

Heads Workshop
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Authors: William Walden, Professor of Microbiology and Immunology and Director of Diversity in Graduate Programs, College of Medicine; Laura Stempel, Assistant to the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs; Mrinalini C. Rao, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs

Case Study #2

Phil Davis has spent most of his career at an Ivy League university, where he was expected to come up for promotion to full professor within the next two years. He is now beginning his first year in the Department of Social Systems at UIC, and his hiring is considered a great coup because he is the author of three important books on social class and crime that have achieved both academic and popular success.

He now receives frequent invitations to make keynote speeches at professional meetings, as well as requests for talks to non-academic audiences for which he commands large speaking fees. In fact, although he has been courted by many institutions, he decided to take a position in Chicago because of a new agreement to be a regular guest on “Oprah.” Last-minute counteroffers from other area universities meant that the appointment went through during the summer, when many department members were away. Those senior faculty who were available agreed to the ad hoc search committee’s recommendation that Davis be hired immediately as a full professor.

His superstar status has brought unprecedented attention to UIC and the department, along with a sudden increase in applications. However, while his new colleagues find Davis friendly and open to intellectual collaboration, he now seems to find fault with nearly everyone else.

He has begun to make unfavorable comparisons between his new students and those at his previous university, claiming that he is accustomed to graduate students who are prepared to work on both their dissertations and his projects, and to do so without regular supervision. Here even his brightest doctoral students seem to expect to meet with him frequently, and the Master’s candidates require greater attention than he feels he has time for. His colleagues insist that nurturing these young scholars is one of the rewards of teaching at UIC, but Davis is becoming impatient with the demands. Given his speaking schedule and the approaching deadline for his next book, he is now insisting that the Provost provide a course buyout if he is to continue supervising thesis students.

In addition, the annual Report on Non-University Activities is due shortly and Davis refuses to disclose his outside income from speaking and consulting. “It’s no one’s business how much money I make!” he insists to his department Head. “My lectures and TV appearances help to increase public awareness of important scholarship and you should be glad I do them. Besides, the more I make from other people, the fewer raises I

need from UIC!” The Head has explained several times that the RNUA is a state requirement over which she has no control, but Davis is adamant that his privacy is at stake and has already called the Dean’s and Provost’s offices and has sent an email to the Vice Chancellor for Research to request a waiver.

The last straw for Davis seems to have been the Chancellor’s recent appearance at the year’s first Board of Trustees meeting, where she reviewed UIC’s recent accomplishments and highlighted several impressive hires. Knowing that one of the Trustees lambasted Davis’s work in a Chicago Tribune letter to the editor a year ago, the Chancellor did not mention him in her presentation, although she did mention him by name at the annual Leadership Institute attended by UIC faculty and staff. Davis sees her omission at the BOT meeting as a personal insult and is now demanding a private meeting with her. He is also hinting that he may reopen negotiations with another Chicago university if he is not given the respect and support he deserves.

After attempting for several weeks to deal with these issues at the departmental level, the Head finally brought it up at her most recent meeting with the Dean. Although the Dean was initially enthusiastic about the hire, he is now beginning to become concerned over Davis’s comments on UIC students, which he fears might become public. Having supported the department’s request for a relatively high salary on the grounds that Davis’s presence would attract more students, he is also unwilling to ask the Provost to support a course buyout. A recent Dean’s Council discussion of the increasing number of special requests from the largest colleges for early tenure or promotion of young superstars also suggests that the smaller colleges believe that potential funding to support their faculty is being funneled into these lines.

The Provost has made it clear that he expects Deans to do everything they can to prevent disgruntled employees from appealing directly to him. While the Head believes that it is her responsibility to represent her faculty’s needs to the administration, she is also concerned that her own reputation is suffering, especially since the Dean noted at a recent college meeting that “certain Heads” do not seem to understand that it is their job to manage their own faculty.

Questions for Discussion

1. What issues does this case study raise?
2. What questions for group discussion come to mind as you read the case?
3. What could the instructor do in this situation? Generate several possible responses.
4. What might be the consequences of these responses?