

## Academic Advising Symposium 2/14/2014

### Notes

#### Advising with Cultural Competence

From Itinerary:

Boston University has strategically expanded our international student population over the years, bringing both challenge and opportunity along with the larger numbers. As advisors, we see issues and concerns that may be unique to—or amplified in—the international student experience. The goal of this session, through both information-sharing and discussion, is to further our toolkits in advising international students and fostering global-mindedness across campus. We will share key immigration concepts and adjustment strategies, and provide a forum for discussion of techniques for effective intercultural communication and tips for advising international students in crisis.

#### **Jeanne Kelley, Managing Director, ISSO**

- Introduction: we would love to talk about everything you need to know about advising with cultural competence in an hour and fifteen minutes, but there is too much! We will get through the basics.

#### **Andrea Popa, Associate Director for Student Services, ISSO**

- Round Table Discussions:

##### Discussion #1

- In your advising role at BU, what are the most common questions do you hear from international students?
  - Can I graduate early?
  - I don't understand the grading scale?
  - Can I study abroad?
  - Can I get a job?
  - Am I eligible for national scholarships?
  - Can I live off campus? (Where the environment is more what I'm used to, more quiet and focus on studying.) Which means RAs tend not to be international students.
- Are they different or similar to common questions from US students?
  - Lots of common questions, but some are very specific to being international vs. domestic.
- Do you answer questions differently for the two populations?
  - Depends on the questions.
  - Different conversation among groups (a Korean man who is going to serve in the military is different than someone from China who is thinking of taking a leave of absence.)
  - Often questions have to be answered differently depending on restrictions, not necessarily culturally.

- Are there any extra steps you take depending on the student's cultural background?
  - Call ISSO.

#### Discussion #2

- Briefly describe an advising case where you worked with an international student in crisis.
- How did you become aware of the crisis? Did you learn of it directly or indirectly?
- What university resources did you use or refer the student to use?
  - Stigma with Behavioral Health.
  - Asking for help in general has a stigma.
- Were there complications you did not expect because the student was international?
  - When academic advise doesn't necessarily match up with legal advice.

#### Discussion #3

- List five words that describe your own cultural (racial, ethnic, regional) background?
- Briefly describe your most significant cross-cultural experience, either abroad or in the US. What did you learn about yourself from this interaction?
- In what ways do you apply your own cross-cultural experience to communicating with international students?
  - It's hard to think individualistically when you're coming from a culture that doesn't embrace individualism. Keeping this in mind when speaking to students from Asia instead of saying, "Yes, that's what your parents want, but what do YOU want." That doesn't work, it's a different conversation.
- ISSO relies on other support services and offices to support students; ISSO can't do it all.
  - Immigration status is very important for our international students.
  - We speak "Immigration". We want advisors to know some of these key pieces and to ASK when they need help.
    - Enrollment: fulltime (12 credits, with some exceptions.)
    - Expiration of documents (not just a Visa, there are four different documents with four different expirations.)
    - Electronic recording (SEVIS). Have to report that students are here, authorized, full-time and in compliance.
      - ISSO needs to keep track of SEVIS status that is changed whenever there is an academic, personal, or immigration document change. (Basically every time something changes, ISSO needs to know!)
      - Termination: failure to check in, unauthorized drop below full-time, unauthorized employment, US entry in another status that doesn't allow for study, criminal charge or disciplinary action.
    - Employment:

- On-campus, 20 hours max during semester, full-time during winter, spring and summer school breaks. STRICT maximum, dates, hours and location matter.
    - Off-campus, required internship for credit or 1-year allowance to work after graduation. That is ALL, no other work permission.
      - Engagement: develop a partnership with international students. Encourage your students to work with their ISSO advisor. Students know who their ISSO advisor, assigned by school so that they know your specific school's rules and processes.
  - Important for you to know the limitations so that you can advise within them.
- Cultural component: being transplanted and living within a new culture
  - Cultural iceberg image: some things come to mind right away (things that are visible), but it goes much deeper (cultural perspective and assumptions includes social rules, values, facial expressions, how to make friends, interaction with authority, who is in authority, etc)
  - Recognize that we too are bringing cultural assumptions to the conversation. The more we can remember this, the more we can meet in the middle and communicate effectively.
  - Culture Shock: recognize the trends and signs.
  - Depending on one's strategy of acculturation, one will want different things. (Separation: want to find and spend time with others who look and act exactly like me. Assimilation: don't want to see anyone who looks or acts exactly like me. Integration: a balance. The only negative experience would be Marginalization, but the other three are all valid as long as they are making connections somehow.)
  - Finding that balance between home and new is not a race, it is an individual journey and outcome.
- Today's Chinese Student: Understanding the US Classroom
  - Impossible to be able to put everyone in a population on one chart, but we can get some general ideas.
  - Other factors beyond culture: weight of being the first college student, only child

### **Jeanne Kelley, Managing Director, ISSO**

- Diverse population, not only in that we have 130 countries coming in, but also that within one culture, there are diverse populations (just as in the US.)
- Tools for Advising International Students
  - Listen: let them say their prepared script because they have probably prepared because they want to make sure their grammar is correct and they are saying what they mean to say. Shows them respect, but also allows you to read between the lines to figure out what they really need, even if they don't know themselves.
  - Limit: acronyms, jargon, idioms are super confusing! They will catch on eventually, but don't assume they will know. Spell it out.

- Watch Cultural Indicators: student reaction may signal miscommunication. Facial expressions and gestures can be different, even opposite. Not that you have to know all of those for all cultures, but just communicate a bit more to make sure they understand.
  - Check for Understanding: have students explain back in their own words to make sure they understand. Following up with written communication helps when students may be struggling with language. And to also make sure they feel comfortable to ask questions.
  - Consider Bureaucracy: consider student's cultural perceptions of rule of law and exceptions. (Can't blame it all on culture, sometimes students try to ask for an exception repeatedly to wear you down. But often there is a different perspective of rules and bending them.)
  - Middle Ground: help students understand the "US way" but also consider changing your behavior or viewpoint. There isn't a right or wrong way.
  - Names: Learn to say a student's name correctly. Don't expect nicknames (they shouldn't have to if they don't want to, though some will offer one because they feel it is easier.) It's ok to ask! At least you're showing an effort.
  - Be Curious: Take time to ask questions about student's home country and cultural viewpoint. They feel comfortable talking about their own experience and home. Show how interested you are in making their experience here as successful as possible.
  - Don't Generalize: Don't impose a cultural stereotype on a student or their situation. Not all Chinese students will act the same, nor Japanese, nor US students for that matter.
- Case Studies:
    - Mira is a freshman student who is pleasant but shy. You are her academic advisor and receive a concerned call from her professor that she is struggling with homework assignments and has recently failed her mid-term exam. You are aware that if she falls below a 3.0 GPA, her full tuition scholarship will be in jeopardy. Before reaching out to the student, you want to make sure you know you have a strategy in mind.
      - Are there any immigration restrictions on her academic registration?
        - Yes, can't be below full time (12 credits) unless special circumstances are approved. Student can't drop the class if it puts her below full time.
      - Would her options be different if she were a sophomore or junior?
        - Not in terms of full-time status. Depends on the scholarship.
      - What BU Offices might be involved in advising this student?
        - ISSO (immigration status), ERC (tutoring), Financial Assistance (scholarship), her school/professor (helping with academics)
      - What resources and solutions might be offered to her?
        - Withdraw from the class, unless it jeopardizes full-time status. Tutoring and support from peers and faculty, financial assistance to work out a different plan.

- You are an advisor to Rahel, a junior Communications major. She is academically strong and socially engaged. She served as an Orientation leader over the summer and has been hired as a Resident Assistant for the fall. In addition she is planning to do a major-required internship at WBUR, and is hoping to pick up a couple of hours per week as a peer tutor at the Educational Resource Center. She comes in to speak to you about drop a course due to her busy schedule and has a few questions about doing the BU LA internship program in spring term.
  - What BU Offices might be involved in advising this student?
    - ISSO (working in US and dropping a course), Res Life, COM Internship Coordinator and Student Services, ERC, WBUR, Orientation.
  - What questions might you have for her?
    - Total hours working during the semester?
  - Are there immigration considerations that need to be taken into account?
    - Yes! What is she allowed to do work-wise?
  - How does this case become more complex if mental health factors are involved?
    - Study abroad and Mental Health need to be included. Is she stretching herself too thin? Will she ask for help or do we need to reach out?
    - Educate about different support services that are available, but know they may not use it and it's ultimately up to them. If you are a student's connection, they may want to come to you for help in all areas because they know you now. If they need to be referred to someone else, it helps to introduce them to the new person.
  
- Jun is a senior living on campus. His girlfriend Naoko is a BU grad student and lives in Allston. After a weekend altercation with Naoko, Jun is arrested by Allston police and charged with assault and battery. His case is forwarded to BU Judicial Affairs and he is facing possible suspension.
  - What BU Offices might be involved in advising this student?
    - Res Life, Judicial, ISSO, DOS, Behavior Health
    - Who is the "need to know" for a case like this: depends on whether the incident is on or off campus. DOS is very involved (and Judicial Affairs within.) They will notify who needs to know based on remaining or leaving housing and academics.
    - ISSO always needs to be notified in situations with international students. If incidents happen off-campus, often ISSO is the last to know. We want to make sure that they know this is important, even though we're not going to be involved legally.
  - Are there cultural considerations that need to be taken into account?
    - Yes! Getting arrested in US is very different than other countries, and students don't necessarily know the implications (lawyer, cost, consequences at BU and immigration status.)
    - Need to get an attorney that understands immigration status as well as criminal defense.

- What immigration complications may arise from judicial action and criminal charges?
  - Absolutely. Deportation could be a factor with criminal punishment or just judicial action within BU.
- We've probably raised more questions than answered them, this is something we all struggle with. When working with students, consider immigration status (though we know you are not an immigration expert and you should send students to us with questions.) Work together and communicate between the two offices and know your resources.