Case studies in Diversity and Gender

This exercise uses "critical incidents" derived from encounters among and between teachers and students at the University of Minnesota. The critical incidents are, as the name implies, incidents or situations that are of importance in understanding the behavior, values, and cultural differences of those described in the incident.

Please present one of these scenarios and demonstrate how you would address the issue as a TA.

Case Study #1*

One of your students is a highly achieving undergraduate who is very bright, personable, and attractive. You enjoy working with this student, but are not otherwise interested in a relationship. Unexpectedly, the student leaves you a note, professing an interest in establishing a close relationship, along with a bouquet of flowers.

*Adapted from University-wide sexual harassment training

1. What are your responsibilities in this situation?
2. How can you maintain the kind of teaching relationship you want?

Case Study #2*

One day, as you are waiting for students to come in and settle down for your discussion session, you notice that one of the students enters wearing a T-shirt which is emblazoned with a sexually obscene and violent slogan. The student sits down as the bell rings for the class to begin. Just as you are about to begin your opening game, another student states loudly that he cannot sit in the class and attempt to learn if that T-shirt is allowed to stay there. The two students then engage in a shouting match.

*Taken from University-wide sexual harassment training

1. What are your responsibilities in this situation?
2. What are some possible solutions?

Case Study #3

Jose, a student in your section, is in a wheelchair. His brother Pedro is in the same section, and is very protective of Jose. (Pedro registered for all the same classes as Jose on purpose so that he can help him out.) The brothers want to be in the same group, but you want to have diverse groups so that students can get to know one another. However, because of Jose's disability you give in to the brothers and put them in a group with two other people. When there is a group test problem, the brothers surprise you by speaking Spanish to one another. You ask them to speak English so that everyone in the group can understand. They tell you that they don't think they read English as well as other people in the class and are just talking to each other in Spanish to be sure that they understand the quiz problem.

1. What could you have done to prevent the situation?
2. What can you do to resolve the situation?

Resources for Diversity and Gender