Student teams are an integral component of our Graduate Programs. During your first year, active participation on your assigned student team will contribute significantly to your overall learning. For almost all students, their post-graduate careers will involve a variety of team roles including that of a team member and team leader. The first-hand experience gained through the graduate program provides a valuable opportunity to grow and develop these much needed skills.

While it is very common for teams to experience growing pains and challenges as they develop an effective working style, occasionally issues arise that go beyond what should reasonably be expected and team performance is significantly impacted. When teams encounter performance problems or behavioral issues within the team, team members often ask about what can be done (including sometimes inquiring about “firing” team members.) Mason Graduate Programs are designed to encourage students to learn the skills to deal with difficult team situations. We intentionally do not want to make firing or disbanding easy options. On the other hand we recognize that there are occasionally irreconcilable differences. To make sure that teams have exhausted every option in handling their own performance and behavioral problems, the following series of escalating problem resolution steps are provided:

**Step 1: The Student Team Attempts to Address the Problem on Its Own**

As a first step, the student team is requested to revisit their team contract. Getting everyone in the team to recommit to the desired behaviors often takes care of the problem. This approach may also identify changes that can be negotiated to make the team contract more effective.

If, however, that does not correct the behavior, one member of the team should be designated to speak with the offending party/parties and provide direct feedback about the behavior(s), providing specific examples and communicating why he/she is a problem.

There are a variety of resources available to help you prepare for what can be a difficult discussion. Sources you might consult include: professors, staff, Leadership Development Experience (LDE) coaches, and second year students. In order to proceed to the next problem resolution step, the Program Director will require documentation of: 1) your renegotiated team contract and 2) the date and topics covered in the feedback session.
**Step 2: The Team Brings In an External Facilitator**

Depending on the nature and severity of the problem, there are a variety of external facilitators who can be engaged to help the team deal with the problem. There are faculty members who consult with management teams on a regular basis, second year students who are seeking careers in this sort of consulting who would welcome the opportunity to gain more experience, and Leadership Development coaches who have handled these sorts of problems throughout their careers.

The external facilitator will do an independent diagnosis of the problem and may employ some or all of the following techniques to help the team: Interviews with individual members, observation of team meetings, survey instruments with feedback, facilitating a team re-contracting session.

To engage this step, any member of the team can check with the Program Director who, after checking to make sure you have implemented step 1, will match you with the appropriate external facilitator.

**Step 3: The Team Develops an Official Performance Improvement Plan**

If steps 1 and 2 have not corrected the problem, the team can elect to develop an official performance improvement plan. The performance improvement plan gives the team member(s) one last chance to change their behavior before the team officially petitions for a membership change. The performance improvement plan specifies a finite period of time during which improvement or progress must be observed (generally not less than 3 weeks.) The performance improvement plan documents are available from the Program Director and must be signed by all members of the team.

Any single team member(s) who has been removed from the team using this process (as a result of unwillingness to change their behavior) will have to complete the remaining “team” assignments on their own for the rest of the year. The offending individual(s) will also be required to complete an independent assignment that will include a personal reflection with respect to their contribution to the team breakdown, a personal development plan to address any desired behavioral changes identified through the process and a specific strategy plan to ensure the team learning opportunities are met.

Behaviors that threaten the safety of team members will be dealt with immediately by the Program Director. Behaviors that persistently violate performance- or commitment-related agreements are subject to the team performance improvement process and, ultimately, possible removal from the team.