

Vignette #1: A Day in the Life of Markus

Introduction

Meet Markus, a 21-year-old junior majoring in Middle Level Math Education at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). He recently pledged Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Incorporated, a historically African American fraternity known for its commitment to scholarship, leadership, and service. Markus is the first member of his family to attend college and he has taken on quite a bit of student debt to achieve his dream of graduation. While Markus excels academically and socially, he has little knowledge about labor unions and their significance.

Morning

Markus wakes up at 7:00 AM to the sound of his fraternity brother's cheerful greeting. Living in the Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Incorporated house has its perks, including a strong sense of brotherhood and support. Another benefit is that the housing provides security and shelter that other off campus solutions in the pricey housing market just can't offer. He gets ready quickly, donning his fraternity apparel proudly, and heads to the dining hall for breakfast.

Over breakfast, Markus chats with his fraternity brothers about their plans for the day. He's particularly excited about today's math education seminar, where he'll be presenting a lesson plan he's been working on for weeks.

Classes and Campus Life

Markus's first class is Calculus II, taught by Dr. Johnson, a professor who has become a mentor to him. This is the first time that Markus has had a teacher AND mentor that look like him. Dr. Johnson's teaching style is engaging and interactive, which reaffirms Markus' decision to pursue a career in education. Today, they dive into complex integrals, and Markus participates actively, asking questions and solving problems on the board. Between classes, Markus heads to the student center, a bustling hub of activity. He bumps into a friend who's involved in the campus student union, and they talk about the upcoming career fair. Top of Markus' mind is to make this investment translate into economic stability after graduation. Markus' friend, who attends the 10-minute meetings at the public elementary school that they both attend for their practicum course, mentions the importance of understanding workers' rights and suggests going together next week. Markus is intrigued but realizes he knows little about unions.

Late Afternoon

After his seminar, Markus heads to the Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Incorporated house for a chapter meeting. They discuss their upcoming community service project and events promoting academic excellence.

Later, Markus has a tutoring session at a nearby middle school, where he assists students in math. The experience is both challenging and rewarding, as he helps students grasp difficult concepts and sees their confidence grow. He realizes the importance of supporting aspiring black male educators and providing them with the resources they need.

Vignette #2: Dr. Arthur Johnson's Story

Introduction

Meet Dr. Arthur Johnson, a dedicated math professor at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). He has been teaching at the university for over fifteen years and is highly respected by both his colleagues and students. One of his students is Markus, a junior majoring in Middle Level Math Education taking Dr. Johnson's Calculus II course. Despite his passion for teaching and his commitment to his students, Dr. Johnson is grappling with an overwhelming course load imposed by the administration. Additionally, he just had a pre-retirement meeting with his financial planner and is learning that because he does not have a pension plan other than is 403 B with the University, his dreams of retiring in good health and comfortably are slipping away.

Morning

Dr. Johnson starts his day at 5:00 AM, preparing for his classes with meticulous care. He reviews his lecture notes and ensures that the day's material is clear and engaging. Teaching Calculus II is one of his favorite parts of the job, especially with students like Markus, who are eager to learn and participate actively in class discussions.

As he heads to his first class, Dr. Johnson feels a familiar sense of exhaustion. The projector connecting his well prepared materials to the worn smart board is broken again. There are no white erase markers to use as a plan B, and even if they were – the finish on the 30 year old white boards makes them nearly unreadable. The heavy course load and lack of materials is taking a toll on him. He has asked for a Graduate Student to support the added work load, but the department chair said that there is no money in the budget for that. He is teaching five courses, advising several students, and serving on multiple committees. Despite his dedication, the strain is evident.

Teaching and Campus Life

In Calculus II, Dr. Johnson works hard to maintain his energy and enthusiasm. Today's topic is complex integrals, and he uses real-world examples to make the material relatable. Markus and his classmates are engaged, asking questions and solving problems on the board. Dr. Johnson's passion for math and teaching shines through, even as fatigue lingers in the background.

Between classes, Dr. Johnson attends a departmental meeting. The department chairs and deans reiterate the need for faculty to take on larger course loads and do more with less. They emphasize that this is a necessary sacrifice for the benefit of Black students who have historically been marginalized and underserved. "We are family," they say, justifying the overwhelming demands placed on faculty in the name of community and solidarity.

Afternoon

After the meeting, Dr. Johnson returns to his office to catch up on grading, student advising, and office hours. Dr. Johnson is always willing to help his students, but he can't help but feel stretched thin. He wants to give each student the attention they deserve, but the sheer volume of his responsibilities makes it difficult. As the afternoon progresses, Dr. Johnson receives emails from several colleagues expressing similar concerns about their workloads. Several of them attended a professional forum at a well-endowed and well-funded state university nearby. There has been some talk of seeking employment elsewhere amongst the group. They feel the pressure of the administration's expectations and are struggling to balance their professional and personal lives. The "we are family" mantra starts to feel more like a burden, another micro-aggression, than a supportive sentiment.

Vignette #3: Maya's Story

Introduction

Meet Maya, a 21-year-old junior majoring in Middle Level Math Education at a prestigious Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Maya is not only a dedicated student but also an active member of the campus student union. She is well-versed in workers' rights and passionate about advocacy, often attending meetings and events that focus on improving conditions for both students and staff. Her parents worry that her open activism will put her at risk in her studies and her future. Showing up and showing out comes with risks. Her commitment and leadership have earned her the trust and respect of her classmates, including her good friend Markus.

Morning

Maya starts her day at 6:00 AM with a quick workout at the campus gym. After a refreshing run, she heads to the dining hall for breakfast. She spots Markus at a table in between classes, already deep in his textbooks. She grabs her meal and joins him, greeting him with a warm smile.

"Ready for another busy day?" she asks, knowing that both of them have a packed schedule of classes, practicum sessions, and extracurricular activities.

Classes and Campus Life

Maya and Markus walk together to their first class, Calculus II, taught by the esteemed Dr. Arthur Johnson. Both students admire Dr. Johnson's dedication, despite knowing about the overwhelming workload he carries. During the lecture, Maya actively participates, solving problems on the board and engaging in discussions. Maya was asked by the Math Department to serve as a Graduate Student instructor, but the position was without pay. It was pitched as "a great opportunity to round out a resume." She is already doing her teaching practicum and that is a huge unpaid load of work already.

After class, they head to the student center, where Maya has a brief meeting with the student union. She's organizing an information booth for the upcoming career fair and is excited to share the details with Markus.

"Hey, Markus, are you coming to the career fair?" she asks as they leave the meeting room. "We're going to have a lot of great organizations, and I'll be at the student union booth discussing workers' rights and union benefits."

Afternoon

In the afternoon, Maya and Markus head to their practicum session at a local middle school. Maya is particularly excited about today's lesson plan, which focuses on making math fun and accessible for their students. During a break, she takes the opportunity to talk to Markus about the importance of understanding workers' rights.

"You know, Markus, I've been attending these 10-minute meetings that my coaching teacher has in her room," she begins. "It's really eye-opening. I think it's something we should all be aware of, especially as future educators."

Markus listens intently as Maya explains how labor unions advocate for fair wages, better working conditions, and professional development opportunities. She shares how these meetings have helped her understand the power of collective action and the importance of standing up for one's rights.

Vignette #4: Alex's Story

Introduction

Meet Alex, a two-spirited Indigenous person working as a cafeteria employee at an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI). Alex is known for their dedication, hard work, and the respect they command among their colleagues. Despite working in a right-to-work state where collective bargaining is illegal, Alex has always advocated for fair treatment and solidarity among the staff. Recently, a new manager has started to micromanage the employees and is attempting to introduce mandatory overtime, creating tension and uncertainty in the workplace.

Morning

Alex starts their day at 5:30 AM, preparing for another busy shift at the college cafeteria. They take pride in their work, knowing that their efforts help provide nutritious meals to students and staff. Alex arrives early to ensure everything is set up for breakfast, greeting their coworkers with a warm smile and a few encouraging words. As the cafeteria doors open, Alex seamlessly coordinates the morning rush, serving students with efficiency and care. Despite the fast pace, they always find time to check in on their colleagues, making sure everyone is managing well and offering support where needed.

Mid-Morning Break

During a mid-morning break, Alex gathers with a few colleagues in the staff room. The conversation quickly turns to the new manager's recent actions. The manager has been micromanaging every aspect of their work, from how they arrange the food stations to how quickly they complete their tasks. This has led to a noticeable drop in morale.

"I heard they're planning to introduce mandatory overtime," says one colleague, worry evident in their voice. "I can't afford to spend more time here; I have a family to take care of." A number of others also talk about their need to get to their second or third jobs. The cost of health insurance, inflation, safe transportation, and housing rise in the room.

Alex listens attentively, feeling a growing sense of responsibility. They know that without the ability to engage in collective bargaining, organizing the staff to stand together is more important than ever.

Afternoon

As the lunch rush begins, Alex remains a pillar of strength for their team. They continue to provide excellent service while discreetly discussing the manager's new policies with their coworkers. Alex emphasizes the importance of unity and standing up for their rights, even in a right-to-work state.

Later, Alex notices the manager scrutinizing every detail of their work, causing additional stress. During this time, the manager continually refers to Alex using "he" and "him". Despite the pressure and the manager continuously ignoring their pronoun corrections, Alex maintains their composure and silently resolves to address the situation constructively.

Vignette #5: Professor Riley's Story

Introduction

Meet Professor Riley, an adjunct professor at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Professor Riley is a white person who has been teaching at the university for three years without any raise in pay despite taking on more and more responsibilities traditionally handled by the tenure track professors. Raised in an anti-union household, they have always been skeptical about unions and their role in the workplace. Riley is known for their kindness and friendliness toward students, faculty, and staff. However, their lack of cultural competency sometimes hinders their effectiveness in engaging with the predominantly Hispanic student body. Riley dreams of becoming a full-time faculty member at the university.

Morning

Professor Riley begins their day at 7:00 AM, preparing for the first lecture of the day. They take great care in crafting their lesson plans, eager to deliver engaging and informative classes. On the way to campus, Riley greets the cafeteria staff and janitors warmly, exchanging pleasantries and smiles.

As Riley enters the classroom, they are greeted by a sea of eager faces. Many of their students are first-generation college students from Hispanic backgrounds. While Riley's lectures are well-organized and thorough, they sometimes miss the mark in connecting with their students' cultural experiences and perspectives. Adjuncts like Professors have a high percentage of their employee evaluations tied to student surveys. Without any clear employee protections, these evaluations are a barrier to Riley's dreams.

Classes and Campus Life

In today's Sociology 101 class, Riley discusses social stratification. They use examples and references that are more familiar to their own upbringing and cultural background, inadvertently alienating some of their students. Despite this, Riley's approachable demeanor encourages students to participate and ask questions. After class, a few students stay behind to seek additional help. One student, Maria, expresses her confusion about a concept that was discussed. Riley patiently explains it again but misses an opportunity to relate it to Maria's cultural context.

Afternoon

During lunch, Riley joins a group of colleagues in the faculty lounge. The conversation shifts to the ongoing discussions about forming an adjunct faculty union. Some of the adjunct professors express their frustrations with job insecurity, low pay, and lack of benefits. Riley listens but remains silent.

A colleague, Professor Martinez, notices Riley's hesitation and strikes up a conversation. "You know, Riley, I was skeptical about unions too, but I've seen how they can advocate for fair treatment and better conditions for everyone, especially for adjuncts like us."

Riley nods politely but remains unconvinced. They change the subject to their aspirations of becoming a full-time faculty member, expressing hope that their dedication and hard work will eventually be recognized.