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Mentor Support?

Year

1999

Description

This case discusses issues of student-mentor relationship and it's responsibilities as it relates to advising.

Body

Part 1

Janet, a new graduate student, is excited at the opportunity to work with Dr. Edgar at Eastern University. After a few months at Eastern, Janet is disappointed. Not only is her adviser hard to contact, but he returns drafts of her thesis late with few helpful comments. Dr. Edgar has recently taken an administrative appointment as Associate Dean of Research and has become even less available. After repeated cancellations of meetings, Janet decides to continue working on her thesis on her own.

At the end of the semester, she thinks she is ready for her preliminary proposal meeting. Before turning the proposal over to her committee members, Janet gives a copy to Dr. Edgar to proof and make revisions. Dr. Edgar, who is quite busy with administrative work at the end of the semester, looks over the proposal quickly. Although he does notice a design flaw in Janet's study, he decides that it would be best for Janet to get the proposal to her committee members quickly. He returns the

proposal to Janet with relatively few revisions, and he does not mention the design flaw.

Janet makes the revisions and turns in copies of the proposal to Dr. Edgar and her other committee members. On the morning of her proposal meeting, Dr. Edgar stops by her office and hands her new revisions! She is surprised that he is giving her additional revisions, since he agreed earlier that the proposal was ready for the committee. Janet notices that one of the revisions includes a substantive comment about her design. Janet, worried, rushes to her adviser's office to discuss the revisions. Dr. Edgar reassures her that the design flaw is not serious. He says that he noticed it in her earlier draft and did not think the committee members would be concerned about the flaw. Relieved, Janet goes back to her office to prepare for the proposal meeting.

At the proposal meeting, one of her committee members, Dr. Olmstead, brings up the design flaw and says that there is no way she could accept the proposal in its present state. Dr. Edgar says that he told Janet to revise the flaw and that he is surprised that she did not make the needed changes! Janet is completely taken aback. There was no possible way for her to incorporate the changes in time for the meeting. The committee decides not to accept her proposal.

Discussion Questions

1. Janet was clearly led astray by Dr. Edgar's advice. Should he have told his colleagues about his role in Janet's proposal and defended her proposal in the meeting?

2. Does Dr. Edgar have an obligation to spend more time with Janet?

3. Should Janet confront Dr. Edgar about his treatment of the proposal and, more specifically, about his role as her adviser?

Part 2

Janet plans to revise her proposal. In a conversation with Tom, another graduate student who works in Dr. Edgar's research lab, she reports what happened in her proposal meeting. She finds out that a similar situation happened in Tom's proposal

meeting and that Dr. Edgar had told him that committee members do not look too closely at the proposals.

Concerned about her situation and the possibility that this experience may be repeated with future graduate students, Janet decides to talk to the head of the department, Dr. Rob Smith. Dr. Smith is dismayed at hearing how Dr. Edgar behaved at the meeting and of Janet's treatment while in the program and decides to speak to Dr. Edgar.

Discussion Questions

4. Should Janet have talked about her situation with others before talking to Dr. Edgar? What could this action mean in terms of her future research with Dr. Edgar?

5. Is it Janet's responsibility to protect future graduate students?

6. Is Dr. Edgar violating his professional responsibility to Janet?

7. What should Dr. Smith do? Does he have a responsibility to help Janet change advisers?

Notes

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