Case Study Discussion

Guidelines:
Use the following questions as a guide. Choose a spokesperson from your group.

1. What would you do in this situation, if anything?
2. What is your responsibility as a professor, teacher, and/or advisor?
3. How is it a teaching moment for you? How is it a learning moment for your students?
4. What is the impact of your decision as a teacher?

SCENARIO #1: As you walk into class (it’s a full classroom), a student discussion is ongoing; a student loudly sums up her position: “Obama isn’t really black—he’s smart, he’s not angry, and he’s better educated than our previous president. That’s why he got elected!”

Reveal #1: After addressing the issue (in the way you as a group decided to address it), a student raises his hand and calmly says, “aren’t you making too much of a big deal about this? I mean, this nation just re-elected a black president. And the fact that he’s black actually helped him get elected. Can’t we start getting past all this white privilege stuff and talk openly about how we feel?”

Reveal #2: After class, a group of students of color gather outside the door talking about the class discussion. “Some people just don’t get it!” says one student, in a tone that indicates the comment is meant for humorous effect—and the whole group bursts out laughing.

SCENARIO #2:

Your advisee, a second-semester African American sophomore, comes to your office hours to discuss her choices for a Major. During your conversation, it comes up that she is feeling a bit overwhelmed keeping up with her classes. She mentions that her involvement in extracurricular activities takes up a lot of time, especially with the Black Student Union, but she adds, “It’s really important to me. I learn so much about race and racial politics at Holy Cross at our events.”

REVEAL #1: As you discuss her time management issues, classes, and student life at Holy Cross, it becomes clear that all of her ideas about diversity at Holy Cross and more generally in society comes from her casual conversations with friends and through BSU events, campus sponsored fishbowls, and the like.

REVEAL #2: She suggests that while these activities and the friendships that spring from them are important, it is not easy. She remarks casually, “After all, it’s not like we are all the same. There’s, like, such a huge difference between a kid from the south side of Chicago or even Mattapan or some prep schooler or someone who grew up in the suburbs in Jersey.”
Scenario #1 –
- What is our responsibility as faculty, teachers, etc.?
- Important to engage in the conversation if it fits with ongoing classroom discussions
- Don’t let it go – use as a teachable moment
- Ask in the moment for students to catch professor up on discussion
- Ask students to take a moment to think about conversation on own – possibly through writing exercise – before speaking as a faculty member.
- Important to consider whether all students want to discuss their discomfort in the moment
- Remember diversity is broad...
- Might be helpful in some cases to move students away from the personal
  - “That’s interesting, but what does scholar x say about the topic?”
  - Bring back to your discipline if possible
- Disarm the person who said the more provocative comment – “is that what you meant to say?”
- Try to begin conversation – better than not saying anything at all
- Does the faculty member have a responsibility to talk with/do something about after class conversations, etc?
- Possibility of taking advantage of a delicate moment...

Scenario #2 -
- Advising a student – not in the classroom
- Helping student to prioritize so that she can devote time to passion, in this case possibly the BSU
- What are her reasons for her involvement in BSU?
  - Is the BSU where she does much of her learning / growth?
  - Is she looking for permission to NOT be involved in BSU?
- Much of the conversation depends on the nature of the advising relationship
- Help her to explore course ideas with regard to her passions
- Importance of asking why questions?
- What can we learn from our students?
- Not just a “color” issue
- Try to tease apart importance or not of involvement in BSU versus other student groups for the advisee
- Was she trying to teach faculty member about the complexities of BSU?
- Importance of checking our own assumptions about students, student groups, etc
- Crucial to ask questions as often our students are trying to tell, share, teach us something
- “What am I missing here?”
- Importance of explaining why we as a faculty member think x, y, z.