

Pushing the Limits:

Agitated Student Discloses Information that May Have Immigration Consequences

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Tags

Crisis-Management; Cross-Cultural Issues; International Student and Scholar Services; Student Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

This scenario takes place at a medium-sized, private university that has a student population under 5,000 and an international student population under 100. The institution is quite relational with strong sense of community and student support. Students historically have interacted directly with the administration, both in areas of academics and student life.

Case

Tran, an F-1 student from Vietnam entered the institution as a non-traditional student. Although he met the English proficiency requirements, it becomes clear that he struggles with communicating his thoughts effectively at times. He is majoring in mathematics and expresses the importance of high academic achievement for his family and for his future academic prospects, especially as he is older than the average international student. After studying at the institution for a year, he expresses financial concerns due to his father's health situation. The International Student Adviser tells him about how to reduce expenses and apply for on-campus employment; the adviser also shares the possibility of applying for off-campus work authorization due to severe economic hardship.

The Adviser is familiar with Tran's tendency to speak loudly and use body language that could be perceived as aggressive. In previous exchanges, the advisor has learned how to deescalate the tension with Tran by

listening until he has fully expressed himself before offering advice or solutions. Tran's appointments take an unusual amount of time and patience.

Tran is struggling in a humanities course and has unsuccessfully challenged the professor in terms of assignments and grades. As he has successfully been granted exceptions to deadlines in the past, he requests to take the course Pass/No Pass beyond the date to declare his intention. Tran was denied the exception, and he quickly arranged a meeting with the faculty member who manages the appeal process. Upon learning that she was not going to approve the appeal, Tran escalates the situation by standing above the faculty member and speaking loudly in anger. The faculty member's administrative assistant called the Campus Safety Office and they escorted Tran away from the office building. Due to the outburst, Tran was charged with a violation of the Student Code of Conduct and given a sanction.

The adviser learns of the situation regarding the course grade issue and Tran appears in their office without an appointment shortly afterwards. Tran shares a draft of an appeal letter that he is planning to submit to the Dean of Students regarding his sanction. He states that an American friend has helped him write the letter, but he would also like to receive the adviser's feedback.

In the letter, Tran explains that he has been under a great deal of pressure due to his father's failing health and need for medical care. He has been working a part-time job in order to help reduce the financial burden, which impacted his studies. The adviser immediately takes note of his reference to working a part-time job and is concerned that he is working off-campus without permission. The adviser has not recommended any off-campus work authorization and is almost certain that he is not working on campus. Tran acknowledged that he apologized to the faculty member.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- Imagine that you are the adviser in this scenario. What concerns are present for you as you meet with Tran?
- What could the adviser recommend to colleagues on campus in order to help them engage with this student? How could the adviser help them consider both the cultural differences and personality aspects involved?
- How could the adviser assist this student with both navigating the campus systems and also with managing his emotions when speaking with those in authority?
- How should the adviser respond to Tran's request to review the letter? What, if anything, should the adviser say or advise about Tran's employment?
- What type of action or proof would cause the adviser to terminate Tran's SEVIS record for illegal employment?