

**Association for Student Conduct Administration  
Conflict Resolution Practices Member Survey**

David R. Karp and Kyle Shum

**Background**

In October 2008, ASCA President Gary Dickstein and the Board of Directors requested a membership survey to “Conduct an assessment of Association membership to determine a baseline of current conflict resolution practices at member colleges and universities and further identify the needs of the overall membership concerning conflict resolution services, resources, training and networking.”

In consultation with a team of ASCA leaders and conflict resolution specialists, David Karp developed an online survey (attached). This brief survey is focused on three areas: the type of practices offered at each institution; what kinds of training people have had; and what areas of training are they seeking.

An initial email solicitation was sent to one representative at each of the 814 association member institutions. Using several strategies to ensure a high response rate (such as reminder emails, providing a computer at the annual conference registration table, and solicitation of alternate institutional representatives), the final tally of responses included 245 institutions, a 30% response rate.

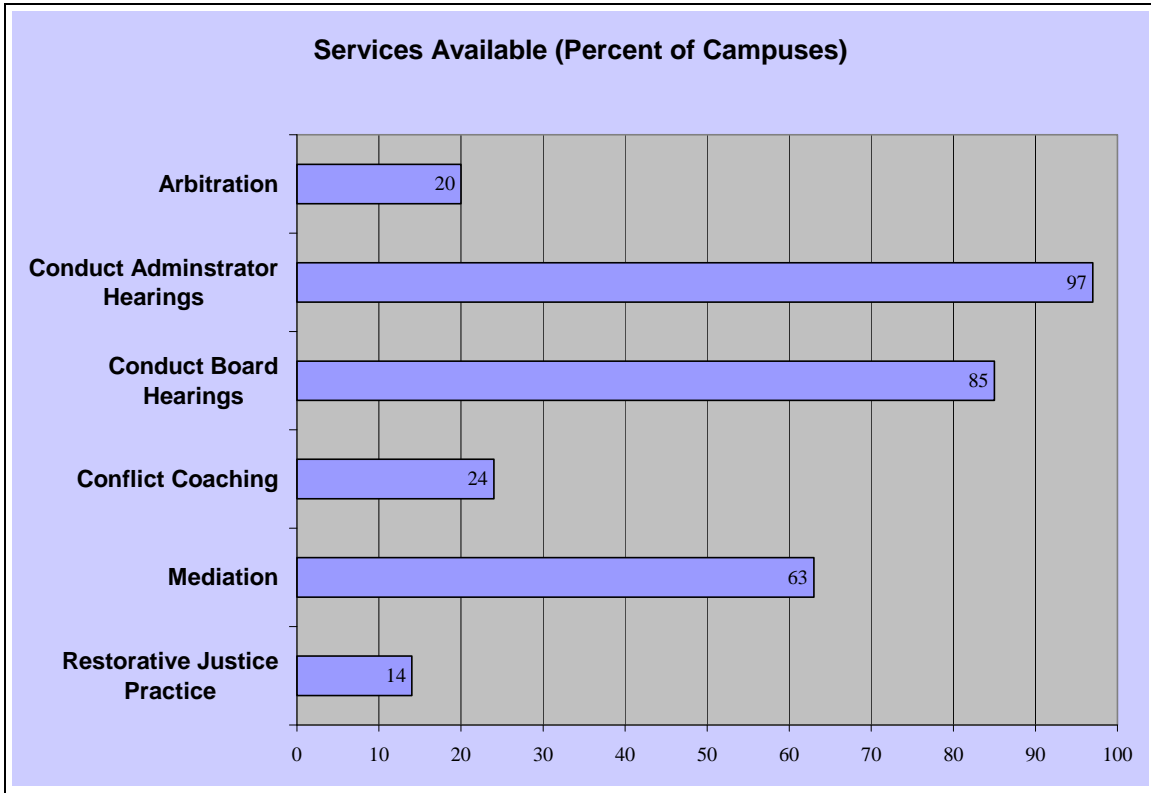
**Current Practice**

Based on the following definitions, members were asked what kinds of conduct services they offered at their institution.

Arbitration	Parties in conflict present their positions to a neutral third party who makes a decision about how the conflict will be resolved
Conduct Administrator Hearing	One-on-one meeting between accused student and conduct officer
Conduct Board Hearing	Accused student appears before a group of individuals who attend and/or are employed by the institution
Conflict Coaching	Conflict resolution specialist coaches an individual about how to address a conflict
Mediation	Mediator facilitates a meeting two or more parties in conflict
Restorative Justice Practice	Facilitated dialogue using a restorative model such as accountability board, conferencing, or circle

Figure One reports the variety of practices used at member institutions. Not surprisingly, nearly all institutions (97%) have conduct administrator hearings. The vast majority also make use of conduct board hearings (85%). Mediation is also quite common (63%). Less

widely used practices include conflict coaching (24%), arbitration (20%), and restorative justice practices (14%).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure One. Conduct Practices Offered on ASCA Member Campuses.**

Although it appears that a variety of “alternative” resolution practices, are commonly available, the survey also reveals that they are infrequently used. Respondents were asked to estimate the number of cases assigned to each type of practice. Our findings reveal that 90% of cases are handled by conduct administrator hearings, 6% by conduct board hearings. Each of the other conflict resolution practices accounts for approximately 1% the total number of conduct cases.

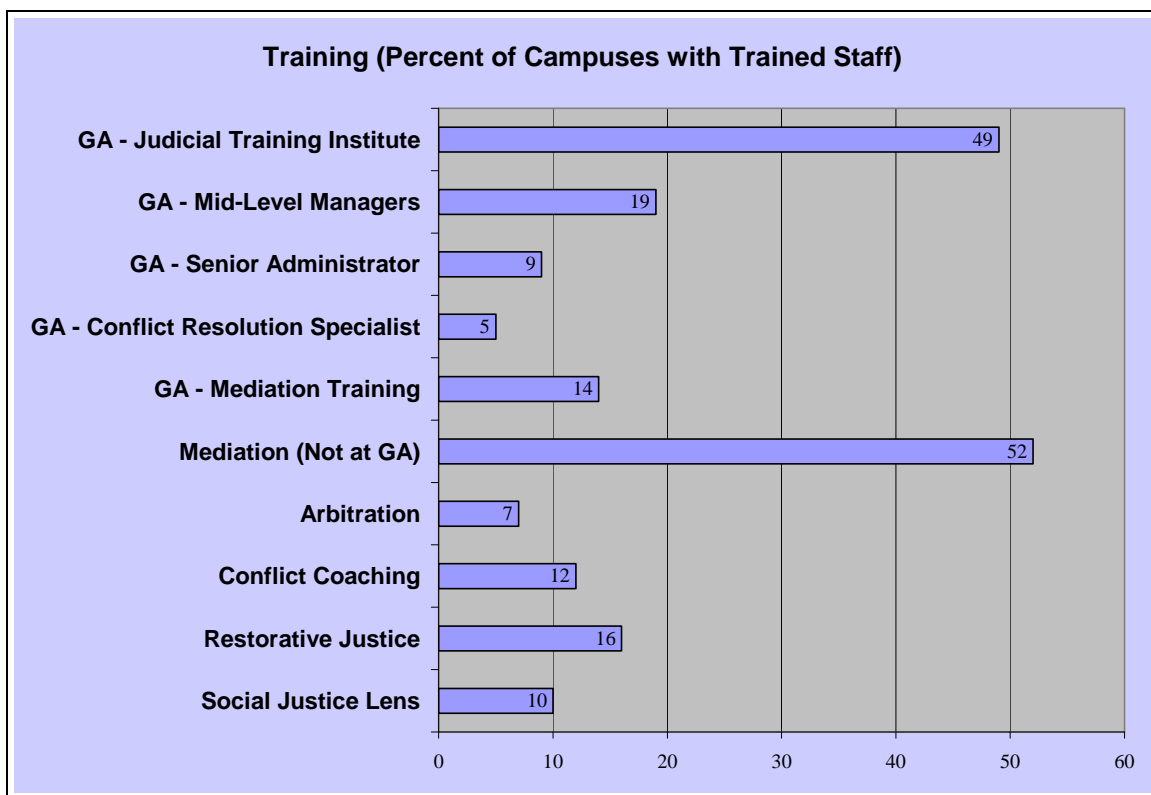
### **Campus Capacity**

The survey next asked about trainings that member institutions have received. We asked if the respondent had participated in various trainings, and if they knew of other staff in their offices that had participated in these trainings. We were interested in trainings offered at the ASCA Gehring Academy and other trainings not necessarily offered by ASCA. In addition to specific practice trainings, we also asked about training focused on the “Social Justice Lens.” For this, we used the following definition: Using a “social justice lens” requires that a facilitator recognize the role of social identity, power, and privilege in a conflict and identify the lenses used by the participants.

<sup>1</sup> In another recent poll by Lowery and Dannells (2008), they found that mediation is available on 54% of campuses, restorative justice on 8% of campuses. Given the different sampling strategy, these are remarkably similar findings. <http://jwlowery.googlepages.com/acpa2008>

In addition to formal training, we asked participants how often they read publications about conflict resolution practices. We found that 20% of the respondents read such publications “frequently,” and another 54% do so “sometimes.”

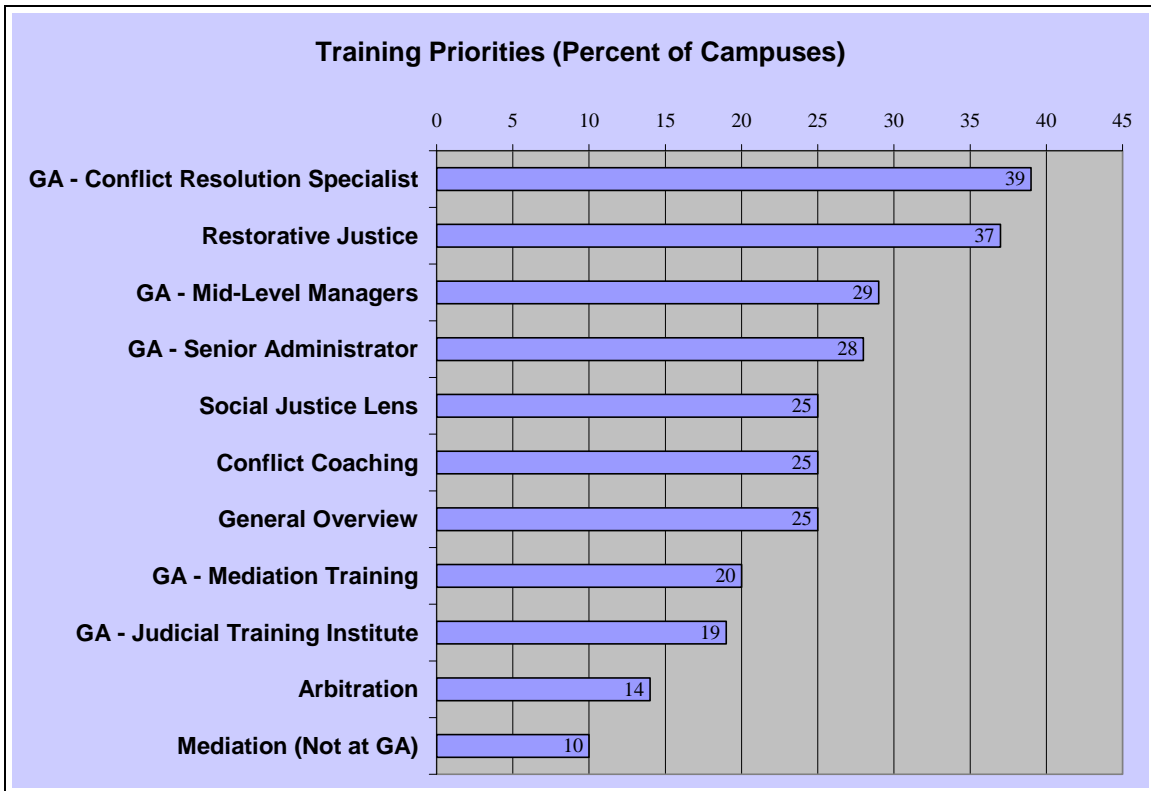
Figure 2 reports our findings about training experiences on member campuses. Despite the relatively infrequent use of mediation, we found high levels of training. Combining training at the Gehring Academy (GA) and other mediation training, 66% of member campuses report having staff that have been trained in mediation. Campuses also report a high level of participation in the Judicial Training Institute at the academy, with 49% having at least one staff that has attended this training. In contrast to mediation, members report having little training in other forms of conflict resolution.



**Figure Two. Training Participation of Campus Staff.**

### **Training Priorities**

The final set of questions solicits members’ interest in various trainings including those offered at the Gehring Academy and other conflict resolution trainings. In addition to specialized trainings, the survey also inquired about two general programs, a “general overview of all conflict resolution practices” and a “conflict resolution specialist training.” Figure 3 reports these results.



**Figure Three. Percent of member campuses expressing interest in various trainings.**

As can be seen in the chart, the strongest interest is in a conflict resolution specialist training at the Gehring Academy (39%) and restorative justice training (37%). The conflict specialist training was introduced at the Academy in 2008. Based on the success of the program, the 2009 Academy has sought to incorporate conflict resolution, restorative justice and social justice themes across programs. In addition, the Academy is offering its first ever four day Restorative Justice Training Program and a One Day Conflict Competency Program. Both of these exceeded the interest level in traditional Academy programs: Judicial Training Institute (19%), Mid-Level Managers Program (29%), and the Senior Administrator Program (28%). We should note that the relatively low interest level reported for the Judicial Training Institute may be explained by the fact that so many of these survey respondents had already participated in this training.

Other programs also garnered significant interest including mediation at the Academy (20%), but less so outside the Academy (10%) suggesting that respondents want to make sure the training is geared toward campus issues. Conflict coaching, social justice, and a general overview of conflict resolution were equally popular (25%). Arbitration had the fewest votes (14%).

### **Conclusion**

This brief survey of ASCA membership sought information about members' current implementation of conflict resolution practices, campus skill capacity, and training priorities. Based on the findings, we draw the following conclusions:

- Traditional conduct practices still characterize the way in which the vast majority of conduct cases are resolved on the college campus.
  - 90% of cases are resolved through one-on-one administrative hearings
  - 6% are resolved using conduct boards
  - 4% are resolved using “alternative” conflict resolution practices: restorative practices, mediation, arbitration, and conflict coaching.
- Campuses have built capacity to resolve cases through conflict resolution practices.
  - 63% offer mediation (66% have trained staff)
  - 24% offer conflict coaching (12% have trained staff)
  - 20% offer arbitration (7% have trained staff)
  - 14% offer restorative justice practices (16% have trained staff)
- Many campuses are seeking training in conflict resolution practices.
  - 39% want conflict resolution specialist training
  - 37% want restorative justice training
  - 25% want social justice lens training
  - 25% want conflict coaching training
  - 25% want general overview training
  - 20% want mediation training at the Academy (10% also want mediation outside the Academy)
  - 14% want arbitration training

**David R. Karp** is Interim Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Associate Professor of Sociology at Skidmore College. **Kyle Shum** is a sociology major at Skidmore College and a member of the Class of 2009.