

One Country, Two Systems: Equitably Addressing Issues on U.S. Campuses Caused by Hong Kong and China Relations

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Tags

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Setting

At a large, private U.S. university, each department operates as its own unit. The Office of Summer Programs (OSP) has 40 full-time employees responsible for non-degree secondary education programming. Programming is offered in the U.S. and abroad.

Each summer, OSP hosts International Academy, a two-week non-degree/not-for-credit conference at the U.S. campus. Approximately 80 Temporary Program Staff are hired to support the Academy. Academically talented high school aged international student group organizations attend and live in campus residences. International student group organizations sign up in the fall for the following summer. Each organization sends at least one chaperone from the home country selected by the facilitating group organization. Students attend the program once, but group organizations tend to return annually. The student breakdown is approximately 35% Latin American countries through one group organization, 35% from mainland China through multiple group organizations, and the remaining students vary greatly in diversity, representing all continents, except Antarctica. Students take a variety of half-day workshops and are exposed to a wealth of academic resources on a campus as part of this unique growth opportunity to be exposed to all that University campuses have to offer. A secondary outcome of the program is developing intercultural communication skills.

A key component of the program is the outdoor Global Fair (GF), which is typically on the fourth evening of the program. Each student group creates a booth showcasing their home country for the GF and does a cultural performance on stage. Students and chaperones attend the fair to host and view booths; and view the performances. The GF is supported by the Temporary Program Staff.

Case

Students and chaperones are finalizing GF booths. The Event Coordinator, a temporary staff member, feels very hot. Access to water is limited in the outdoor venue and dispensers are needed. The Event Coordinator spends 45 minutes contacting other staff to locate and clean water dispensers.

Meanwhile, students and chaperones ask the Program Director (PD) about water. The PD instructs another temporary staff member to make an announcement over the loudspeaker explaining there will be water soon. Presentations start and students leave their booths to watch on the lawn in front of the stage. Water dispensers arrive. Staff place a water dispenser every five booths to evenly distribute water around the event.

After the Colombian group's presentation is finished, the PD announces that there will be a 30-minute break from presentations for students to explore booths and encourages students to fill their water bottles at the water dispensers. High school age appropriate music from various countries plays in the background while students experience the booths.

The PD notices that near the Hong Kong booth, there are two students crying, one from Hong Kong and one from mainland China. There appears to be a heated discussion going on between a Hong Kong chaperone, and a chaperone from one of the China groups. The PD asks the chaperones what is going on.

The Hong Kong chaperone complains that their booth's "Freedom of Speech" wall had been defaced with curse words written by a mainland China student.

The mainland China student's chaperone, complains that a water dispenser was intentionally placed on the Hong Kong booth to draw special attention to the Hong Kong booth due to American bias for Hong Kong, and forced his Chinese students who he had told to stay away from the booth to spend time there. The chaperone further complains that there is a Hong Kong and a Taiwan booth, but "every other booth is for a country. Why are there booths for these cities? International Academy needs to respect all viewpoints, not force American ideals."

Via the loudspeaker, the Event Coordinator announces that the presentations are about to continue and that everyone needs to get back to the lawn. An Australian chaperone appears and says "I need to speak with the PD immediately. Our group has an emergency!" The PD quickly tells the Hong Kong and China groups' chaperones that the dispensers were placed evenly among the booths and that the Program Director will follow up on this situation tomorrow. The students seem eager to get back to the event. The PD informs the China and Hong Kong groups' chaperones that there will be meetings with the students tomorrow as well. The PD instructs a nearby temporary staff member to move the dispenser to the Zambia booth which is two away from Hong Kong's booth. The PD then turns attention to the Australian chaperone.

Later in the evening, the PD notices that a gathering of chaperones from various mainland China groups from multiple organizations appears to be pointing at the Hong Kong booth while talking. The PD also overhears the Hong Kong chaperones talking about the mainland China student.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are the problems and who has them? How would you rank each problem in terms of importance? What biases may influence your ranking? What additional information might you want to gather from each person?
- How effectively does the PD prioritize problems? What might be the tradeoffs of waiting to address the chaperones and students from the Hong Kong and China groups until tomorrow?
- As PD, how would you address each of the impacted chaperones' and students' concerns? How might you address larger community concerns among these groups?
- What changes to planning might you make to limit the likelihood of these issues? How might you improve a student facing orientation or a chaperone orientation? How might you improve a temporary staff training or communications among temporary staff?
- How might answers to these questions change in a degree-seeking program versus a short-term non-degree program?