

Cross-Cultural Confusion: Supporting International Students Through Academic Conduct Issues

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Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Education Policy; International Student and Scholar Services; Student Learning and Development; Student Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

At the International Student & Scholar Office (ISSO) at a large, private university in the northeastern U.S. (with 5,000+ international students), Rebecca is a recently hired international student advisor specializing in academics. This is a new focus area for the ISSO, as they have been seeing an increase in international student academic conduct issues.

The university is decentralized, with international advisors focusing mainly on immigration, and separate advisors for academics, student conduct, etc. There has been very little communication between these departments in regards to how these issues impact international students, given that their immigration status is dependent on their full-time enrollment.

Rebecca has been tasked with advising international students, particularly in complicated academic cases. Additionally, she has been asked to find ways to bring the relevant parties at the university together, and ensure they have up-to-date immigration information in order to best serve students.

Case

Rebecca's first meeting of the day is with a freshman international student who was referred by their academic advisor. The student was recently placed on academic probation as a result of failing a class last semester. Upon further questioning, the student reveals that they failed the class because they were accused of plagiarizing their final paper. Consequently, the professor filed a student conduct case against them.

The proposed outcome of the student conduct case is dismissal from the university, which Rebecca advises would result in a negative termination of the student's immigration record. This would mean the student would need to leave the U.S. immediately, and it could make it very difficult for them to return to the U.S. in the future.

The student is understandably upset at hearing this information and explains that they did not cheat on their final paper, and they are not sure why the professor filed the case against them. Rebecca offers to contact the Student Conduct Office for more information about the case, and suggests that the student email the professor for clarification and copy her on the email.

The professor responds to the student's email quickly – he explains that the student used multiple quotes from outside sources in their paper and that they did not use citations: no bibliography, no quotation marks, etc. He maintains that this was “blatant, obvious plagiarism that has no place at this esteemed institution of learning”, and that he has no intention of dropping or altering the case against the student.

The student meets with Rebecca the next day and explains tearfully that in their country they do not use citations the way that is expected in the U.S. They were not aware that they had to use quotation marks or include a bibliography, and they had not read the professor's syllabus, which had included a link to the university's strict plagiarism policy.

Rebecca lays out the student's options:

- Accept the terms of their conduct case, and likely leave the U.S.
- Meet with the professor, explain their side of things, and try to convince him to drop the case
- Dispute the outcome of the conduct case, which would then go into a lengthy panel review process with the Student Conduct Office, not necessarily guaranteeing a positive outcome for the student

Rebecca feels that none of these options are ideal for the student, and they all cause a great deal of emotional distress. After her meeting with the student, she tries to brainstorm how she can prevent this situation from happening in the future.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- How would you advise the student? Do you see any options beyond the three that Rebecca laid out?
- Would your advising and opinion of the case be different if the student were in their final year and not in their first year?

- Whose responsibility is it to ensure that international students are aware of and understand U.S. citation and plagiarism rules?
- What other departments would you contact regarding this issue, and how would you collaborate with them?
- Consider the feasibility and likely successful outcome of these trainings. Should these trainings be voluntary or mandatory?
 - A plagiarism training for new international students during orientation
 - A training for relevant staff on international students and academic conduct
 - A training for faculty on international students and academic conduct
- What other academic conduct issues might involve international students at this university? How could Rebecca proactively address these issues in the future?