PASS

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

Disconnected Upper-Level Student Wants Advice

Purpose: This vignette highlights the challenges of students in upper-level coursework who feel disconnected.

Student Vignette: Michelle (a 21-year-old pre-med major) is in her third year of college. Her two closest friends were accepted into a nursing program at the end of their sophomore year and moved to another city to begin coursework over the summer. During the second week of classes this fall, she found out her boyfriend who she dated since high school had cheated on her and he moved out of their shared apartment. Her relationship with her mom is rocky and her dad passed away when she was in elementary school. Michelle feels lonely, isolated and anxious about the future. This is not what she had expected college to be like. She graduated high school as valedictorian but is now a B student. Early in the semesteer, she began going to bars with someone she met in class, but she now finds herself drinking regularly. You meet with her just after midterms and notice that she seems down. She shares what is happening, "I just feel lonely all the time." She recognizes that something needs to change and is open to trying new things.

Guiding Questions:

1. Have you encountered a situation like this? If so, briefly reflect on those experiences. How did you support the student? What approaches were beneficial? What approaches were less successful?

2. Describe the challenges is Michelle navigating? What are the key issues that need to be addressed to support Michelle before the semester ends? What resources exist on campus that may be helpful? What are her strengths that can be leveraged in this situation?

3. Given your role (e.g., academic advisor, program director, faculty, etc.), what might you do to support Michelle? What are some limitations in your current knowledge and skills in meeting Michelle's needs? What resources or opportunities can you connect her with on and off-campus?

4. Reflect on the concept of ecological validation. How could the norms framing student interactions (holistic, proactive, strengths-oriented, and developmental) and the work of educators (collaborative and reflective) be leveraged to support Michelle?

5. What policies and practices could be shifted to support students in a similar situation? What would need to happen to initiate change? Who would be involved in this process?