

# UC San Diego

## Student Affairs

### Student Affairs Book Club

*Building better practices through shared knowledge and dialogue*

**Book: Why Aren't We There Yet? Taking Personal Responsibility for Creating and Inclusive Campus**

**Wednesday, August 2, 2017**

**12:15pm-1:30pm | Conference Room 111A, Chancellor's Complex [1hr 15 mins]**

### DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO REAL ISSUES

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#### Part One.

Think about the case studies presented in the book and consider the prompts provided to the respondents in Chapter 6 (p. 185). Please reflect on how you would respond to the situation, specifically with consideration to the following:

- Identify the stakeholders in the situation
- Explore yourself and your role
- Consider the context
- Decide on a response

Additionally, think about who you would consults and/or collaborate with to help address these issues as well as which stakeholders would have the ultimate say in how the issue is resolved.

### SCENARIO 1: A DISAGREEMENT ESCALATES

When Kate Harris, director of student activities at Highbanks State University for the past 10 months, arrived at work on Friday morning, she learned from her staff about a verbal altercation between two students during a late-night event run by her office the previous evening. Her graduate assistant, Nick, was present at the event and filled her in on what happened. In short, Nick observed two students on the outskirts of the event yelling at each other, and one of them ultimately telling the other, "You'd better watch your back" and "I'm gonna take you down." Although the altercation was very brief, Nick took the threat seriously and called campus security. The officers talked to each of the students individually, took statements from them and a few witnesses, served the two students notices to appear before the campus judicial board, and escorted them back to their residence hall rooms.

Kate read the official report filed by campus security and was shocked when she learned who the students were. In her role as adviser to several student organizations, Kate worked closely with Toussaint Williams and Eric Chen, both presidents of large student clubs that were cosponsoring the event. Although it had only been a few weeks into the semester, Kate's interactions with both students led her to believe they were polite, intelligent, and respectful, so she was surprised by their behavior. The students' statements provided to campus security, as well as those of the witnesses, were fairly consistent. They had a disagreement about where their clubs' sponsorship signs should be posted, with Toussaint arguing that since his club provided more money and more members to work the event, he got to decide. The disagreement quickly escalated, they both raised their voices inappropriately, and Toussaint told the security officers that he shouldn't have lost his temper and threatened Eric.

Kate thanked Nick for handling the situation well and began thinking about how she might address the incident next time she met individually with Toussaint and Eric. Other than those imminent conversations and possible judicial sanctions, she thought the incident was behind them all until the following weekend when she saw the Toussaint had posted his thoughts about the incident on Facebook. A new story emerged in which

Toussaint claimed that his threat to Eric was provoked by a racial slur; he said Eric called him the N word and that's why he lost his temper and threatened him.

By Monday morning, numerous Facebook groups with hundreds of members were discussing the incident. The campus was abuzz with students sharing opinions with each other and fueling unprecedented tension between the Black Student Union (BSU) and the Asian Student Union (ASU), Toussaint's and Eric's organizations, respectively. The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Alliance took sides as well, deciding to support Eric, who was openly gay and a past officer of that organization. Eric also served as a student representative on the campus's diversity board, and there were calls for him to resign. Almost overnight, the incident went from a relatively minor disagreement between two student leaders who had handled it poorly to a significant campus issue with racial undertones that could have lasting effects.

Kate urgently tried to set up a meeting with her direct supervisor, the dean of students, to discuss what to do. In the meantime, Eric showed up in her office wanting to talk. On the verge of tears, he denied calling Toussaint any name, especially the N word. He said that he knew he acted inappropriately that evening by yelling, but that their argument had nothing to do with race. He reminded Kate of all the work he had done on campus to promote cultural awareness and appreciation of diversity and said he was sickened by the accusation that he used a racial slur. Eric asked Kate to promise he wouldn't be kicked off the diversity board, because all of this was a lie. Feeling that she didn't have enough information to make promises, all Kate could say was that the incident would be investigated fully and that there would be a fair resolution. Eric left feeling hopeless, helpless, and alone- that no one was on his side.

About an hour later, Toussaint showed up at Kate's office. Although she didn't feel prepared to talk with him, she also couldn't turn him away. Toussaint recounted the incident as he wrote it on Facebook- not as it was written in the original statements and reports. He pleaded for Kate's support, suggesting that as a Black woman, she must be able to understand how he lost his temper and threatened Eric after being called the N word. He asked that Eric be removed from his position as president of the ASU and from campus diversity board immediately. Kate told Toussaint that he needed to be patient and that she was sure the investigation would result in a fair outcome. He left feeling disgusted that Kate wouldn't support "one of her own."

Finally, that afternoon, Kate was able to talk with the dean of students but didn't know where to begin.

## SCENARIO 2: DISRUPTIVE STUDENT THREAT

As the director of the student conduct office, Derrick Dixon assembled a threat assessment team composed of faculty, administrators, and students to develop protocol for proactive approaches to preventing tragedies such as those at Northern Illinois University and Virginia Tech from happening on their campus. The objectives of the team are threefold: to empower the campus community to identify and report incidents of students who exhibit disruptive emotional and behavioral threats in the classroom and other campus spaces, enhance the development of a culture of care by taking proactive measures to maintain campus safety, and refer students who are exhibiting inappropriate behavior but may also be experiencing emotional or mental health concerns to the student conduct office and the counseling center. The team serves as a consulting group for members of the campus community for strategies to employ when encountering students who exhibit disturbing behavior inside and outside the classroom.

Dixon communicated a week ago via telephone with Professor Weston about the peculiar behavior of a student named Luis in Weston's course. During the telephone conversation, Weston expressed his concern that Luis invokes fear in his classroom environment by his presence because he stares inappropriately at women (two students complained to Weston during the class break). Other students avoid working with him during small-group activities in class. Furthermore, he keeps his Bible sitting on his desk during class discussions. Weston is a full professor of business law and a White man who has been teaching at the university for over 20 years. Weston sought advice from Dixon about what measures, if any, to take to address this situation, because in his years of teaching he had not come across a student who seemed so "disturbing." After hanging up the phone with Weston, Dixon checked Luis's disciplinary and academic records to ascertain whether previous complaints had been filed. There were no reports in Luis's file because he just transferred; this was Luis's first

semester on campus. Dixon advised Weston to pay close attention to this situation and follow up with him if subsequent complaints from students about Luis are made. Dixon then mentioned the incident to other members of the threat assessment team.

Less than two weeks later, Dixon received an e-mail message from Weston. Within the first paragraph, Weston demanded campus police presence either inside or outside his classroom if Luis is to remain enrolled in the course. Weston attached a message from a student, Paulina, a 25-year-old married woman who had submitted a formal complaint to Weston about Luis. In Paulina's message, she attached information from Luis's "About Me" section of his Facebook page. Paulina noted that Luis's message, which read,

I will not associate with anyone who is not like-minded and doesn't have a mind set to educate themselves for the good and grace of Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior. If you do not complement my goals and visions, don't let the door hit you on your way out

was quite unnerving. Paulina noted that Luis's incessant staring at her during class caused her great discomfort. The staring coupled with the messages on Luis's Facebook page made her and her husband concerned not only for her safety but also for the safety of the entire class.

Weston then said he returned the midterm exams to the students last week. Luis's performance was in his words "abysmal." In all his years of teaching, he had never had a student earn such a low grade, less than a 25% on the exam. When Weston talked with Luis about his exam, as opposed to admitting that he was unprepared, Luis stated, "I'll get a 95% on the next exam." Weston was shocked by Luis's "detachment from reality." He wrote to Dixon, "I want him out of my classroom." Weston then questioned how the university could have admitted a student who was clearly academically unprepared for work at this level.

Dixon consulted with the threat assessment team and then perused Luis's Facebook page. Dixon saw Luis's profile picture, a smiling, clean-cut Latino male with his mom and dog. Olivia Goldsmith, vice president for student affairs, advised Dixon to set up an appointment with Luis and let him know that his mother or another family member was welcome to attend the meeting with him. Dixon's next step was to call Luis into the office, but Luis didn't show up for the meeting. Per Weston's request, campus police were stationed outside the classroom for the next class period. Dixon then sent Luis a letter informing him that he would be receiving an interim suspension from the university until he complied with meeting with Dixon in the student conduct office.

After Luis's receipt of the letter, he and his mother scheduled a meeting with Dixon for the next day. When Luis and his mother arrived for the meeting, Dixon was immediately struck by Luis's gentle nature. Dixon asked Luis about his experience in the class. Luis was shocked by the reaction of his peers and professor. When Dixon asked Luis about his performance on the first exam, he said, "I'm not used to classes here yet." Luis's mother objected, "I thought you were earning an A in this course." During the course of the conversation, Luis agreed to see a counselor in the university counseling center to talk about his transition to life at the university; however, he adamantly wanted to finish the course without a late withdrawal because he'd completed most of the work.

When Luis left his office, Dixon considered the interactions with Weston and Luis and his mother. Luis wants to finish the class, but Weston and two other students in the course want him to withdraw from the course. What should happen next?