

Standing Ovation:

Latina Exchange Student Overcomes Cross-Cultural Stereotype

Yvette Underdue Murph, DPA

Director of Enrollment Management, Student Success Marketing and Communications
Carnegie Mellon University Africa
Email: yummsterr@gmail.com

María Elisa Grandoné, PhD

Director of Undergraduate Programs
University of California, Irvine
Paul Merage School of Business
Email: mgrandon@uci.edu

Tags

Cross-Cultural Issues; Ethics, Equity, and Social Justice; International Student and Scholar Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

Birch College is a small liberal arts institution in Vermont known for its elite theater and performing arts program that prepares students who aspire to perform in dramatic and musical theater. Within this vibrant academic atmosphere, the college welcomes domestic and international students from diverse cultural backgrounds who bring unique perspectives to the campus community. Birch College has a long-standing student exchange initiative for its theater arts program with a university located in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Faculty at both institutions make a mutual decision to select Sofia, a Latina, first-generation, bilingual talented student, for the Birch College theater arts exchange program. Sofia comes from a university in San Juan, Puerto Rico where renowned faculty teach acting classes primarily in Spanish. She is excited to have the opportunity to

CSIE cases are offered as professional development for readers and are not meant to focus on specific individuals or organizations. Names and other identifying details within the cases have been changed. In some instances, cases may have been amalgamated. Article reuse guidelines: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

spend her junior year at Birch College so that she can engage with students from different cultures and hone her acting skills. Sofia is proficient in English and has been the lead actress in several plays at her university. Most of her performances were delivered in her native language, Spanish, and on a few occasions in English.

Case

From the onset at Birch College, Sofia actively fosters relationships with her peers and is an active contributor to amplify everyone's acting ability through rehearsals. Sofia frequently solicits feedback from her instructors and diligently practices her lines to refine her acting skills. Sofia is eager to audition for the lead role in a play.

However, a week before auditions, some students vocally express their bias against Sofia about her English accent and believe that she should be disqualified from auditioning for the play. It becomes apparent to Sofia that they are biased against non-native English speakers and their insensitivity creates an unwelcoming environment.

Despite the hostile environment, Sofia is motivated to overcome this false perception through resilience in her acting ability. This resolve leads her to confidently audition for the lead role in the Birch College Annual Theater Production.

The director of the play selects Sofia for the lead role and consequently, the peers who spoke against her reluctantly acknowledge her exceptional talent as a dramatic actress. Through this adversity, Sofia delivers one of her best performances that culminates in a resounding standing ovation. The skeptical students who exhibited bias about her English accent being an impediment to the audience are enlightened about the value of diversity and inclusion through her performance. This experience elevates Sofia's confidence and passion to advocate to the broad community about the importance of embracing cross-cultural differences and fostering inclusivity among exchange students.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- Which specific stereotypes and biases did Sofia encounter and how did these manifest themselves among her peers? How did those stereotypes and biases affect the overall educational environment?
- In this case, what could a student, staff member, or faculty member have done to be an ally to Sofia?
- Before and after selecting Sofia as the lead, how could the director have intervened to resolve the conflict between Sofia and her peers?
- What responsibilities do faculty members in the theater and performing arts program have to ensure that students like Sofia are evaluated based on their abilities rather than on their linguistic or cultural backgrounds?
- What steps can individual faculty members take to create a more inclusive environment that addresses bias and fosters diversity within its theater and performing arts program?
- What strategies can an institution adopt to enhance cultural sensitivity and reduce biases to ensure all students have equal opportunities to succeed?

CSIE cases are offered as professional development for readers and are not meant to focus on specific individuals or organizations. Names and other identifying details within the cases have been changed. In some instances, cases may have been amalgamated.

Article reuse guidelines: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>