

A QUESTION OF LOW GPA

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CASE DESCRIPTION

This case study portrays dilemmas faced by advisors during advisement. The case revolves around Prema Cruz and one of her advisees, David Konde. David is an older, non-traditional MBA student with health and financial issues. He withdraws late from Business Policy class resulting in a “WF” grade. This results in his GPA dropping and him unable to receive his MBA degree. He is also at risk of being terminated from the program. Prema Cruz wants to help him in completion of his degree. This case study could be used to demonstrate advisement problems. It would allow advisors to understand their roles and responsibilities and ethical implications of their decisions. This case can be integrated into any advisement workshops. It can be designated for a 60 minute session slot. The instructor can distribute the case study at the beginning of the workshop. Participants can read the case study briefly to allow thorough discussion of the various case related issues.

CASE SYNOPSIS

This case is concerned with the role and responsibilities of advisors in academic environments. It deals with the ethical implications surrounding advisors decisions when there is a conflict between their core values and institutional guidelines. Conflicts occur when there is a clash of personal morals and beliefs and institutional policies. Advisors are often faced with a dilemma when reaching a decision. “*How to do the right thing versus just doing things right?*” The case study traces the problem faced by David Konde and the helplessness of his advisor Prema Cruz in helping him. David withdraws late from a graduate class due to genuine health reasons. He is given a grade of “WF” which brings his overall GPA below 3.0. David is unable to graduate and is also under consideration for termination from the program. Prema wants him to complete his degree and leave. She is left wondering how to help on this matter.

CASE BODY

Dr. Prema Cruz’s cell phone started ringing just as she entered her house. She threw her handbag on the sofa and reached out for her phone. “*Hello*” she breathlessly said, and heard the familiar tone of one of her MBA’s students, David Konde. She quietly heard him rattle on nervously on the other end. “*Give me some time, I will look it up on the computer later on. Just reached home*”, she assured him on the phone.

But it was around 9 pm before Dr. Cruz was able to switch on the computer and look up the student on Banner Degree Works. David was right, he was not meeting the degree requirements to graduate for Spring Commencement. He had a GPA of 2.89. He needed a 3.0 GPA to get his degree.

The Student

David Konde was a non-traditional student in his early fifties, an African from Kenya who had previously worked as a teacher in public schools and colleges. He was now enrolled in

the MBA (Masters of Business Administration) program to further improve his career prospects. David was not comfortable using technology and dreaded online classes. He wore thick glasses and had sight issues. He had two teenaged boys still residing in Kenya with his mother and had recently got married a second time. David had a habit of frequently dropping in to meet Dr. Cruz at her office. He would inquire about her day and then talk in length about his student related problems usually the courses, the instructors, financial concerns etc. He was having numerous financial problems, was unable to drive because of his vision problems and had difficulty attending classes in evening because of transportation issues. The local bus services provided in the city was not reliable and being a small rural town, inhabitants depended a lot on their own cars. David's wife was from Kenya, did not know driving and had, just had a baby girl and was not a position to drive a car. David earlier registered for MBA in healthcare but then had earned a grade of "C" in one of the healthcare electives. This had made him feel uneasy and he subsequently decided to change his major to general business administration. He had managed to sustain a GPA of 3.0 over the semesters and seemed on track towards graduation when his audit was signed. His tentative graduation date was Spring 2016.

But then in Fall 2015, David had taken Business Policy the capstone subject for the degree. He had problems right from the beginning of the course and talked about dropping the course. David had earlier taken Dr. Cruz's course and had her cell phone number (she had mentioned this on her syllabus). David would call up Dr. Cruz whenever he had problems in the degree program. This had become a habit with him.

Dr. Cruz advised him to drop the class and informed him about the deadline for doing so. David's vision problems flared up around this time. He had to undergo a cataract surgery. Due to health issues, David did drop the class but after the deadline. As a result of which he was awarded a grade of "WF" on this course. Dr. Cruz repeatedly talked with the Registrar's office about David being sick and needing to drop the class. She contacted the Graduate Dean as well who also took up his case. David submitted health documents from his doctor. But the date of his surgery and the withdrawal dates were not same. Dr. Cruz reasoned that he was sick and in pain which was the reason he had forgotten about the deadline. The student had a cataract surgery and being worried about that, he was unable to complete the paperwork in time. But the Registrar's office refused to concede to this request. The grade of "WF" remained unchanged.

At the end of Fall 2015, he received a Scholastic Warning that his GPA was below 3.0 and he needed to earn a grade of "A" in the last two remaining classes enrolled in Spring 2016. Dr. Cruz and David discussed in length about the elective he should take and decided on a Public Administration subject Labor and Collective Bargaining because David felt he could handle the course content better and was more comfortable with the instructor of the course. Dr. Cruz had a substitute letter typed up and it was approved. Dr. Cruz advised David to focus on these two subjects—Labor and Collective Bargaining and Business Policy, establish contact with the instructors and do his best.

Dr. Cruz

Dr. Cruz was a professor of management and had been working at the college for over eleven years. She had been the director of the MBA program for two years now and had been involved with the program for a year as the Chair of the Graduate Council. She knew most of the students well, met them at office and corresponded with them over the telephone and on email. Most of the students knew her cell phone number and called her when they wanted a quick and

prompt response to alleviate their anxiety. She advised all the 100 students, and ensured they were on track to graduation. She advised students face-to-face and also over the phone depending on their schedules. She also taught two of the MBA subjects: Organizational Behavior and Human Resources Management. She empathized with the students especially their persistence and hard work. And with their decision to take up studies with a full time job, families and financial problems.

The MBA Program

The MBA program had around 100 students, majority of them were females, non-traditional students working in small jobs within the city, consisting primarily of African-American population. The program was offered in the evening time with a few subjects online or as hybrid. The program possessed ACBSP accreditation and all its faculty were doctorates. A few of the courses were taught by adjunct faculty. For instance the Business Policy class was taught by the CEO of a major corporation. Similarly another general business elective was taught by a senior executive employed by a leading corporation.

The general requirements for all masters' degrees in the university were as under:

1. A minimum of 30 semester hours in a prescribed curriculum needed to be completed with a grade point average of 3.0 or above.
2. All course work needed to be completed within six years of date of graduation.

More specific MBA degree program related requirements were as under:

1. Failure to achieve a grade of "B" or better in the first nine semester hours taken under a provisional admission status would result in termination from the program.
2. Earning a grade of "F" in any MBA course.

The Decision

Dr. Cruz calculated David's GPA, it was 2.89. She switched off the computer. The next morning she met with David in her office. David informed her that he had approached Business Policy professor to accept his project which he had not submitted because of a health issue. He showed her the doctor's letter. This should pull up his grade from a "C" to a "B" leading to an increase in his GPA. Dr. Cruz nodded. She followed up with the secretary over the next few days. The Business Policy instructor changed the grade of David Konde from a "C" to "B" by completing the Grade Change Form. Soon after David informed Dr. Cruz his new GPA was 3.02. And then went for an interview in Texas.

Dr. Cruz waited for a few days for all these changes to be reflected and then looked up the Banner Degree works. David's GPA was now 2.91. "*Why? How did this happen?*" she wondered. She contacted the Registrar's office. "*You left out the WF in Business Policy*", she was informed. She was still thinking when the phone rang, it was the Graduate Dean. "*It is about David Konde. He has received a "WF". Does not your program have a policy of terminating students who receive an "F" in any of the MBA courses?*" questioned the Graduate Dean.

Dr. Cruz argued that the student had a medical issue and had been planning to drop the class but his paperwork had got delayed, he had medical documents, etc. "*Can anything be*

done? Would it be possible for him to pick up another subject to pull up his GPA and get his degree?" she inquired.

"Do you have in writing any policies about "WF"? Has anyone been in this situation before? I am not sure? Let me find out on my end. You in the meantime discuss this issue with your business school Dean. Do not talk or correspond with the student." the Graduate Dean suggested to her.

Dr. Cruz called the Dean's office explaining the reason for her visit. She was reflective as she climbed the stairs towards the Dean's office. On one side the rules were not clearly explicit. On the other was a student and his career. *"What to do? How to resolve this issue?"* were the questions on her mind.

Questions

Q1. What are the policies of the MBA degree program?

Q2. What is the issue in the above situation?

Q3. What would you have done in this situation?

Q4. What do you think was the decision taken in the above situation? Give reasons for your answer.

Q5. Are there any ethical implications surrounding this decision? If so please discuss.