



Cornell University

# **A Day in the Life of the Deans: Leading and Managing, Surviving and Thriving**

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# Outline

- Case Studies /Your Cases
- Debrief: What the Deans Learned
- Leadership Lessons
- Emerging Issues



# Case Guidelines

- Review the case on your table or provide your own
- Discuss the questions listed
- Prepare to share your proposed response and intractable problems with the large group
- Congratulate yourself that these cases would NEVER happen at your institution!



# To Guide Your Discussion...

- What is your initial (“gut”) response?
- What are the essential questions and issues you must identify and consider before responding?
- What information do you need? From whom?
- Are there Graduate School or University policies to guide your action/response?
- What are the pitfalls or mistakes you want to avoid?
- What steps will you take? What outcome do you want?



# Case 1: A Defense Postponed

Four days before his defense, a student is injured in his advisor's lab one night. Although he was not authorized to work alone in the lab, he was there, he said, because he feared failing his defense and wanted to do more experiments to help support his results. He immediately inquires of you what support, financial and otherwise, he should expect as a result of his accident and injuries.



## Case 2: Long Distance...Distance Enough?

A faculty member asks you for help with a student who is exhibiting inappropriate behavior while abroad doing field research. The student has had issues with authority in the past, including issues with this faculty member. The female faculty member believes that her gender is an issue for the student. The student's field research focuses on disease transmission in local women, and there are reliable reports that the student is jeopardizing the project through his inappropriate language and behavior.



## Case 3: Self-Plagiarizing Your Dissertation

A former student contacts you three years post-PhD to report that, after submitting her CV and list of accomplishments for her junior faculty annual review, she was accused of self-plagiarism in the two articles she published from her dissertation. She asks for your help in defending herself against these charges.



## Case 4: But He Said It Better...and I Agree With Him

A graduate student is accused of a violation of your school's honor code. Her professor submitted the take-home exam to a plagiarism detection site and discovered that all the answers were copied from one or more Internet sources. When asked, the student explained that the "internet authors express themselves better than I do. But I agree completely with what they wrote. These are my thoughts and answers, too."





## Case 5: The Yellow Rose of [insert school name]

An undergraduate tells you that her TA has sent her a dozen yellow roses, anonymously, with a poem. She is certain that it is him, “because of the way he looks at me in class.”



## Case 6: Cute As a Bunny

A second year graduate student meets with you to explain that her recent poor progress, resulting in several marks of Incomplete in courses for which she is finishing papers, is related to health problems that have recently and finally been correctly diagnosed and are being treated. Her concerns rest with her faculty instructors' response to her chronic illness. She reported that her (female) advisor said to her, "Do you think the faculty members don't believe you are very ill because you always look so pretty? You really are just as cute as a bunny."



## Case 7: Dissertation 101

Two years after one of your institution's humanities doctoral students received his degree you receive a letter from a scholar that begins, "I was delighted to discover a dissertation devoted to John Smith, whose work has not yet received the attention that I believe it deserves. Further, the author appears to have produced information not known to scholars in our field before. However, there appears to be some discrepancies between the new scholarship and some of the well-established information in history, chronology, and work of John Smith. I have written to Dr. Author three times but have received no response. Might you help me contact Dr. Author to learn more about the sources of information for his new scholarship?"



## Case 8: Mentor or Tormentor

A fifth-year doctoral student makes an appointment to speak with you about “a concern regarding a faculty member.” She refuses to give her name or department. But she proceeds to share that a faculty member in the department “abuses and humiliates” his students and lab manager. She is especially concerned about a second-year female student who recently gave a presentation of her research proposal to the department. Once back in the lab he told the student in front of her lab mates, both undergraduate and graduate students, “That is the worst presentation I’ve ever heard. You will give that presentation every day in our lab until I say it’s good enough.” The student in your office further reports, “He doesn’t see students as human beings. He has failed to notice that this student weighs 85 pounds; he’s just piling on her.” As the student is leaving your office, you ask, “He treats all his students this way, right?” She responds, “No, now that you mention it, it’s only the female students and lab manager.”



## Case 9: To Dismiss or Not To Dismiss

A first-year master's student nearing the end of his second semester in a two-year program has not shown the progress expected. His advisor has set deadlines and conveyed expectations, which the student has failed to meet. The Director of Graduate Studies and the advisor meet with the student to inform him that his active student status is being terminated at the end of the term. In response, the student reveals that during the winter break he had gender reassignment surgery and was not prepared for the physical and psychological recovery that the surgery required. The student is asking to remain in the program. The DGS contacts you for guidance.



## Case 10: How Much?

One of your doctoral students living in university housing has fallen behind in his rent. He's \$24,000 in arrears. The university housing office has taken him to court twice, he has promised to follow a court-ordered repayment plan, and then each time he failed to do so. Upon admission to the university he reported that he intended to bring his family (wife and five children) with him, so he was given the largest housing unit available to students. After more than two years, his family has not yet arrived to join him in your fair city. Currently you have no Graduate School policy that would encompass failure to pay rent as a violation.



## Case 11: After Hours

A student asks for your advice. In class last night, as students discussed an assigned article with the instructor/her advisor, she engaged in some “intellectual sparring” with the faculty member over the author’s intent in various passages. The instructor seemed increasingly irritated with her interpretations and questions, so she “backed off” in the discussion and sat mostly silent for the final hour of the class. When the class ended at 9:30 pm, her advisor asked her to stay after class and informed her that he didn’t appreciate her questioning him. Finally, as 10:30 pm approached (the room had been darkened to show slides and the lights had remained off for their almost hour-long conversation), her chair said, “We’d not be a good match, would we, because we have so many intellectual disagreements.”



## Case 12: Show Me Your Hands

A faculty member tells you that he is concerned about the welfare of one of his students that has not been in lab for 3 weeks. You reach out to the student and ask that he meets with you. Eventually, he agrees to. He arrives disheveled, unkempt, and seems despondent. He appears nervous, sometimes agitated, and awkwardly keeps both hands hidden inside his sweatshirt's front pocket the entire time. He refuses to go to the University Counseling Center. He leaves agreeing only to take information about counseling and other resources. After weeks of follow-up outreach (including from counselors, police, parents and faculty mentors), a required signature he needs from the Graduate School prompts him to return to your office. He wants to discuss how to remain a student.





## Case 13: What Is That Hovering Overhead?

A second year student requested a health leave of absence, and while on leave, her mother contacts you to request that her daughter's rent for her University apartment be reduced while her daughter is away on leave. She calls again asking you to contact her daughter's professors about her marks of incomplete. She calls again to request that her daughter's teaching assistantship be restored upon her return, which is dependent upon her finishing the incompletes and returning to good standing. The mother calls again... and again and again. Sometimes she calls to complain that you are not responding quickly enough to her emailed questions. The Director of Graduate Studies in this department tells you that she expects the student is much less interested in degree completion than her mother is.



## Case 14: The Ultimate Test

An international first-year Master's graduate student comes to your office very upset. He informs you that after time was "up" during a mid-term examination that the faculty quickly collected the exams from students. Because this student was at the end of the line, the faculty member accused him of cheating. The student is adamant that he didn't cheat, but instead was standing in a long line to turn in the exam. Furthermore, after class he went to talk with the faculty mentor about turning in the exam (which he still had). While doing this, he overheard the faculty mentor saying "awful" things about Chinese students and special privileges. He is very fearful and just wants to drop the course without retaliation.



## Case 15: A Third Chance?

A fourth-year doctoral student has been accused of violating the university's academic integrity code. Again. She was found guilty of failure to correctly cite and acknowledge the work of others in two courses in the second semester of her first year. After that finding, she has been accused of the same violation in her qualifying exams. After her first violation she was required to re-write the paper and to take an independent study with her advisor to understand and avoid plagiarism. She admits that she was extremely busy with multiple papers the week she was also writing her quals. She is terribly upset because of the shame her possible dismissal will bring to her family.



## Case 16: Give Me The Money

An advanced doctoral student reports that a faculty member is “abusing” her students. He shares examples that include requiring students to pay for research materials from their fellowship stipend to use in her lab, refusing to reimburse students for research expenses she previously said she would pay, and speaking critically about graduate students “behind their backs” to other students. He also mentions a student who left her PhD program unable to bear the abuse from the faculty member. In response, the faculty member now reports that she fears for her safety since dismissing the student from her lab.



## Case 17: A Misunderstanding?

You are asked to meet with a master's degree student to discuss a paper she submitted as her final project for the degree. Her chair returned the paper with extensive comments. The student refuses to revise the paper, declaring that the faculty holds a racial bias against her. This student leveled the same charge against two other instructors in each of her previous semesters in the program. Investigations are launched, and during each, she declares while being interviewed that she was misunderstood – she never meant to accuse a faculty member of bias. Now she has made a third charge and her advisor, understandably, wants nothing more to do with her.



## Case 18: Make Her Stop!

You have two longtime admissions staff members who share an office. It's a nice office with large windows and looks out over a plaza and garden. Neither of them wants to move, but they can't agree on whether the overhead fluorescent lights should be on or off. So their day is spent with one turning the lights off and within minutes the other turning the lights on. On and off. On and Off. On and off. On and off, interrupted only by each running into your office demanding, "Make her stop!"



## Case 19: Make Room for Tchotchkes

One day your university's mailroom workers come to you and announce they just delivered 42 boxes to one of your employees. They needed three workers with three mail carts. In the last week it's been 102 packages. They are concerned about both the packages' contents and the amount of increased work for their mailroom staff. You have noticed an increase in the number of small objects, stuffed animals, and dolls being displayed on the shelves in her office, which she shares with another staff member. Clearly, something extraordinary is going on.



## Case 20:

A master's student, charged with a violation of academic integrity, appears before the Graduate School's Hearing Board. His defense is that his fieldwork project was done in collaboration with other students, so he believed he could submit a project paper written by another student. He was found guilty (and allowed to write a new, original paper). He left his program without finishing his degree. Now his advisor reports seeing a posting on Facebook indicating he has "received his degree, with Honors, from your institution." He has not, and there is no Honors designation for graduate degrees at your school.





# What the Deans Learned

- What was the most difficult part of your case?
- Do your policies adequately address the issues we encountered?
- What are the common pitfalls we must avoid in responding to sensitive and challenging cases we manage?
- What strengths and skills did you find yourself using in managing your case?



# What the Deans Learned

- Do you ever use a strength to excess?
- Did you discover any blind spots or liabilities?
- Did you find yourself ever leaving the “center ring” for the “side show?”



# Lessons in Leading and Managing

- Each case has unique elements
- Multiple heads are better than one...synergy
- Define your role and identify scope of responsibilities
- These are people (not just cases)
- Focus on the center ring, not the side show



# Lessons in Leading and Managing

- Recognize and use different communication and conflict resolution styles
- “If you are called to defend yourself for having the knowledge you have, but did not do anything, would you be comfortable with the story being on the front page of....?”



# Emerging Issues in Graduate Education



# Thank You!

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