CASE STUDY: Terry and Anna

Teaching Assistant (Terry)

Terry, the Instructor, administered an exam last week. Terry is one of four Instructors teaching the same course and they have all been instructed to cover the same material and utilize the same exams. A few students stopped by Terry's office in the days following the exam to express concern about their difficulty with the exam. Since then, Terry graded the exam and plans to return them to the 40+ students today.

At the beginning of class, Terry returns the exams and there is much talking and grumbling among the students. Many of the students did not do very well. A few students ask Terry questions about the exam and in particular ask when and where (e.g., during lecture, text, etc.) the material was covered. The questions coming from the students are in a very angry and frustrated tone.

Terry thinks it may be appropriate to consider making adjustments (e.g., lower the weight of the exam, throw out some of the more controversial questions, allow the students to earn extra credit, etc.) to address the concerns but says only, “I’d like some time to think about the questions you’ve raised. Now, however, it’s important to move on to the material planned for today.” The questions took more time than Terry expected and getting through material planned for today is Terry’s main concern. The last thing Terry wants to do is utilize more class time to discuss the exam. Another concern of Terry’s is whether it is even feasible to make any adjustments for the students in this class, given that other students in other sections took the same exam.

One student, Anna, does not want to move on to new material and keeps asking questions about the exam and continues to express her disapproval of specific questions on the exam. Terry started to feel angry because Anna's behavior seemed disrespectful and inappropriate. Terry does move on to other material and ignores Anna, even though Anna is visibly upset and continues to talk loudly to students around her and be disruptive.

After the class Terry is very angry about Anna’s behavior and considers obtaining information about policies for dealing with disruptive students. Terry wonders about ways for dealing with Anna, and the situation in general during the next class period.
CASE STUDY: Terry and Anna

Undergraduate Student (Anna)

Anna is an undergraduate student at Boulder and is discussing with her roommate a problem she had with Terry, one of her instructors, today. Anna describes Terry, as a pretty good lecturer and says that she really has learned from Terry. The problems arose a couple weeks prior to the first exam.

Terry seemed really concerned about time and covering enough material. Terry was impatient with student’s questions and just flew through the lectures. Terry’s is one of several sections, and it is Anna’s understanding that one exam has been developed for all of the sections. Anna suspects that Terry was trying to get through all of the material already covered on the exam and cared more about not having to re-write the exam than teaching students sufficiently. When students asked specific questions about the exam Terry assured everyone that the exam would be straightforward and if they studied their notes and did the readings they shouldn’t have any trouble.

After the exam Anna felt she hadn’t done very well and was very angry Terry had not done a better job of preparing the class – and she spoke to many other students who felt the same way. Anna went to Terry’s office a couple days after the exam to discuss the exam and Terry was very nice and said that he would discuss the exam in class after he returned them to the students in about a week.

As promised, Terry did return the exams but he would not take very much time to discuss the exam. Many students expressed concern about the exam, including Anna. Terry started out by addressing questions from students but then became angry, particularly at Anna, and all of a sudden said that he wouldn’t take any more time for questions and would consider the students concerns.

Anna is willing to take the grade she received for this exam but wants to discuss strategies for better preparing for the next exam (e.g., study sessions, worksheets from Terry, etc.). Anna is really angry that Terry won’t even talk with the students about the issue. Anna feels that she has become the spokesperson for the class because she is older than the other students and several students approached her after class.