

# **A QUESTION OF LOW GPA**

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## **INSTRUCTORS' NOTES**

### **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 minutes 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.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This case study is based on the personal experience of the author during her administrative years as the MBA program coordinator and later as the MBA program director.

### **TEACHING OBJECTIVES**

This case study can be used in advisement workshops to create awareness amongst the participants.

## TEACHING METHODS

The following is a sample teaching for a 60 minute discussion session in an Advisement Workshop:

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|---|--------|
| 1. Distribution of case study & discussion questions in class<br>& for reading the case study | 20 min |
| 2. Discussion on program policies, guidelines & advisement issues                             | 15 min |
| 3. Discussion Questions   | 20 min |
| 4. Summarize and discuss the answers  | 5 min  |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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

Ans. The policies of the MBA degree program are as under:

- a. Students need to earn a GPA of 3.0 and above to graduate.
- b. All course work needs to be completed within six years of the date of graduation.
- c. All provisional students need to earn a grade of “B” or higher in their first nine hours of MBA course work to avoid termination from the program.
- d. If a student earned a grade “F” in any MBA course they would automatically be terminated from the program.

*Q2. What is the issue in the above situation?*

Ans. David a non-traditional MBA student has health and financial issues. He withdraws from a graduate class after the deadline is over. He possesses health excuses but these are unable to provide strong reasons why he dropped the Business Policy class two days after the deadline. He is given a “WF” on the class. His GPA falls down. A grade of “WF” is computed as “F” when calculating grades point average. His overall final GPA is 2.91. His advisor Prema Cruz watches helplessly unable to help him. Dr. Cruz is both his advisor and the MBA Director. The Graduate Dean contacts her about David’s possible termination from the program. The MBA program has a policy of terminating all students who earn a grade of “F” in any one of their courses. Dr. Cruz checks the program guidelines on “WF” but is unable to find anything. The Graduate Dean tells her to discuss this matter with the college Dean.

*Q3. What would you have done in this situation?*

Ans. The workshop participants can discuss their opinions here. They could suggest David Konde be terminated from the program. Or any other alternative options available giving reasons for their answers.

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

Ans. Prema Cruz is sympathetic to David Konde's problem. She speaks in favor of David before the Graduate Dean. She looks up the policies on "WF". She knows there is nothing in writing about "WF" at the MBA level. Mostly likely this is how she will present the case in front of Dean. She will most likely argue that David should be allowed to pick up another class to pull up his GPA and graduate. Further steps should be taken to clarify the position of a student earning a "WF" at the MBA level to ensure similar situations do not occur in the near future.

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

Ans. There are ethical implications surrounding this decision. Dr. Cruz needs to decide whose interest is more important—the student's future, university regulations and guidelines and her own personal values as well. Ethics pertain to what can be considered appropriate and inappropriate. Traits like honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion and fairness are considered to be moral values. Ethical decision making would involve "...thinking about and evaluating how to act to achieve the best possible outcome" (Frank, 2000: 49). To allow a correct decision to emerge it is necessary:

- a. To identify personal morals.
- b. Minimize harm and try not to harm anyone.
- c. Practice altruistic behavior. One should respect others, practice fairness, and try to be consistent.
- d. To attempt to find a balance between all conflicting roles.
- e. To reach out to other administrators to resolve a dilemma while maintaining confidentiality.
- f. To collaborate with others and seek help where needed.
- g. To stand by your decision (Compton, 2014).

Lutz, Boon & Xue (2016) discuss core values which all advisors should integrate when advising their students. Advisors have a responsibility to create appropriate conditions for the students to make correct career choices. They need to keep abreast with the latest knowledge, and information, and make a conscious effort to expose their students to a variety of different academic opportunities. They should not allow their personal agendas to influence the advisement process and advice according to the university's mission, strategic objectives and guidelines.

To summarize all advisors have moral responsibilities towards their advisees and the institution. The advisor is the spokesperson of the university and the enforcer of university policies and guidelines. Advisors are also the students' confidant, sources of knowledge and educators (Table 1).

Further the process of ethical academic advisement should follow the following steps:

1. It is necessary to deconstruct the issue completely.
2. Identify what is best for the advisee as well as the institution.
3. Decide (Church and Robinson, 2006).

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Core values of NACADA</b>	<b>Practical applications in academic advising</b>
Advisers are responsible to the individuals they advise.	Advisers create conditions for students to make informed, reasoned choices.
Advisers are responsible for involving others, when appropriate in the advising process.	Advisers share knowledge of other resources and departments to help students explore academic opportunities.
Advisers are responsible to their institutions.	Advisers emphasize the importance of advising and do not impose their personal agendas on students.
Advisers are responsible to higher education and to their educational community.	Advisers simultaneously advocate for their students and for the mission of their educational institutions.
Advisers are responsible for their professional practices and for themselves personally.	Advisers regularly examine their own motivations and seek feedback on their performance.

**Source: Lutz, D., Boon, A. & Xue, X. (2016). "Resolving ethical dilemmas in academic advising through core values and aspirational principles", *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*.**

In the above case, the entire process of academic advisement would follow the following procedure:

1. First deconstructing the entire issue. There are no university regulations on "WF" at the MBA level. There is nothing specified in writing.
2. So it is possible to treat David as an exception and allow him the option of enrolling for an additional course and pulling up his overall GPA. And to avoid such a situation in the future, proper guidelines should be implemented at the program level with regards to "WF" grade.

## REFERENCES

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