CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Students experiencing a conflict with an advisor or other faculty member are encouraged to discuss their situation with the Director of the Graduate Student Center (https://gsc.upenn.edu/) for advice and support before moving forward. If a dispute or concern arises between a graduate student and advisor with respect to the mentoring relationship, the student and advisor should try first to resolve any difficulties amicably between themselves. If informal discussion does not resolve the problem, there are several avenues to pursue within the graduate group: in most cases, the graduate group chair should be consulted first. If the graduate group chair is unable to find a satisfactory solution, advice may be sought from the relevant associate dean of the student's school or from the University Ombuds (http://www.upenn.edu/ombudsman/), which is a confidential, off-the-record resource that can help the student or the advisor explore options, identify resources, manage expectations, and express frustrations. Additionally, the University Ombuds (http://www.upenn.edu/ombudsman/) offers informal mediation services provided by a professionally trained and certified mediator.

If all else fails, and if the nature of the issue is academic, a student may pursue a formal academic appeal by contacting the Office of the Vice Provost for Education at provost-ed@upenn.edu.

Here are some further considerations related to conflict resolution:

- All conflict is not necessarily to be avoided. Conflict can result in creative solutions and when the conflict involves ideas, it can advance knowledge.
- There is a significant power differential in the student/advisor relationship, but the very nature of the relationship and the academic enterprise requires that ideas and assumptions may be challenged.
- Expectations should be clear and commonly understood on both sides; put them in writing, if necessary.
- Conflict should be handled early: it is easier to handle smaller issues as they arise, and sometimes options for resolution may diminish over time.
- The Restorative Practices @ Penn program (https://csa.upenn.edu/restorative-practices-penn/) provides conflict coaching, mediation, and workshops on communication and conflict resolution skills.
- Not all conflict can be resolved informally. If informal methods do not resolve the issue, follow the recommended route to a more formal resolution.