

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

Supporting a Student Balancing Family and Community Priorities

Purpose: This vignette highlights the experiences of a student who is attempting to balance family and community priorities with college expectations.

Student Vignette: Fatima is an 18-year-old social work major who plans to remain in the local community after completing college. During the first few classes, you learn that Fatima lives with her parents. Fatima's family actively participates in their church community where her father has a leadership role. She attends Bible study during the week and a full day of events each Sunday (morning, lunch, and evening services). When you meet with Fatima on a Wednesday around midsemester, you find that she is contemplating leaving school. She has a take home midterm due on Monday as well another midterm exam Tuesday morning, but she just found out that someone in her church community passed and the funeral is on Saturday. The women in the church coordinate events whenever a church member passes—including a dinner after the wake on Friday as well as a full day of events the day of the funeral, followed by regular church events on Sunday. Fatima does not know what to do. Her church and family are top priorities. She has not spoken to her professors because she is not sure if they will understand. After sharing her situation, she lowers her voice and reflects, "maybe college just is not for me."

Guiding Questions:

1. Have you encountered a similar situation? If so, briefly reflect on those experiences. How did you support the student? What approaches were beneficial? What approaches were less successful?
2. What might be next steps for Fatima? What resources exist on campus that may be helpful to her? What strengths does Fatima have that can be leveraged?
3. Given your role, what might you do to support Fatima? What are some limitations in your current knowledge and skills in meeting her needs? What resources or opportunities can you connect Fatima 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 Fatima?
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?