

**Session:** A problem for my solution

**Aim of session:** The aim of the panel is to acknowledge the importance of effective communication, good listening skills and empathy towards any applicants for any program, but also practicing creative thinking in finding solutions for difficult problems and situations.

**Material needed:** articles about effective communication to be discussed and used as a basis for discussion during the panel

**Time of session:** 2h

**Description of session:** Each higher education institution has a group of international students who are either studying full-time or visiting for a short period of time. It is necessary to lead them during the registration process and give them all information that might be needed. It is important that staff responsible for incoming students realize how important some abilities are to make this process possible:

- Effective communication that leads to understanding
- Listening skills
- Using language both parties understand
- Face-to-face contact
- Understanding age barriers
- Appreciation and respect for the listener/speaker

Being given a huge amount of procedures, the administrative staff can prepare incoming students for what they will face during the studies they plan to begin, including registration, needed documents, legal stay, information about possible accommodation, etc. Still, it is obvious that students face different problems which are not connected to education, but to other aspects of living for a longer period in a different country, like health issues or lack of finances. It happens that students are a party of a difficult situation as the ones who cause the tension/misunderstanding/conflict.

Problems connected to daily life such as health (where can I go to get the treatment? Will my insurance be enough?) or finances (any scholarships or discounts, what happens if I will not pay?) are possible to solve with only basic assistance of staff, such as giving information, showing legal procedures that might help or just clearing the student what is possible or not.

When we think of “difficult situations” we focus on issues which are connected to the students but are not foreseen in the staff’s declared responsibilities. That kind of problems usually touch the sphere of emotions, family/relationships issues, even of being involved in legal actions. There is a variety of situations where students might need help and if there is trust towards the administration, the interested one will contact the staff members as those who usually help or give advice.

Each staff member of the administration in charge of international students stay at the institution needs to decide, how far they are able to involve themselves in students’ affairs. Each person has its own limits and no one should force to change, if there is no such will. But if there is a possibility and knowledge of how to support the student in his/her untypical situation, there should be an action. It is also necessary

to acknowledge that usually the international student is alone in a foreign country and might not be aware of how serious the issue is and what the consequences of his/her behaviour are. Even if it is obvious that student has caused some serious damage or led to dangerous situation, assistance of administration staff might be needed to move forward some legal procedures or even to clear the situation between parties involved.

It is a big responsibility to interact with students and cross the regular bound of administration's responsibilities. Being helpful does not stand against being assertive though. But knowing that anything can happen to each student we are in touch with might increase the awareness of how much support they need. It is crucial to prepare the students for their studies/mobility – to inform about their rights and obligations towards the university, the city and the society. Assisting the students and helping to solve their problems is something that in time might be organized and formed into new procedures due to the experience the staff members get. The key to solve the majority of problems is to remember about a person behind each case discussed and keeping in mind that everyone needs help and assistance from time to time and that we all make mistakes and hopefully learn from them.

**Other notes:** The session should refer to case studies, provide examples and refer to different experience of the participants regarding the above mentioned issues.