

Fostering Inclusive Departmental Climates

Case Studies for Director Workshops

Case Study 3

Characters:

Jim (professor and PI)

Akimbo (4th year graduate student)

Ling (3rd year graduate student)

Dave (professor and Co-PI)

***Narrator:** The scene is the weekly research group meeting of a joint project. All graduate students and PIs/Co-PIs involved in the project are present. The student group is a mix of Americans and international students.*

Jim: Good morning, all. Thanks for being here at this early hour. There are some donuts and coffee on the table at the back. I'll give you some time to go help yourselves and then we can start our meeting in earnest.

***Narrator:** The meeting resumes after a few minutes...*

Jim: I'm sure you'll agree that things have been going reasonably well for our project over the past few months. Allison and Mark have got papers accepted for publication, Evan has come up with a novel idea for synthesis of one of our precursors and all in all, things are looking reasonably well on that side. Let's ask Allison, Mark and Evan to stand for recognition, and urge them to continue on the path.

***Narrator:** Allison, Mark and Evan stand and take their mention.*

Jim: Ling, I haven't seen you in the office much. What have you been up to?

Akimbo: Ling isn't in the office because he is in the lab whenever he isn't in class.

Jim: Okay. We hope he brings us some good results soon. Let's move on with the rest of the meeting.

***Narrator:** The meeting continues. The meeting ends with Jim addressing the group...*

Jim: Thank you all for coming. Have a good and rewarding work week. Allison, I am looking to you to continue providing doughnuts and coffee for these meetings. And Evan and Mark, on the review of those papers which I asked you to handle for me, I am looking forward to getting your drafts by Friday.

***Narrator:** Six months have passed. The scene is another research group meeting of the same project.*

Jim: Things continue to go reasonably well for our project. We've met most of our deadlines and milestones. There is a particular area, however, that needs work. As we've talked about over the past few meetings, Ling, you have still not contributed a result of your project. You haven't been in to see me, or had much one-on-one discussion regarding your work. Ling, is there anything that you want to add?

Ling: I work hard. I spend a lot of time at the bench, watching and learning from others in the group as you told me to.

Jim: Okay, Ling. But let us set up a time within the next day or two so we can have a discussion.

Dave: I really do see Ling at the bench all the time, working in earnest, and we have had many a conversation on his experiments. I think we should acknowledge that what we're asking from Ling is pretty involved and is brand new territory. Maybe we should consider changing course and having our new postdoc work with Ling on the project, even for a while.

Jim: Okay. We will see how things go. Let's press on with the meeting.

***Narrator:** The meeting concludes. After the meeting, Ling is alone with his fellow researcher Yu.*

Ling: I really don't think I can take any more of this, Yu. All the negativity and shaming is wearing me down. If I lose my funding I can't stay here anymore. How can I go back home without the Ph.D.? I don't want to leave, but...

***Narrator:** The conversation between Ling and Yu continues...*

Discussion Guide:

1. What are some of the positives/negatives of this scenario?
2. What could/should Jim have done differently in relation to Ling?
3. Have you encountered situations like this?
4. In such situations is there someone to whom the student can go for advice? How would you advise?
5. Do you know any Jims? Would you be willing to have a discussion with Jim around any of his approaches which might need to be re-directed?

Case Study 4

Characters:

Sam (*director of the major, from department X*)

Bruce (*faculty member of department X*)

Gloria (*faculty member of department Y*)

Raul (*faculty member of department Y*)

Susan (*professional staff working with the team*)

***Narrator:** The scene is a meeting of a committee for an interdisciplinary major. The topic is graduate student admissions.*

Sam: Thanks for coming. We need to discuss who to accept as graduate students for next year. It is now open for discussion.

Bruce: We should accept Davenport, Morrison and Fitt. These students will do well in my area. I know each of their undergraduate advisors who have written their letters of support.

Gloria: I say that we accept Elliot and Stathis. Both have had undergraduate research experience at an Ivy League school, and both are interested in my area. I have a pending grant and may be able to support some of these students. Last year your area, Bruce, got your preferences. It's time this year to spread the coverage to other areas.

Sam: I agree with Bruce, I support Davenport, Morrison and Fitt being accepted.

Raul: We need to provide some diversity to the acceptances, both in interdisciplinary area and in other attributes. I don't see that in either of your recommendations, Bruce and Gloria. The students I recommend, Lopez and Washington would not only diversify our program in the area as well as in other attributes, but have shown grit in getting as far as they have under the circumstances.

Raul: By the way, would you please all introduce yourselves and say what your area is? This is my first time on the committee, and I don't know all of you.

***Narrator:** All the attendees introduce themselves.*

Susan: Last year we made some agreements as to requirements for acceptance – a rubric. None of you have discussed the rubric and the relevance of the students' background to that. Shall I send it around again to everyone? On checking the files, I note that these students are not those that would rise to the top with our rubric.

Gloria: By the way, I thought that this committee had 9 members, one representing each of the contributing departments. Where is everyone?

Sam: Susan had trouble scheduling a time for all. This is the best we can do under the timeline.

Sam: I have to leave for another meeting right now. Let's end the meeting and regroup. I've heard your comments and in view of the deadline for acceptances, I will go ahead and select and send acceptances. Susan, please do send the rubric out to all and schedule another meeting for plans for the future.

Narrator: The meeting ends.

Discussion Guide:

1. What went wrong during the meeting? Identify all the areas that need improvement.
2. Have you encountered situations like this before?
3. What might Sam have done better in this scenario?