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The University of Cicerone & Matthew College

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The University of Cicerone & Matthew College

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Dean Jones of Matthew College is a former counseling professor who is interested in creating an exchange partnership for the graduate students in the counseling program to study at an Italian institution of higher education. One of Dean Jones' research interests is internationalization of counselor education and the counseling profession. As a result of this interest, and coupled with a growing interest identified by professional counseling organizations and program accreditation bodies to expand counselor education training and practice internationally, Dean Jones is exploring study abroad partnership possibilities in Italy.

Matthew College is a medium-sized public university located on the East Coast. The counseling program at Matthew College accepts approximately 30 students each year for its master's programs and 5 students each year for its doctoral program. The program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), a national accrediting body for counselor education programs. Due to the program's CACREP accreditation,

specific courses are required in each program of study; these courses are designed to address competency objectives identified by CACREP.

Dean Jones has a friend and colleague, Professor Marzia, who is an Italian vocational counseling and psychology professor at the University of Cicerone. The University of Cicerone is a large public university in Italy that enrolls approximately 200 individuals in its assessment and counseling degree programs. The university offers master's degrees in assessment and counseling, with a focus on vocational counseling. The program is not governed by an accreditation body, although in response to the Bologna Process, the university has standardized its credit system to align with other European institutions.

Professor Marzia is interested in exploring a possible study abroad partnership with Matthew College and Dean Jones; however, he has several concerns. First, English is not a language commonly spoken by the Italian population; therefore, Italian students may not be able to travel abroad. Dean Jones comments that the language barrier may also prevent the students from working together in

small groups, as collaboration is not a common form of instruction at the University of Cicerone. Further, the language barrier may prohibit students from interacting with one another with a common vocabulary of professional language. Specifically, in the context of vocational counseling, terms such as mental health, career, goals, and collaboration may not be recognized between students.

As Dean Jones continues planning for a successful partnership of study abroad experiences with the University of Cicerone, Professor Marzia wonders how the credit system will be equated between the two universities. The University of Cicerone does not utilize the American system for offering course credit, nor does it utilize similar structures of instruction for its courses. Professor Marzia wishes to provide a meaningful yet fair experience for the students from Matthew College, but does not understand how course credit could be offered with an incompatible system.

Although both Dean Jones and Professor Marzia are dedicated to establishing a partnership between their two institutions, aligning the interests of each is difficult. Although Matthew College is committed to internationalization, the administration at Cicerone has reservations. Bureaucracy further slows this process as many administrators are hesitant to establish a partnership and do not see the value in establishing international relationships. Student exchanges are expected to be equal between institutions, especially concerning financial resources. Because of the differences in tuition between the American and Italian systems, creating

equal exchanges will be difficult.

Dean Jones seeks the support of his faculty to explore the possibilities of an academic sequence for the proposed program. Along with Professor Marzia, they select a committee of faculty at each institution to steer the development of a potential course of studies for master's-level counselors. The first issue they encounter during this dialogue is the lack of a term for counseling in Italian. As the professors and faculty members continue to explore what a course of studies might look like, further issues are uncovered that highlight the differences in orientation to education between the two systems. A primary challenge is found in creating coursework offerings that meet the needs of each training program. While faculty in Matthew College's program emphasize experiential and practical teaching and learning experiences, the faculty at Cicerone prioritize lecture-based theoretical knowledge as key to the development of counselors. A second challenge is identified in selecting course materials, as the language limitations of students in both programs make the text selection process a complex undertaking.

Additional concerns are raised by faculty members at both institutions regarding the core tenets of training required by each location's licensing agency. Because CACREP guides the course offerings and learning outcomes of Matthew College's program, a further concern is raised about the adherence of the Italian course offerings to these standards. Prior to adjourning, the committee decides that the use of a

comprehensive exam would meet the needs of both programs to measure learning outcomes, although the type of exam becomes an issue of further contention. Following these discussions, the faculty members express frustration at the overwhelming complexity of developing this program. Nonetheless, both groups of faculty continue to identify the great benefits of being able to make this program a reality for students, particularly with the growing interest in internationalization of counselor education and counseling.

Student access is also a concern for this exchange partnership. Funding is a challenge, especially for students with lower socio-economic status. Students with visual, motor, or cognitive disabilities may also have difficulties in participating in the exchange. Appropriate instructional materials need to be developed for students with visual, motor, or other impairments. Of additional concern are the challenges concerning cultural differences; the differences between Italy and the United States can be challenging for students studying abroad in either country for a variety of reasons.

Although there are many challenges presented in the collaboration efforts of Dean Jones and Professor Marzia, a successful program between the universities could be valuable for students from both institutions. Matthew College and the University of Cicerone plan to continue to seek appropriate solutions to the differential structures within the two existing programs in order to create globalized learning opportunities. They decide that the

best place to begin is to find novel solutions to the most pressing issues of implementation.

Questions

1. What are the benefits associated with the internationalization of the counseling programs at each institution? What are the possible risks and liabilities of this?
2. In what ways does the language barrier impact aspects of the planning, implementation, and assessment of the students' experiences in this program? How might these challenges be managed?
3. In what ways do educational values of each culture impact the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning activities? How might these challenges be managed?
4. What challenges do faculty face in implementing this program? What solutions might you propose to make this program manageable for faculty and beneficial for students?
5. What student support issues are identifiable in this situation? How might faculty at each institution plan for and manage issues of student support before, during, and after participation in the program?
6. In what ways might the faculty promote equal access for all students to this opportunity? What challenges prevent this and how might faculty plan to address these concerns?
7. Overall, how might each institution promote this experience to faculty members

who may be apprehensive about or opposed to changing the program and student composition of their classes?

What might be the arguments faculty would give for not wanting to take on this task? What counterarguments would you offer in response?

About the Authors

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