

## Case Study – Progressing Through PCC

Mariana is currently in her second semester at PCC. This past week, two experiences have left her wondering again about whether or not she truly belongs in college. The first occurred during one of her classes. The second occurred when she got lost on her way to a meeting and asked assistance from someone who works at the college.

### Situation #1

From the Instructor's Perspective	From Mariana's Perspective
<p><i>At the end of Tuesday's class, I returned the first assignment to students. I don't know if I've ever had a group who, on the whole, did so poorly. I mean, I get it. This is a tough class. You will either sink or swim. And if you are going to swim, you need to be both academically ready and willing to work hard. That's how it was when I first started out as a student in this discipline, and it shouldn't be any different now.</i></p> <p><i>Anyway, there was a group of students who stayed behind after class to ask me about their assignment. To be completely honest, I had just moved through a very demanding day of meetings, class preparation, and teaching. I was tired and did not have a lot of energy left to offer them.</i></p> <p><i>To be fair, some of the individuals who hung back were the ones who clearly want to do well. They are the ones who sit near the front and pose thoughtful questions throughout class. And, when asking me about their assignment, these students had good/specific questions to ask. Some of the others, however, clearly don't get it. They are the ones who sit in the back and never speak up during class. These students asked vague questions when speaking with me about the assignment. For example, one student asked: "How can I improve?" I don't really think it's my job to hold her hand. She needs to figure out how to study; she's a college student.</i></p> <p><i>So, I told her to focus in class and take better notes, and that if she is still struggling after another class maybe she should drop the course. On the one hand I felt bad for this</i></p>	<p><i>During Tuesday's class, the instructor handed back our first assignment. It was a tough assignment, and I had really tried my best. I used my notes from class and even went to the library to try and use the reserved textbook. Unfortunately, it was already being used, and because of my work schedule I did not get a chance to go back to the Library before the assignment was due. Anyway, to make a long story short, I did not do well. I basically got a "D." At the end of class, I saw other students going up to ask the instructor questions about the assignment, and she seemed pretty cool with that happening. I decided to do the same. I just wanted to know if she had any advice for how I could do better. I waited for about 10 minutes, and was the last person to speak with her.</i></p> <p><i>The first thing I noticed as we started to talk was that she did not seem to know who I was. I had heard her say "Hi, Tyler," or "Hello, Xiao," when the prior students approached her, but this did not happen when I went up. Although I had not been previously thinking that she had favorites, maybe it was true since she spoke differently to all of the students ahead of me. Come to think of it, during class, the few students she does refer to by name are all of those who sit in the front row. I never sit in the front row because I am worried I will get called on when I don't know an answer.</i></p> <p><i>The second thing she did bothered me the most, though. After I asked her my question about what I could do to improve, she told me: "This is a difficult course, and students either sink or swim. You are going to have to figure out what it is you need to do to not sink." She then added: "Why don't you stick it out for another couple of classes and then decide what to do. If you don't think you are going to be able to make it then maybe you should drop before the add/drop deadline, so your transcript isn't impacted."</i></p>

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*student. On the other hand, if she doesn't learn to dig in and take care of herself, she'll never be prepared for the real world.*

*Even though I felt upset, I thanked her for her time and quickly left the classroom. Now, I am wondering whether or not I should drop this class. It sounded to me like the professor is not sure I have the smarts to do this class, and now I'm not sure either. If I drop, though, it might screw up my Ed Plan that the counselor gave me. And, if I can't do this class, maybe I won't be able to do any of the other ones that are still yet to come. I wish I had someone to talk to. I'm feeling super stressed right now, and I don't want to screw this up like I did at Citrus.*

### Situation #2

From the Staff Member's Perspective	From Mariana's Perspective
<p><i>Wednesday was not the greatest day in my office. We are always busy, but at about 10am that morning, a couple of additional pieces got added to our work plates. Unfortunately, they were not quick and easy tasks, and in addition to all of our other regular work, these pieces had to be attended to that day.</i></p> <p><i>Because our office is located off of a common corridor, it is not uncommon for students (or prospective students and their parents) to pop into our office for directions to some other part of campus. When I first started working in this office, this didn't really bother me. Now, that I have been here for a while, that feeling has changed. I find it quite frustrating to constantly have to stop my work to help students figure out where to go.</i></p> <p><i>This past Wednesday afternoon when I was frantically trying to get through all of the work that needed to be done, three different students came into our office for directions, all within the span of about 30 minutes. When the final one entered looking for some STEM meeting, I thought I was going to lose it. I probably wasn't the politest, but quite honestly...if I don't get my work done, I'll be in trouble.</i></p>	<p><i>On Wednesday, I wanted to go to a meeting to find out more information about a program at the college called MAS<sup>2</sup>. It's for Latin/x STEM students who are just starting out in community college. I thought I was in the right location but unfortunately, I was not. When I opened the door and went in, I found an office not a meeting space. There was a desk in front of me and the man sitting behind it raised his head and asked, "Can I help you?" I told him that I was looking for the MAS<sup>2</sup> meeting. He gave me an unwelcoming look and then kind of snapped back: "Clearly this is not the MAS<sup>2</sup> meeting."</i></p> <p><i>I probably should have just apologized and left the office, but I really wanted to find my meeting. I have not yet made many friends on campus, and I am determined to have my PCC experience be different than the one I had at Citrus.</i></p> <p><i>"Do you happen to know where this location is?" I asked as I showed him a copy of the flyer.</i></p> <p><i>"That's not even in this building," he stated sharply. "You need to go to the RED building."</i></p> <p><i>When I asked if that was next to the BLUE building, he replied: "I really don't have time for this. Here's a map. You should be able to figure this out yourself."</i></p> <p><i>I left feeling embarrassed and frustrated. I wondered to myself, "What's wrong with me? Why am I having so many problems here, when nobody else seems to be?"</i></p>

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With your partner, reflect on and then draft a response to the following questions.

1. What is happening in these situations for the instructor/staff member? For the student?
  
2. Why might the significance of these events be different for the instructor/staff member than for the student?
  
3. Have you ever wondered if similar situations have inadvertently occurred in your classroom or office? If yes, what are some of the things you could do to find out more about this, and/or address it? If you have not wondered about this, what are some of the things you might suggest to a colleague who is wondering about this...and who wants to do something to address it?
  - a. What are two actions I could take to find out more about whether this is happening in the spaces where I work (e.g., classroom, office, etc.)?
  
  - b. What are two actions I could take to ensure students avoid having an experience like the ones Mariana described?