on issues that affect themselves and by extension the school community.

Option #1

Students should be provided with or have easy access to a guidebook that students can use to find the department or office that deals with the problems or issues that they want to report or discuss.

A Student says:

> I think this could be very helpful. I don't remember if something like this was ever given to me freshman year or if we were told about it, but with everything going on that week I just forgot about it.

An Administrator says:

>That's very feasible. Creating a simple guide to lead students to the right department and making it accessible shouldn't be that hard to do.

The Think Tank says:

>This seems like it should be an easy enough solution. It might take some work trying to imagine all of the different problems that students might experience in order to direct them in the guidebook, but it seems like a relatively easy task overall.

Option #2

A separate office should be created within the university for students to reach out to that can direct students to the department or office that they should be in contact with.

An Administrator says:

>This would take a lot of work to solve the issue. Not only would it take a lot of work, but it would also probably take a lot of time before it would really be ready to do anything. I think there are more effective solutions that would be ready sooner.

A Student says:

>If a resource like that existed that would be great, but I wouldn't be surprised if it didn't. I don't know how often they would have anything to do. I don't know how often students would call. I think I would just believe that members of the administration would be able to direct me to the right group.

The Think Tank says:

>This option would take a lot of work to set up and might not be all that feasible. It would include finding office space, probably hiring multiple new administration members, making sure everyone is knowledgeable about where issues should be directed to. I think that if someone calls the wrong department and that department is able to redirect them that that would do the trick.

Problem Scenario 2

"University's Response"

A look at how the university's attempt to address campus concerns could possibly cause friction among the student body

The Decision Makers

Leo

An administrator who is in charge of writing out the provost's email about an incident on campus

Helen

An administrator who is helping write the provost's email and thinks that more should be said to engage the students

Ben

A student who takes issue with the provost's email and petitions the university for greater action

The setting is a conference room where some members of the administration are preparing an email for the student body after a student mural space on campus was vandalized. Breaking the rules of the mural space, a "Black Lives Matter" mural was spray painted over to read "All ~~Black~~ Lives Matter". Leo and Helen are debating what should be included in the email.

Helen: We should talk about how it has caused pain to the student community.

Leo: Why?

Helen: So that they know that we're paying attention and that we care.

Leo: That's not necessary. It was in the president's email this morning.

Helen: Which isn't this email.

Leo: This is a follow-up email to the president's email. It is meant to further discuss the findings of the investigation by campus police.

Helen: Is this email going to be an actual response to his email or sent on its own.

Leo: It's going to be sent on its own, but the president's email told people that it would be coming.

Helen: That doesn't matter. This is the official response from the academic half of the administration. We should address it.

Leo: It's not going to be a big deal. We tell them what the investigation found. It was controversial and against the university's beliefs and values, but we don't regulate speech. While the method doesn't meet the rules of the mural space, the rules are student-regulated. That is it.

Helen: We should be saying more.

* Soon after, some students read through the email sent from the administration.

Ben: I can't believe that the university is sticking up for this. It's clearly wrong.

Tyler: It's like they don't care about what we think.

Ben: We need to make them listen to us.

Tyler: How?

Ben: If they won't listen to a handful of us then we'll get more. If we get everyone in on this then they'll have to listen.

* *After creating a petition and getting a large number of the student body and faculty to sign it, Ben has a meeting with Leo.*

Leo: So, you have an issue with the university's email in response to the message left on the mural space.

Ben: We feel that the university is ignoring us.

Leo: We're not ignoring you. It's a complicated issue.

Ben: You're condoning what happened.

Leo: We most definitely are not.

Ben: Then what are you doing about it?

Leo: There's very little that we can do. The university has no oversight about how the mural space is regulated. It is student overseen. We are looking into other measures about how to prevent things like this from happening again.

Ben: When will you be done 'looking into' them? We want to see something be done.

Leo: We can't just *do things*. There're procedures. There's the budget. There's a process.

Ben: When will it be done? Are you just waiting for those of us who are angry to graduate and then you can stop pretending?

Leo: Of course not. We take matters like this very seriously, but like I said, there's a process. This is a complicated issue.

Ben: Listening to your students is a complicated issue?

The student body's discontent with the university's response doesn't go away and causes some to believe the school doesn't care about its students and their concerns.

The Story *Behind the Story*

A Student says:

> The university didn't take into account how the act made us feel. A lot of the first years especially see this as a troubling sign about the campus community and whether they have a place on campus.

An Administrator says:

> The message sent by the administration did the right thing by trying to acknowledge that this is not a simple issue. There are complexities to this and they need to be factored in. However, it is surprising that the message did not try to engage the students in a conversation about how complex it is. By not acknowledging the pain in the community, they gave the act a pass.

A Professor says:

> The acts of vandalism against the fence should be treated as such. Whether the matter is complex or not, it is just wrong and to not treat it as such is an injustice.

The Think Tank says:

The University's inability to have a conversation with the students about the complexities of the issue instead of lecturing to them results in the administration losing some of the student body's trust. No real change is implemented as quickly as the students want and the university fails to explain that these things can take time to change.

Options & Outcomes for Scenario 2

Decision Point

Students feel that their concerns aren't being heard and may not fully understand the actions taken by the University.

Option #1

Town halls should be scheduled at a regular interval to allow students to directly interact with professors and administrators and express their perceived problems.

The Think Tank says:

> We think these could be incredibly useful, but it might be hard to schedule them or get people to commit to meeting based on personal schedules outside of classes and work. However, these might be worthwhile to pursue because creating dialogues is always an incredibly powerful and helpful tool.

A Student says:

> I think this would be a great idea. Allowing the student community to actually engage with professors or members of the administration in person would be great and it would give them a chance to explain themselves in a way that we just don't get now.

An Administrator says:

> This would be tough to orchestrate. It wouldn't make sense to schedule it during the day when students who would want to attend may not be able to and not a lot of members of the University want to stay late after work is over. It might be very hard to get these scheduled and planned.

Option #2

The administration should work to be more transparent throughout the decision-making process to keep students in the loop about how their concerns are being handled.

An Administrator says:

> This might not be wholly possible. In the long run, we might be able to figure out a proper way to make the decision process more transparent and able to be observed and understood, but some of what drives decisions and how the process works is strictly university knowledge and can't be disclosed. We already work hard to inform students when changes affect them and how that is so.

A Student says:

> I'm sure that someone might be happy with this, but I feel like it wouldn't benefit a lot of us. Either we're not going to take the time to read it cause we're busy with our schoolwork, or the wording is complicated and isn't really worth the time of deciphering. It would probably encourage more people to speak up though if they could see that something was happening.

The Think Tank says:

Acknowledging student concern about issues and being more transparent about how decisions are made is sure to smooth over some students' problems with the school not taking students seriously, but it is not an end all and be all solution.

Findings

The discussions that we had in our round table and our interviews were very informative about the reasons that communication can break down between students and the university administration and result in discontent on campus. As we predicted, the barriers to effective communication occurred both prior to and during discussions, and affected communication in different ways. Students and administrators do not always meet their goal of adequately communicating with the other. In some cases, it is not always clear what a message from the university to the student body means or if a report from one or more students to the administration has any impact. The goal is not complete transparency, but rather a *shared understanding* between all parties involved. With communication being such a key element in any enterprise, one small misstep can snowball into much larger issues and even feelings of resentment.

Lack of Communication

The lack of communication or failure to reach the attention of the recipient of emails or messages or announcements plays a big part in the failure to keep everyone informed. While one might look at that as being obvious, this failure subsequently affects the relationship between the students and the university. It is incredibly important to work to remove any barriers to effective communication in order to promote an open and inviting environment and build a strong working relationship between the students and the administration.

The University's decentralized method, while marvelous in allowing departments to work in a way that is best for them, causes a sort of mayhem for students who are trying to reach members of the administration to report a perceived issue. With many departments having different systems of contact to go through, many students who may not see their voice or issue as important are discouraged from even attempting to reach out to the administration. As was shown in our problem scenario, when something like this goes on over a long period of time and no change is made, resentment can begin to foster among groups of students. One way to address this could be through training all departments to know pertinent connections in others. This could be done by requiring a list next to a building coordinator's phone, or a hotline of sorts that makes the needed connections. It is a small effort that could have a big impact on the way students choose to interact with the University.

It can also be extremely difficult for the university to reach students and provide them with important information because of the methods of communication at their disposal. Due to the different ways students prefer to receive information, the various rates at which they may check what messages they've received, the likelihood that they examine every notification they get, and even the ability for important information to be missed in a pile of unimportant information all received at once, it is incredibly likely that groups of students aren't aware of important information that they've received. When the University sends out information, it may

be months before a student sees it if they ever do and this may cause people to view students' reports about issues to be petty and petulant, furthering a silent disrespect for students among members of the administration.

While none of these issues are ever the intent, the smallest of problems can snowball out of hand and cause larger disruptions. Lack of communication is a key issue that threatens to disrupt our school environment and we need to continue diligently to prevent it.

Getting the Student View

Our scenario revealed why students aren't doing something about the injustices that they perceive on campus. At times, even when students had the necessary resources available to them, they still felt uncomfortable going to higher authorities about issues. One viable solution is to introduce intermediary student groups, acting as a liaison between their peers and those in positions of authority that can make meaningful change. Such a group could collect incidents for a department or college, and it would be a responsibility of the group to protect the anonymity of the reporting students. The group could be a combination of vetted students as well as members of Student Government, that way if change needs to be implemented on their level, they are aware of the problems at hand. Students showed that they were more comfortable to talk to peers about what was bothering them and introducing an intermediary student group could help to overcome this hesitation with approaching administrators.

Another approach to getting the student view would be to draw from social media platforms and pages to gather information on what is happening on campus and why students may be concerned about bringing these events to light in a more direct way. Social media platforms and websites for airing grievances against Carnegie Mellon already exist; the key is to use it to the University's advantage. While there is a lot of intel to be gathered from these sites, understanding the information could be key to making change. If the University were able to make a private site specifically for students, they could still use their anonymity to post about perceived issues without threat of damaging the University's reputation. A student group, perhaps the same as mentioned previously, could be tasked with filtering through the page, interpreting patterns that are present and acting on them when necessary. In an age where social media rules, rebranding a testimonials page can benefit both students and administrators.

These two approaches, while focused on obtaining the students' point of view, emphasize the need of *both* students and administrators stepping up in order to overcome issues of understanding on campus.

Understanding and Relatability

Another issue that escalates discontent among the student body is not providing a clear understanding of the decisions and processes on campus. It is understandable how a large university needs time to enact change. Policies and processes do not change overnight, and many factors must be taken into consideration in order to optimize the gain for everyone at the school. However, many students don't have a full understanding of the bureaucratic process. It isn't something that students deal with every day and so oftentimes there is confusion about why changes take longer than one might expect.

This affects more than just a student's opinion of whether or not the school is changing to meet the needs of its students. It can also affect how likely they are to try to reach out to the administration in the first place. Even if a student wants to report a perceived issue to the university, they are much less likely to if they don't understand how their report will be used by the university to enact change. If the university were to be more open about the behind-the-scenes of important decisions, where reasonable of course, it would likely alleviate a lot of the students' dismay.

Critical Incident Interviews and Think Tank Participation List

Allegheny College

- Alexandra Downer, Delta Delta Delta Philanthropy Chair/Panhellenic Council/Up Til Dawn Executive Board/Cheerleading Captain
- Brie Gerner, Delta Delta Delta Vice President of Finance
- Lynsey Gutzmer, Delta Delta Delta Academic Chair
- Andrea Jonsson, Orchesis President/Gator Guide/International Club
- Abdikadir Lugundi, Allegheny Student Government President
- Luis Mendoza, GFC Executive Board
- Grace Proper, Alpha Chi Omega VP Intellectual Development Chair
- David Roach, Press Secretary ASG (Allegheny Student Government)/Delta Tau Delta Executive Committee & Public Relations

Carnegie Mellon University

- Hannah Anderson (Varsity Soccer, Kappa Alpha Theta, Neurosac, Hotlab @ CMU)- handerso@andrew.cmu.edu
- Vanessa Branch (Staff Finance Administrator SLICE) - vrbranch@andrew.cmu.edu
- Dr. Jen Gilbride-Brown, Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Success and Equity
- Gina Casalegno (Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students)- ginac@andrew.cmu.edu
- Josh Centor (Associate Vice President of Student Affairs / Director of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation)- jcentor@andrew.cmu.edu
- Diana Crookston, Finance Chair of undergraduate student senate
- Linda Flower (Professor, Department of English)- lf54@andrew.cmu.edu
- Monica Harrison (Softball Head Coach / NCAA Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Designee) - mmharris@andrew.cmu.edu
- Abby Kuznick (Varsity Soccer, Kappa Alpha Theta, Scotty Ventures, Highland Ambassadors)- akuznick@andrew.cmu.edu
- Ayana Ledford, Executive Director of PROGRESS and Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion for Dietrich Heinz College
- Eric Li (Fifth Year Senior, Captain Ultimate Frisbee Team) - eli1@andrew.cmu.edu
- Danny Maya (Junior, Captain Rugby Team) - dmaya@andrew.cmu.edu
- Govind Menon, CMU Student Body President
- Reneé Nikolov, Student Activist
- Joshua Pinckney (Varsity Tennis, CA, Plaidvocates)- jpinckne@andrew.cmu.edu
- Elizabeth Stoyle, Dietrich Student Advisor
- Mason Tolliver (Varsity Football Captain, Scotty Ventures)- mtollive@andrew.cmu.edu
- Lauren Warden-Rodgers, Associate Director of Student Academic Success

Fact Sheet

Part 1:

Articles:
- [UAA Conversations About Race and Racism: Joshua Pinckney](#)
- [Frustration with CMU Administration: An Ineffective Response to Racism on Campus](#)
- [Higher Ed's Toothless Response to the Killing of George Floyd](#)
- ['Hood Lives Matter': After Backlash, Carnegie Mellon Removes Campus Map That Excluded Predominantly Black Neighborhoods](#)
- [Covid-19 and Protests](#)
- [Letter to the Editor: Coalition of graduate students and student organizations asks CMU to do more](#)
- [Why two CMU professors wrote an essay criticizing their school's response to protests against police brutality](#)
- [Forming Student Groups](#)
- [Letter from 200 faculty, staff urge CMU to withdraw Richard Grenell's appointment](#)
- [Defending CMU's integrity (letter with hyperlinks)](#)
- [CMU must repay Pittsburgh](#)

Studies:
- [Life@CMU Study](#)
- [Top 50 Colleges With The Most Depressed Student Bodies](#)
- [Decision Making in Universities](#)

Data:
- [Equity in Athletics Data Analysis Report](#)
- [How social media interacts with activism](#)

Focus Groups:
- [Task force on campus climate present their five initial recommendations](#)
- [Interim Report on Progress and Goals of the Task Force on Campus Climate](#)
- [Summary of Goals and Progress of the Task Force on Campus Climate](#)

[Overlooked at Carnegie Mellon](#)

Part 2:

Allegheny College

Allegheny College offers over 100 student organizations. These student groups include student government, honorary societies, athletic organizations, College committees, community service, fraternity and sorority life, media organizations, performance groups, religious/spiritual organizations and special interest groups.

➔ Senior Leadership
1. President Link
2. Administrative Executive Committee: Terry Bensel (Associate provost and director of The Allegheny Gateway, Professor of Environmental Science), Ian Binnington (Dean of

curriculum and Registrar, Associate Professor of History and Black Studies), Ron Cole (Provost, Dean of the College, Professor of Geology), Dr. Kristin Nicole Dukes (Dean for institutional diversity), Richard Holmgren (Vice President for Information Services and Assessment, Chief Information Officer), Cornell B. LeSane II (Senior Vice President for Enrollment and Dean of Admissions), Jennifer Padlan (Director of Human Resources), Bill Ross (Director of Athletics and Recreation), Susan K. Salton (Vice President for College Relations), April Thompson (Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students), Matthew P. Stinson (Vice President for Development and Alumni Affairs), Linda Wetsell (Chief Financial Officer, Vice President of Finance and Administration)

➔ The student-faculty ratio at Allegheny College is 11:1, and the school has 71.1% of its classes with fewer than 20 students.

➔ https://sites.allegheny.edu/deanofstudents/ This page outlines the mission, vision, and goals of the dean of student affairs in relation to co-curricular opportunities.

➔ https://universitybusiness.com/outlook-on-administration-campus-leadership-challenges/ This website discusses leadership challenges at the administrative level in relation to finding a balance with finances. Although this is different from the relationship between administrators and student leaders, finances are proving to play an important role in hurdles leaders must face.

Carnegie Mellon University

➔ CMU Community Think Tank on Self-Advocacy: https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/english/courses/course-webpages/community-think-tank/ctt-files/self-advocacy-at-cmu.pdf

➔ Example of students engaging with leadership through Grenell Survey: https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/rescind-richard-grenells-senior-fellow-position

➔ Resources for student leadership: IDRA article- https://www.idra.org/resource-center/promoting-student-leadership-on-campus/

➔ Tips for leadership skills: https://aboutleaders.com/student-leadership/#gs.kcsj6r

➔ Student Government:

1. https://www.cmu.edu/stugov/

2. Executive Branch: https://www.cmu.edu/stugov/exec/presidents-cabinet.html
   a. Govind Menon(SBP)

   3. Undergraduate Student Senate- https://www.cmu.edu/stugov/senate/index.html
   a. Liam O'connell(Senate Chair)
   b. Committee Departments- https://www.cmu.edu/stugov/senate/committees/index.html
   c. Email- student-senate@andrew.cmu.edu

   4. SLICE- https://www.cmu.edu/student-affairs/slice/

➔ Studies on college communication: General Communication between Universities and Students- https://www.tribalgroup.com/blog/communicating-with-students-why-are-94-

of-student-communication-strategies-failing-to-engage and Communications between Admin and Faculty- https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/technology-and-learning/6-hypotheses-why-internal-campus-communication-so-challenging

Definitions/Labels

Microaggressions: brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership". The persons making the comments may be otherwise well-intentioned and unaware of the potential impact of their words.

Plaidvocates: The Plaidvocates is a peer health and wellness advocacy program for student-athletes that supports the well-being of CMU's varsity athletics community. This peer-to-peer volunteer organization is composed of student-athletes that lead by adopting health-promoting behaviors, provide year-round support and mentorship, and empower their peers to engage in responsible and informed decision making.

SAAC: NCAA Student-Athlete Advisory Committees, seek to enhance the total student-athlete experience by promoting opportunity, protecting student-athlete welfare and fostering a positive student-athlete image.

POC: Person of color, anyone with a skin pigmentation other than and especially darker than what is considered characteristic of people typically defined as white

SLICE: Student Leadership Involvement and Civic Engagement

ASG: Allegheny Student Government

SBP: Student Body President