



Office of the Ombudsperson for Students

Fairness Toolkit: Negotiation 101

We all negotiate. Sometimes we negotiate about small things - where to go for dinner, how much to pay for a second-hand desk, or who should do what part of a group project. Sometimes we negotiate for bigger things - what our starting salary should be, dividing family responsibilities, or what might be an appropriate remedy for an error.

In your university life, you may find yourself having to negotiate with fellow students, faculty and staff about academic, financial, personal and other issues. Generally we negotiate to resolve concerns. We're looking for something that fixes the immediate problem we're facing. Yet, when we focus solely on what we want to resolve, we can lose sight of the fact that achieving immediate benefits might have long-lasting effects on our relationships, reputation and credibility. Here are some strategies to consider:

1

Determine the best communication channel. Some conversations are best held face-to-face. Others work better in text form, such as email. Use email to schedule appointments or ask for a meeting, but not to convey concerns, explain a complex position, or request answers. Emails are fine to confirm understanding after you have met in person.

Take the time to self-reflect. Usually conflicts arise from the actions of more than one person. Think about what you may or may not have done to that could have played a part in your situation. Even if you think you have done nothing to contribute to the situation, you can contribute to its resolution. Think about why you want the resolution you want and what you could do to achieve it.

2

3

Understand both sides. When we are upset it may be difficult to see the other person's point of view. We all make assumptions. We create pictures about what happens and why, what a person feels, and their intentions. We can forget that others may have different information or understood things differently. Be curious and seek clarification by asking questions. Delaying judgment and seeking a good understanding of what things might look like from the other perspective will bring you closer to a positive outcome.

4

Negotiate the “why” not the “what”. Negotiations can get stuck when we communicate what we want instead of talking about why it is important to us. Focus on the “why” behind your position, and open up options for resolution by developing the fullest possible understanding of the issues.

Look at the options. Write down your short and long term goals, possible explanations and responses you might receive, and the pros and cons of your available options. Preparation will help you to look at the situation objectively.

5

6

Bring a friend to the meeting. You may need to meet with a person to try and resolve your issue. If it’s an emotionally charged issue or if you feel anxious about the meeting, bring someone with you. Your friend or colleague doesn’t have to say a word, but can be there to listen and later help you reflect and respond most effectively.

Take your time, but set a date. You don’t have to respond to a proposed solution immediately. Say that you would like to think it over. Then set a realistic date by which you want to make your decision. Get some advice and support from people you trust and from the available resources on campus.

7

8

Keep your eye on long-term goals. Carefully weigh short-term gains against possible long-term losses. While you may feel strongly that you need a certain resolution, consider its importance in the broader context of your educational program, your relationships with the individuals involved and others, and your reputation.

We all can turn difficult conversations into constructive discussions. Please visit **our resources** for campus resources that support students.