

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

First-Year Student With Physical Barriers Preventing Them from Attending

Purpose: This student vignette highlights how physical barriers can lead to various academic problems that may be unrecognized by advisors without deeper investigation.

Student Vignette:

Nico just got back from a rock climbing trip with his friends, where he fractured his tibia. He had a midterm the following day, and he knew he had to find a way to be there in person to take the exam. However, when he woke up in the morning, his leg was throbbing, and his roommate's car wouldn't start. He no longer had a ride to campus and could not walk over a mile on his crutches. Nico emailed his professor an hour before his exam, explaining the situation and asking whether there was another time he could take the exam or if he could take it from home. The professor assumed that Nico was lying, and didn't study enough to feel prepared for the exam. The professor responded that Nico would just have to take a zero on the exam and complete extra credit assignments to try to raise his grade before the end of the semester. Nico reached out to Student Disability Services, working with them to find another solution, as he believed his professor was being unfair. He also reaches out to you to support him in this process.

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 Nico is navigating. What are the key issues that need to be addressed to support Nico before the semester ends? What resources exist on campus that may be helpful? What are his 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 Nico? What are some limitations in your current knowledge and skills in meeting Nico's needs? What resources or opportunities can you connect him 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 Nico?
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??