



**IUPUI**

## ***Proactive Advising***

### **An Ethics in Action Case Example**

#### **The Scenario:**

A student is meeting with their advisor to talk about their goal of attending medical school. In discussing how they might prepare for medical school, the student shares that they are planning to pursue a medical mission trip abroad because they “have always loved traveling” and it would be a great way to help “really poor people” at the same time. The advisor is concerned by the limited lens by which the student is viewing the community he would be serving, and feels obligated to begin a conversation about their concerns. On the other hand, the student is only in their first year of college, so there is plenty of time for things to change before the student actually would need to apply. Should the advisor start a very difficult conversation, or just assume that the student will gain perspective as he moves throughout his college career?

***Given what you know, what do you do?***

#### **Questions to consider:**

- Where are other places that the student might gain exposure to these issues? *Are there other places?*
- Is your role merely to advise, or is it to educate?
- What resources exist that might help the student gain a different perspective on these trips?
- What specific issues might you bring up with the student to help them reconsider their motives?
- Are there other experiences that you might encourage the student to pursue *before* they register for a trip?

#### **Some Tension Points:**

- Privilege – The student presents themselves as wanting to be helpful, but only acknowledges the other population in the conversation by their socioeconomic status.
- Motivation – The student’s primary motivation seems to be travel and adventure.
- Professional Role – Is it the advisor’s job to tell the student what their motivation *should* be? If the student is right, and the trip would enhance their medical school application, where is the advisor’s loyalty?
- Relationship with the Student – 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.
- Campus Politics – If the program has an affiliation with the university (sponsorships, alumni ties, etc.), what are the concerns about questioning its ethics?

## One Resolution:

Because it is an advisor's job to ask students questions, it is possible to gather more information about the student's goals without sounding like you are questioning their integrity, or giving them a lecture. Below is a list of questions you can ask to help a student think critically about the scenario from a different perspective, while still sounding like you have the student's best interests at heart (because, you do!):

- What part of the world do you hope to visit?
  - Why are you targeting that location?
  - What are some of the challenges you know that are facing that area?
- What kind of skills do you hope to be able to contribute to the cause?
  - What kind of skills do you think the people there truly need from "outsiders"?
- How do you think the people in that community feel about having so many strangers in their town?
- How will the cause continue to be supported after you leave?
- What do you think you will learn from the people there? (Note: *from the people* is important, not *from the trip*.)
- What kind of training are you going to receive before the trip?
- If you were planning the trip, what are some things you would plan to do. Why?
- How have you researched the organizations that lead these trips?
  - How will you choose which organization to go with?

After asking several of these questions, I think it's safe to say something like "This is really interesting to me, and I'm so glad you're willing to think critically about these issues. I've been doing some reading recently about how important it is to help, but to help in a way that doesn't hurt the people you're trying to help. I have a few articles (books, chapters, etc.) that I wonder if you'd be willing to review. I would love to know your thoughts – can we schedule another appointment to chat about it next week...?"

Hopefully, that helps you get the conversation started in a way that indicates curiosity and a partnership, and not judgment.

***How did your response compare to the one above?***