Case Study Report – Student Perspective

Many of the challenges between faculty and (international) students are largely due to miscommunication. This case study report presents problems and possible solutions from the perspective of the student.

Case Study: A Question of Interpretation
(From Unit 1, Cultures In Contrast: Student Life at U.S. Colleges and Universities, Myra Shulman)

I. Statement of the Problem
   a. Definition: Mei, an international student from China, is studying for a B.A. in Computer Science at a large west coast university. She is having trouble in several of her college courses because her English language skills are not high enough. She failed her midterm exams. Unless she can show improvement in her class participation and written work, she is in danger of failing the course.

   b. Analysis: Because of Mei’s shyness and fear of being laughed at by her peers for her poor pronunciation skills, she will not speak up in class, nor will she admit to having difficulty understanding what people are saying to her. This is causing problems because she refuses to participate or spend the time needed to improve her writing. Miscommunication between the student and the professor has caused Mei even more stress and discouragement, resulting in her missing more classes and falling behind on her coursework.

II. Possible Solutions
   1. Mei can give up on the class and receive a failing grade.
   2. Mei can seek outside support through friends, faculty, counselors and/or family.
   3. Mei can work on addressing the problems she is having and look for practical solutions to help her succeed in this class and other classes.

I. Evaluation of possible solutions
   a. Solution 1: Mei can give up on the class and receive a failing grade.
   i. Advantages: While it is a short-term solution, if Mei gives up on the class, she can spend the remaining two weeks focusing on her other classes, assuming that they are not intensive writing classes or classes that require intensive participation.
   ii. Disadvantages: Giving up on this class may have an even greater emotional toll on Mei than if she had tried her best to pass it. She could have focused on things she could control, such as stepping outside of her comfort zone and trying to speak up more, attending classes, and working on her writing skills in the time she had left.

b. Solution 2: Mei can seek outside support through friends, faculty, counselors and/or family.
   i. Advantages: Mei has deeper emotional issues that need to be addressed. The miscommunication between her and her professor, her lack of motivation to attend class or complete assigned work, and her failure to take responsibility for improving her performance in class all point towards problems that need to be addressed.
ii. **Disadvantages:** This will not solve the current situation of her failing her class.

c. **Solution 3. Mei can work on addressing the problems she is having and look for practical solutions to help her succeed in this class and other classes.**

i. **Advantages:** Mei needs practical useful strategies for working on her writing skills. She needs to harness techniques to help her with her pronunciation and listening comprehension abilities because her English class isn’t the only class she is having trouble in. If she is having trouble with comprehension and speaking up in class in one class, odds are she is facing these same issues in her other classes. If she doesn’t figure out a way to solve them, she will face the same situation over and over again.

ii. **Disadvantages:** It will be time consuming and require an intense amount of commitment on her part.

II. **Selecting a Solution**

a. **Choice:** Solution 3 - Mei can work on addressing the problems she is having and look for practical solutions to help her succeed in this and her other classes.

b. **Justification:** Mei’s main problem is that she is ignoring the issues that have caused her to receive a failing grade on her midterm. She knows she should rewrite her papers and consult the professor to get the comments on her papers explained, but she has not. It was also her decision to “not care about English” anymore. Professors cannot be expected to know that their students do not understand what others are saying or the reasons why they have chosen not to participate in class. However, teachers have a responsibility towards their students to help them in any feasible way. Ms. Kramer treated Mei as though she was just choosing to not speak up in class and called on her more, which annoyed her and caused her to feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. Ms. Kramer should have pulled Mei aside in private when she noticed Mei was not participating in class instead of calling on her more. She also didn’t demonstrate enough respect towards Mei by making remarks to her while her classmates were present. Mei needs to work on developing skills to help her improve her language skills. The only reasonable way that can happen is if she steps out of her comfort zone and risks a little embarrassment to improve her class performance in order to make progress.
Case Study Report – Faculty Perspective

Many of the challenges between faculty and (international) students are largely due to miscommunication. This case study report presents problems and possible solutions from the perspective of the faculty member.

Case Study: A Question of Interpretation
(From Unit 1, Cultures In Contrast: Student Life at U.S. Colleges and Universities, Myra Shulman)

I. Statement of the Problem
a. Definition: Ms. Kramer teaches an advanced English course. She is having difficulty with an international student in her class named Mei Chang. Mei is a sophomore computer science student who is required to take Ms. Kramer’s class as an elective to graduate. Mei is doing poorly in the class and rarely participates in class discussions. Ms. Kramer has noticed Mei’s lack of participation and repeatedly calls on her. Mei never goes to Ms. Kramer’s office hours. Half way through the semester, Ms. Kramer conducted written and oral evaluations with each of her students. During her meeting with Mei, she informed her that she had a C- average in the course and that she needed to put more effort into her English. After the meeting, Mei began to stop attending classes and submitting assignments.

b. Analysis: Ms. Kramer noticed Mei’s lack of participation in class, and made the decision to call on Mei more often. Ms. Kramer was unaware that constantly calling on Mei made her feel that she was being picked on and singled out. Ms. Kramer’s comments during the mid-term evaluation with Mei demoralized her because while she was trying to help Mei, she made assumptions that the reason Mei was doing poorly was due to lack of effort and failure to complete the assigned homework. In addition, Ms. Kramer put the onus on the student to figure out how the professor could help her succeed by asking her what she could do to help and how she could encourage her to participate more in class. Ms. Kramer also missed the clear indicator that Mei was not aware of what she needed to do to improve. Another mistake Ms. Kramer made was that she was unaware that she embarrassed the student by making comments about her academic performance while there were other classmates present. There was also a definite miscommunication between what Ms. Kramer said versus what Mei understood.

II. Possible Solutions
Office Hours: Many international students are unaware of the customs and practices relating to office hours in the U.S. Often, professors take for granted that students from different cultures easily adapt to practices in American universities. One way that professors can address this issue early on without singling out students is to require students to come to office hours during the first few weeks of class. They will learn where the professor’s office is, and the professor can learn their names. If your class is large, get your TA to meet students during office hours too. Students who have made a first visit are much more likely to visit again.
Lack of participation by the student: Because of language proficiency or unfamiliarity with American classroom culture, some students from other countries feel stressed and frustrated at the practice of class participation. As a result, they do not feel comfortable speaking up in class. To bridge this gap with international students, instructors could adopt certain strategies: avoid using colloquialisms, use different types of visual aids, and summarize important points of the discussions.

Feedback to Students: Consider both intellectual and emotional perspectives when commenting on a student’s work. Think about how you feel when you receive criticism, even when it is constructive. Oftentimes, students are emotionally attached to their submitted work, and criticism could feel like a personal attack. Start with a positive point about the student’s work to motivate the student, and let them know they are on the right track. Be specific and always ask yourself if this feedback will help the student improve their skills. Don’t just write “good” without explaining why something was “good” or how it could be made better. They need to understand what was good (or unclear, awkward, or illogical) about their work before they can duplicate (or fix) it. This will also make your feedback more valuable. Also, students need specific suggestions on how to improve.