



IUPUI

Sense-Making with Students

An Ethics in Action Case Example

The Scenario:

A student has recently returned from a service trip abroad, and meets with her academic advisor to plan classes for the following semester. The advisor is anxious to hear about the student's experience, but as the student begins to share stories, she reveals some information that raises red flags for the advisor. She begins sharing the pictures she took with members of the host community that she has posted on her Facebook page, and there is little evidence that the host community participated in planning the event in any way. The advisor also suspects that the student has been allowed to complete duties outside her scope of knowledge, and with little supervision.

As the advisor pushes on these points of concern, the student becomes frustrated and defensive. She believes the trip did wonders for the community it served, and she is shocked that the advisor might suggest otherwise. The student is planning to apply for professional medical programs and she is certain that this experience will give her a "leg up" in the admission process. The advisor isn't so sure, and wants to help the student reflect more critically on the experience without shutting down her enthusiasm for serving vulnerable populations.

As the student's advisor, how would you approach this important conversation?

Questions to consider:

- Developmentally, how ready is the student for this conversation?
- What was the student's initial motivation for going on this trip? Was it altruistic, or was it motivated her by desire to be accepted into a competitive post-graduate program?
 - Does this difference matter? Would you approach the conversation differently, depending on the answer?
- What are questions you can ask to gain more information about the situation, before making your concerns public?
- What are questions can you ask the student to help her begin to analyze the situation from a different perspective?
- How might you advise the student regarding her intention to publicize this experience in her professional school application process?
- What are campus/community resources that might help you learn more about the situation? Or, resources that might help the student learn more?

Some Tension Points:

- Campus Politics – If the program has an affiliation with the university (sponsorships, alumni ties, etc.), what are the concerns about questioning its ethics?
- Student Relationship – You want to be encouraging and supportive of the student and her ambitions, and you want the student to feel comfortable returning to you when she needs assistance in the future.
- Boundaries – It may feel like having this conversation isn't "your job." Does that matter?
- Perspective – You only know the student's side of the story.

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One Resolution:

You might let the student know that you have heard rumors about how these trips are perceived on professional school applications, and give some specific examples. You could also help the student connect with some admission representatives, so she can hear it directly from those who may be evaluating her application. Let the student know that you think it's great that she's had this experience, and let her know that you think it will enhance her application if she's able to address multiple sides of the issue.

How did your response compare to the one above?