**Case Studies Reflective Paper**

Indiana University Bloomington

**Introduction**

As an administrator in Higher Education, even on large campuses, it is common to wear multiple hats and handle lots of various types of student interaction. For this reason, rather than choose three separate occasions in one of my jobs through which to derive situations, I’ve chosen three separate positions/responsibilities I currently hold and come up with case studies for each.

The first is my main position as a Graduate Assistant Advisor for the Indiana Memorial Union Board. The Board is comprised of 16 undergraduate students, and I directly advise two of them, along with co-advising the other 14. My second responsibility is acting as an instructor for one section of Leadership Training, and undergraduate course as a part of the LEAD IU program. These classes, though basic in material, have high rates of international students as they prove a helpful time for language learning. The final responsibility is my role as Esoteric (Ritual) Advisor for IU’s chapter of Chi Omega. While my position dictates that I advise the New Member Educator, I also help advise the President and Vice-President as we have fewer advisors than needed. The below case studies will highlight issues I have faced in each position and how methods from this course can help alleviate similar issues in the future.

**Union Board Case Study**

***Situation***

The Indiana Memorial Union Board is Indiana University’s oldest and largest campus-wide programming body. As servant leaders to the student body as a whole, 16 undergraduate Directors plan fun, educational, and entertaining events that provide alcohol alternatives and campus engagement opportunities to their peers. In addition to their planning responsibilities, they have the task of working with their fellow Directors in what is hoped to be a positive, creative, and challenging, but supportive manner.

Following a very tense first semester working with the Board, you and the advising team have decided to address interpersonal issues between directors at your Fall Retreat in early September. Knowing that some Directors have gotten into verbal and physical altercations, while others are happily oblivious to the goings-on of angry Directors, you have to strategically decide what the best plan of action is. You have all of the students gathered for Friday evening in a comfortable conference room in the student union. What activities do you plan and how do you facilitate a safe and engaging discussion that fosters learning rather than dissent?

***Solution***

The main thing that I’d want to get at as an advisor is the tough conversation of what their motives and goals are on Board and why working together in a positive work environment is crucial to their success in these endeavors. To do that, I would create a values continuum in increasing seriousness of topic. The first could talk about how much they agree or disagree with whether or not they enjoy their work on Union Board, whether or not they have friends on Board, then eventually progressing to if they think Board is a business or a social organization, what the goal of Union Board is (to create programs, to further personal goals, to make friends), and whether or not their satisfied with their work on Board. This activity engages the three learning styles through movement, auditory, and watching the responses of their peers, while also requiring them to think critically about their own motivations and aspirations. Between each question, students would have the opportunity to explain their choice and why it’s important to them.

From there, we would break into a group discussion that digs deeper into the topics we skimmed the surface of. Each Director would go around in a circle and remind the other Directors why they joined Board and add why they remain on Board. In order to encourage shared goals, the Directors need to see that they have shared motives, or at least shared passion for the organization they all participate in. We would encourage them to take the lead with the conversation and think critically about where they have fallen short as a Board over the past semester and where responsibility lies for that. Once they’ve hashed out the problem areas, they can begin to tackle them.

The easiest way to help them come up with plans of action for a successful second semester would be to break from the large group, go into small groups to think-pair-share and then start a large brain dump. Once they’re satisfied with the brain dump, they can start a new page, organizing the ideas they like most, knocking out ideas that are either unrealistic or disliked, and then pulling them all together into a cohesive, self-created plan to remedy their short-comings. Though the advisors have facilitated the discussion and activities, at the end of the evening, the students will feel as though they’ve created the entire plan (which, to be fair, they have), and have the buy-in to hold each other accountable to these new goals and expectations.

**EDUC-U 207 Leadership Training Case Study**

***Situation***

The Leadership Training Course in the Wendell W. Wright School of Education is an undergraduate course taught by Student Affairs professionals as a part of the LEAD IU program. However, the course is not exclusive to students of the LEAD IU program, and, in fact, attracts a high population of international students due to its easier nature as a perfect environment to practice English as a Second Language skills. The course is designed to help students garner a better understanding of what it means to be a leader in addition to developing a solid definition of leadership means to them, what style leader they are, and how their personal values and ethics interplay with these definitions.

As a Student Affairs professional, icebreakers are second nature to me. If you had to pinpoint my entire field of study into one concept, it would be nurturing in and out-of-classroom engagement on college campuses. With that in mind, when I actually get the chance to be leading a class, I’m pretty darn great at engaging my students in the lesson and activities. I firmly agree with the line form Mary Poppins: “In every job that must be done/ there is an element of fun./ You find the fun and snap!/ The job’s a game!”. However, the Leadership Training course is a new adventure in the land of engaging my students due to the population of international students.

So the case is this. I walk in on the first day of class. Knowing I have a roster with half of my students listed as international, I am anticipating different cultural expectations of classroom behavior, names, and interpersonal interaction between domestic and international students. My task is to respectfully learn all my students’ names (whether domestic or international), set expectations of the classroom, and ensure that all students feel comfortable with the composition of their classroom- both interpersonally and structurally from me. Knowing I am walking in blind to the dynamic that will develop organically between students and myself, how can I create an engaging and collaborative learning environment that crosses cultural borders?

***Solution***

Knowing that I have a strong grasp of icebreakers, I focus the main part of my first class on those activities. I choose three out of my resource binder and study then to determine what aspects will garner cultural issues. The first choice is a name game. When I normally play this, students choose an adjective that starts with the same letter as their first name, but not knowing what kind of language barriers I may be facing, I adapt it to have the students say their name while adding some type of physical gesture (ie: two claps, a wave, goofy pose). The students go around in a circle and as more students go, they add on each name and motion prior to them. For example, the second student will only do the person before her, and herself, but the last person in the circle will do every person prior to doing her own name. This activity engages all three types of learning—kinesthetic through the motions, auditory through hearing each name, and visual by each student watching the link between name and motion—while also giving the students plenty of repetition.

Following the name game, you let everybody sit back down and do an activity in smaller groups called Two Truths and a Lie. In groups of three-four, students choose three personal facts, two of them being true and one being false, then present them to their small group. The group then has to decide which is a lie. This provides a more intimate setting for those uncomfortable in large group activities to get to know their peers on a more personal level. Once this activity is done, have one person from each group report back to the class and interesting fact that they learned about a peer to connect it back to the larger community.

Finally, the students should be comfortable enough to move into a bit of the academic work. Ask them a few simple questions about what makes a leader, how one can be considered a leader, and what qualities a leader does and does not need to possess. The discussion doesn’t need to be in depth, but should allow the students to engage in the material on a level that is easy for them, as this requires no prior academic knowledge. Before moving into the final activity and expectations for the next class session, take a small break to either share music or YouTube videos to reengage the students attention and ask for their own contributions. To finish class, give the group a small hidden riddle of an activity that requires all students to work as a group. Once complete, ask the students how different styles of leadership stuck out, what worked well and what didn’t, and how different students showed different strengths. Make sure to highlight the necessity for quiet and loud voices in the process, allowing students to engage as much as they feel comfortable. Finally, hand out a 3x5 to each student and ask that before they leave, they write one thing that worked well for them this class and one thing to be improved in order to gauge how well the lesson plan panned out. Ta-da!

**Chi Omega Case Study**

***Situation***

Founded on April 5th, 1895, Chi Omega is the largest women’s fraternal organization in the world. Boasting over 300,000 living initiated members, it is an extensive network of college-educated women promotes “Friendship, High Standards of Personnel, Sincere Learning and Creditable Scholarship, Participation in Campus Activities, Career Development, and Community Service”. At Indiana University Bloomington, the Theta Beta chapter has been in existence since 1922, and houses 120 active sisters within its walls. The women hail from all over the country and hold various positions of leadership and service within the house.

As an advisor to the chapter, your role is to guide and mentor the women on national policies, risk management, Chi Omega ritual, and ways in which to best be a member of the Indiana University Panhellenic Association. Coming from a very different institutional and chapter type at your undergraduate institution, you are shocked to discover the vast cultural differences in this chapter. As you begin advising, you struggle to balance your notions of what is proper Chi Omega procedure and what is simply a cultural difference and expectation. It is no more striking than the night that you chaperone a formal with a fellow advisor.

Upon arriving at the house, you are surprised and concerned to note that very few sisters are present. You quickly learn that, with rare exception, most are next door at a fraternity drinking prior to the buses that will take all participants to the social location. Over the course of the evening, women are beyond inebriated, men are acting in violation of transportation rules, and the general safety and risk level of the event escalates far beyond what the Executive Board was prepared to handle. Though all men and women make it home safely, you are deeply disappointed in the chapter and need to address the issues. How do you handle your follow-up with the Executive Board in a manner that fosters their buy-in and learning, knowing they will be defensive?

***Solution***

One of the most important parts of collaborative learning is involving students in the learning process. The instructor should not be at the front of the classroom talking at the students and hoping they magically absorb all knowledge as true and accurate. Rather, it is a shared experience; the instructor and students should learn from each other and both be active participants in the creation of knowledge. Though it may seem counter-intuitive, the classroom environment is not the only place in which this dynamic can and should occur. In order to best create a safe and engaging conversation about the problems at the social, you must take a collaborative learning approach.

In order to do this, you need to be aware of how you’re presenting the problems. In other words, present the problems as something that they have the ability to solve, and not a huge negligence on their part, but a chance for learning and improvement instead. When each topic is presented, give the Executive Board a chance to voice what went well, what could be improved, and interesting aspects. Give them the first word and respond with as many questions as possible, rather than answers. Letting the women find the answers on their own, even though you’re steering, allows buy-in. When the debate gets intense, take a moment to let everyone breathe and remind them that you’re all there for the same reason- to make the chapter better and to help keep them going on the positive trajectory they’re on. Engage them in a balanced conversation that recognizes their merit, but pushes them to think beyond what they’re used to doing.

The final step that is absolutely crucial is being able to acknowledge that all your ideas aren’t necessarily the best. Since you are a co-creator of knowledge rather than the sole creator of knowledge, letting your advisees know that your word is not the be-all end-all is crucial in gaining their trust and candor. Feedback must run along a two-way street. While there are always multiple ways to handle hard conversations, using collaborative learning techniques like those above are some of the easiest and most cohesive methods for a positive learning experience for all parties involved.