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A workshop on proactive strategies to prevent student complaints

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Description of the session: Resolving student complaints is part of the job description of most academic chairs. These complaints, while infrequent, often require significant time, energy, and follow-through on the part of chairs, yet we devote little time to considering how to prevent these complaints from happening in the first place. In this workshop, we will identify general categories of student complaints, such as those about academic advising, grading, bias, and teaching style, with specific examples drawn from our experience as chairs and union officers. We will consider the patterns related to student expectations and satisfaction with faculty, and will close with a discussion of proactive strategies to avoid complaints. While the focus of the workshop is on prevention of student complaints, we will also consider how to prevent complaint escalation at all phases in the complaint process - formal, informal, tangential, and incidental - and how best to intercede at various phases in the process.

This workshop is designed to be interactive. We will provide the participants with scenarios of typical student complaints and task them with suggesting ways that these complaints could have been avoided. We will then develop a set of specific actions that chairs can take to lead a discussion with their faculty about how to avoid complaints and provide students with rigorous and satisfying experiences in their classrooms.

Workshop participants can expect a lively discussion about student complaints and their impact on our work and the work of faculty members in our departments. We will provide participants with a list of strategies to help prevent complaints in terms of classroom etiquette, syllabus preparation, and the management of student expectations. We will also provide suggestions for how to work with faculty members on this topic through group discussions and individual meetings with faculty members who are targets of student complaints.