

DEAD WEEK

SNEAK PREVIEW

From: Terrance Zimmerman <tzimmerman2@mortoncollege.edu>
to: All Morton College Faculty and Staff
subject: Dead Week and Finals Week policies
security: Standard encryption (TLS)
date: November 19
Good afternoon Colleagues!

Several social media posts have come to my attention regarding alleged plans for an unrecognized student organization to stage a campus demonstration, thus disrupting students' ability to complete end of semester projects and prepare for exams. Rumors of professors moving Final Exam dates have also surfaced.

The last full week of classes before final examinations is designated as Dead Week. The intent of this policy is to establish a one-week period of substantial and predictable QUIET study time for undergraduate students.

Instructors are reminded that violation of the Dead Week policy can cause excessive student workloads.

We recognize that playful shenanigans help students blow off steam, however we ask you all to remain vigilant in strictly enforcing the 23/7 quiet hour policies during Dead Week and Finals Week. With your cooperation, we can ensure a peaceful ending to the semester.

Incidents of disorderly behavior should be referred to the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. For more serious misconduct, please contact Campus Security immediately.

Please refer to the website for complete Dead Week and Finals Week policies and procedures.
www.mortoncollege.edu/exampolicies

Best regards,
Terrance Zimmerman
Professor, Agriculture Sciences
Faculty Senate Examinations Committee Chair"

Chapter One

If Cassandra Sato had to pinpoint the moment enthusiasm for her dream job faltered, it was when her weather app displayed a morning temperature of thirty-eight degrees with a predicted high of forty-two. Morton College in mid-November had more in common with the arctic tundra than a tropical paradise.

No one in her native state of Hawai'i would consider forty-two degrees a high temperature. Ever.

After three months, Cassandra had grown accustomed to Nebraska and the college, if not the frosty weather. Hard work and a good plan had gotten her to this point in her higher education career so quickly: a thirty-four-year-old Vice President of Student Affairs. A student's tragic death in October had been unsettling, but with the help of friends she'd passed her first professional test.

Fast walking from the Faculty Senate meeting back to the Osborne Administration Building, Cassandra slid Professor Zimmerman's printed memo into her leather portfolio and drew her numb hands inside her coat sleeves for protection. Only two weeks earlier, her boss, President Nielson, had announced his retirement then left on an extended vacation with his wife. In his absence, Cassandra felt added pressure to prevent shenanigans or disorderly behavior during the remaining weeks until the holiday break.

Inside the gloriously warm lobby, she climbed three flights of stairs to her office suite and paused to check her reflection in the elevator's mirrored steel surround.

Winter hadn't officially begun, yet Cassandra's red cheeks stung with cold. Her watery eyes had loosed a small mascara trail near her nose that she wiped away before entering her office suite.

Facing the doorway, four student workers deep in animated discussion crowded around a laptop screen on the reception desk. Since the September budget cuts and hiring freeze, Cassandra's secretarial needs had been cobbled together by part-time work study students whose primary concerns were passing Chemistry and getting dates for Saturday nights. She longed for a permanent assistant someday soon.

Logan Dunn, a dark-haired senior, quickly typed while the others dictated. Rachel Nagle's voice rose above the hubbub. "I think a hunger strike is way better than blasting really loud heavy-metal music!" Then she slowly signed in American Sign Language to Lance Erickson, the deaf student standing near Logan's desk.

"I was gonna suggest a smoke grenade," said Logan, "but I love the irony that loud music irritates hearing people and the deaf people don't care. Weaponized sound . . . now that's style."

"Skipping meals makes my blood sugar drop." Bridget's French-manicured hand daintily rested over her heart. "I think we should nix the hunger strike and just have people sign a petition."

Logan leaned away from the keyboard, allowing Lance to read their ideas on the laptop screen. "Petition drives are too easy. No one pays attention to them. We could always just

boycott class. Preferably on Tuesday during my European History test at 11:30.” He acknowledged Cassandra’s entrance with a charming smile.

“What are you future felons up to now?” Cassandra crossed her hands in front of her chest. “Please tell me this is for a class?” Normally their amusing antics involved breaking office machinery or mixing up appointment times, not planning terroristic threats.

“Yeah, my Deaf Studies class has been working on an advocacy project.” Rachel said, “We’ve recruited students to support our cause, and we have to follow through with one of our ideas. Lance took the class last Spring so he’s helping me decide our final tactic.”

Lance put his two palms face out at Cassandra and shook his head no. Then he made a bomb gesture and his cheeks mimed an explosion. His head shook again.

The “no grenades” denial didn’t reassure Cassandra. Professor Zimmerman’s memo hadn’t mentioned the Deaf Studies class by name, but hunger strikes, smoke grenades, and boycotts sounded like alleged demonstrations.

Rachel’s eyes shone with excitement. “Professor Bryant told us that if we wanted things to change on campus, we had to advocate for them. Like back in the 80s. Another freshman in my class complained that Morton isn’t accessible for us deaf people. So, we’re going to protest and get them to change it.”

Since Cassandra was likely the “them” who’d deal with their student misconduct charges if they crossed the line, she needed to set them straight from the beginning. Cassandra knew deaf students could have a classroom interpreter from talking to her friend Meg O’Brien. What more did they need?

“Wait.” Laying her portfolio on the reception desk, Cassandra held up a hand. “Let’s back up. Did you say, ‘us deaf people,’ Rachel? What do you mean?” Rachel raised the left side of her long blonde hair, showing Cassandra a hearing aid behind her ear.

Cassandra’s eyes widened. “I’ve never noticed that before. I thought you could hear.”

“I could until tenth grade. Over six months, I completely lost my hearing on the right side, but my left still has a little bit. I started learning some signs my senior year because if I’m going to be deaf the rest of my life, I might as well use ASL. I’ve been trying an interpreter in my classes, but I don’t understand enough yet to really learn that way.”

“If you don’t understand ASL well yet, how do you keep up in your Deaf Studies class? Does an interpreter tell you what Dr. Bryant is signing?” asked Cassandra.

“Everyone in my class is learning ASL,” said Rachel. “Our professor uses sign, his PowerPoint, and gestures to communicate with us.”

“Is any of your family deaf?” Logan asked.

“I wish I knew. My dad’s family can all hear, but my mother was adopted. I want to research her birth parents, but it’s kind of a sensitive subject for my mom.”

Bridget frowned. “Your mom doesn’t know her birth parents’ names?”

“When I asked in high school, Mom said she believed her birth mother had made the best decision she could. She didn’t want me to search for her birth parents, but I need to know about their genetic history.”

“Nothing about adoption is easy. I understand why your mom is sensitive about it,” said Cassandra.

“We studied about causes of deafness in my class with Dr. Bryant.” Rachel bit her fingernail. “There’s even one called Usher Syndrome 3 where people lose their hearing in their teens and twenties. Like me! Then when they’re 40 or 50 years old, they also go blind.”

Cassandra knew enough from Meg to know that being deaf didn’t have to be a barrier to a great job and family and life. Adding blindness would definitely be harder though.

Rachel fought back tears. “What if I have that? Or what if I carry a gene that means my future children will become deaf, too?”

“Surely the odds of you having that specific type of syndrome are very, very small, Rachel,” Cassandra reassured. “Don’t get ahead of yourself in worrying.”

“I’m going to convince my mother to let me take a DNA test over semester break to check for the genetic syndrome.” Rachel added, “I found my mom’s birth certificate and searched my birth grandmother’s name. She was a student here at Morton in the 1970s.”

“What a coincidence,” said Cassandra.

Rachel’s eyes flickered off to the side before meeting Cassandra’s. “Not really. One reason I chose Morton was to find out more about my birth grandparents’ families. My grandmother is dead. I saw her online obituary from 1976.”

Cassandra had heard of students choosing a college because it was near the beach or they’d been offered a good scholarship. Following your dead grandmother’s footsteps was unusual, at best.

“Promise you won’t tell my mother I know all this!” Rachel pleaded, “I may have snooped for that birth certificate.”

Cassandra didn’t want to tangle with anyone’s mother. “I won’t tell your mom.”

Rachel blew out a sigh. “Thanks, Dr. Sato.”

“No worries, Rachel. But what if she finds out you went behind her back?”

“She’ll be mad for a little while.” Rachel shrugged off the warning.

“Now, for the rest of you lot . . .” Raising a finger, Cassandra made eye contact with each of them in turn. “Smoke grenades are not a joke. The college frowns upon blowing up stuff.”

Lance showed Cassandra his phone screen where he’d typed a list for the class advocacy project titled: “Things on campus that aren’t accessible. Public TVs not captioned, public announcements spoken in English only, classroom videos not captioned, no emergency alert or 9-1-1 text system.”

If they presented their concerns appropriately, Cassandra would be happy to help. “I look forward to seeing your advocacy proposal when it’s finished.” She stopped short in her inner

office doorway. “And Logan, you’d better study for your history test, because no way is a class boycott going to happen.”

“It worked before at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC.” Rachel looked eager to start right now. “They got out of classes for a week, got the president fired, and pressured the board to appoint the first Deaf President in school history.”

Cassandra advised, “In any negotiation, it’s better to make your requests privately first before you escalate to more serious and public moves.”

“That’s not what Professor Bryant told us. He was at Gallaudet in 1988, and he says deaf people are tired of fighting this battle.”

Professor Bryant’s student advocacy project had the bones of a great learning experience, but campus anarchy was not how Cassandra planned to end her first semester. Demonstrations and boycotts were the last thing the college needed after the difficulties of last month. With Nielson’s exit, it fell to her to keep the peace. She’d have to keep a close eye on this project.

Chapter Two

The contented feeling of knowing she was in the right place at the right time, doing a job she loved, settled over Cassandra during the Faculty Senate meeting and while guiding her student workers back on track. The glow lingered oh . . . maybe fifteen more minutes while the Diversity Council brainstormed activity ideas for the first campus-wide Diversity Day. Taking a deep pull of hot chamomile tea from her Morton College travel mug, she smiled expansively at the hand-picked representatives seated around the scarred oak boardroom table in the executive administration suite.

To her left sat Dr. Shannon Bryant, chair of the Deaf Studies department. Cassandra guessed he was in his late forties by the deep wrinkle between his large, dark-brown eyebrows that threatened to grow together if he didn't follow a strict grooming schedule. His face was tanned like a guy who spent a lot of time outdoors.

Bryant raised his hands and signed in ASL, and Cassandra's best friend, Meg O'Brien who worked the meeting as his interpreter, spoke in English, "I'd like to see a small group discussion forum where students learn how it feels to be a person of color or[...]" "person with a disability at Morton." Rocking back in his chair, he crossed his arms.

Cassandra wrote Bryant's idea on the large whiteboard that filled one wall of the conference room. One British professor, one assistant admissions director she'd never met who looked Korean, and two African American men also sat at the table. Ben Dawes, she recognized from the housing department. The second gentleman, Cassandra knew worked in the athletic department, but she'd never spoken to him before. Shawn Armstrong was printed on the cardboard name tent in front of him. Others present represented academic departments or student clubs around campus.

President Nielson had appointed Cassandra as the Diversity Council chairperson upon her hiring in August, entrusting her with the opportunity to make an immediate impact on students and the campus climate through leadership of the institution's most progressive colleagues. She relished the chance to hit the reset button on last month's negative publicity.

"No-Nonsense Nielson" was an odd mix of small-town traditionalist mentality and bumbling dreamer who often made Cassandra cringe. He'd recognized the importance of bringing their small, private college into the current decade of institutional diversity. Since 83% of their students, faculty and staff were Caucasian, administration had a long way to go in making the remaining 17% feel more at home on campus.

Before announcing his intention to relax on a fishing boat somewhere warm during retirement, Nielson had forged a new connection with Hangzhou Commerce College in China to increase the number of international students studying at Morton and to open study-abroad opportunities for Nebraska students visiting Hangzhou.

Piggybacking on his success, Cassandra planned to prioritize their 6-month action items before Nielson's replacement was named. Substantive events and discussion at all levels of the college were important first steps for making quick and visible positive impressions.

“Maybe after the Diversity Day events, we could add an evening activity,” suggested Gia Torres, a Latina Political Science professor. “A Poetry Slam would be a great opportunity for diverse voices to be heard. Set up a small stage and microphone at the coffee shop where it would attract the most attention.”

Dr. Torres had attended the inaugural meeting of Cassandra’s pet project, the Women of Tomorrow leadership academy, over a week earlier and seemed full of creative ideas. With only three female members—Cassandra, Gia, and Cinda Weller, the Counseling and Career Center Director—even their Diversity Council wasn’t exactly the pinnacle of diversity.

Cassandra nodded encouragingly at the fifteen faces turned her direction hoping for a few more ideas. She thought, this process was going well!

“How about a Hobby Fair where people bring in items related to their hobbies and share stories about them,” said John Park.

Cassandra added his idea to the board then wrote, Deaf Studies Advocacy Project.

“Thanks. I’d like to address Dr. Bryant’s students’ proposal about increasing accessibility on campus for deaf and hard of hearing students.

The point of Diversity Day was to include members across campus, raising awareness among all the stakeholders. Incorporating students in the planning process might head off any wild ideas they had about smoke bombs or protests while also elevating the Diversity Council’s visibility. It was a win-win solution.

Bryant’s head nodded slowly while he watched Meg signing.

From a corner of the table, Dawes said, “Morton receives federal aid and grants. We must already be accessible. That’s the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

Cassandra noted the smirk on Dr. Bryant’s face. He signed, “Just because we have the ADA doesn’t mean Morton is accessible.” His lips twitched into a quick smile in Cassandra’s direction, then he resumed watching Meg. “It’s about time someone took us seriously.”

“Depending which weekend we choose, I could check with the guys in my band and see if we’re available to perform after the Poetry Slam,” offered Dr. Simon Harris.

A loud scoff erupted from Bryant and his dark eyebrows nearly met, hooding deep-set eyes.

Cassandra had noticed Harris texting on his phone earlier during the meeting. It didn’t surprise Cassandra that the leatherjacket wearing, Indiana Jones look-a-like teacher moonlighted in a band. But his comment had no relation to the student advocacy project or the ADA.

“Dr. Harris—”

“—How do deaf people hear music?” The British prof without a name tent in front of him interrupted her. She’d met him once but forgotten his name. “I couldn’t live without the Beatles.”

Wait. Seriously?

The guy next to the Brit rolled his eyes, “They feel the vibrations. *Everyone* knows that.” Cassandra thought some deaf people probably felt musical vibrations, but now was not the time to ask. She opened her mouth to redirect the conversation but stopped short when Dr. Bryant raised his hands.

His vigorous signing and animated expressions captivated everyone's attention. Meg's voice could hardly keep up with his fast-moving hands. "I'm tired of re-explaining the same tedious assumptions to people with no imagination. Being deaf is about more than whether or not our ears work. Instead of looking for ways to embrace the Deaf Community's unique communication and cultural assets, you're splitting hairs about music appreciation."

Bryant stood up so quickly his chair rolled against the wall and he walked out. In the momentary silence following his departure, Cassandra's stomach dropped like an elevator skipping several floors at once. Looking around the room, most of the council members appeared confused or uncomfortable.

Cassandra fought to keep her astonishment hidden while she adjourned the meeting and promised to schedule the next one soon. She'd expected her life experience growing up on Oahu would be an asset to the Diversity Council. Hawai'i was a crossroads of races, ethnicities, and incomes where ideals like aloha and ohana were treasures. Instead, she had hesitated when she should have led by example.

Only Meg hung back after everyone else had left the board room. "That could have gone better," said her friend.

Cassandra squinted hard and shook her head. Meg was the master of understatement.

So much for relationship building and preventing student unrest. Restoring her confidence would take more than a mug of hot tea.

* * *

After lunch, Cassandra was several paragraphs into reading the meeting minutes to salvage the useful Diversity Day ideas, when Rachel Nagle glided into her office and closed the door.

"Do you have a minute, Dr. Sato?"

Her timing was perfect. Rachel was exactly the kind of student Cassandra wanted to include in Diversity Day planning. "Sure, Rachel. How can I help you?"

Hesitating a few seconds, Rachel said, "Remember earlier when I showed you my hearing aid?"

Cassandra nodded.

"Well, my friend Taylor Phillips works for the *Maple Leaf* college newspaper, and she's writing a story about our Deaf Studies advocacy project," said Rachel. "Our booth at the Student Center has been pretty popular this week. Lots of kids have signed up to support us. We even have hashtags."

Cassandra had less than twenty Facebook friends and didn't post on social apps. Still, she knew about hashtags and was relieved she had other things to worry about besides creating clever phrases to describe her daily activities.

"Taylor wants to interview me. Like, my personal perspective."

Rachel's situation was unique, but other students might be inspired by her battle to overcome her hearing loss obstacles. Cassandra said, "Good for you." Studying Rachel's oval face, Cassandra noticed a slight frown. "Are you worried about the article?" she guessed.

"I'm not 100% sure I want to tell Taylor everything." Rachel squirmed in the armchair facing Cassandra's desk. "Not everyone here knows about me . . . uh my, um hearing thing. Sometimes in Dr. Bryant's class I feel inspired that I can still do anything I want even if I can't hear. Look at him. He's traveled the world, testified in front of the state legislature, and teaches college classes."

Cassandra nodded. "Yes, he's a very successful person."

"The thing is, I'm not sure I want the whole world to know me as deaf. "

"Honestly, I couldn't even tell until you showed me your hearing aid. What you've done is pretty amazing." Cassandra leaned forward at her desk. "In fact, I'd like you to attend our next planning meeting and present the accessibility issues your class has identified. Your Deaf Studies project is a great example of how Morton could be more responsive to students. It'll need to be a complete proposal including justifications and estimated costs. Email me a draft, and I can help you organize your ideas."

"Me? I don't know if I need any more clubs." Rachel's shoulders hunched up. "I just like being able to talk to you." Her wide set green eyes gazed in open awe of Cassandra. "You left everything behind in Hawai'i and moved to Carson, Nebraska. I mean, it's crazy right? But also, so brave."

Cassandra's cheeks heated slightly. She was encouraging Rachel, not holding herself up as completely together. If Rachel's work on the advocacy project succeeded, she could join Cassandra's Women of Tomorrow leadership group her junior year. "Sometimes bravery isn't a bold cross-country move. Sometimes bravery is embracing your unique gifts and talents to help those around you. Overcoming your hearing loss obstacles makes you a role model for students with similar experiences." Cassandra saw an intangible light within Rachel and wanted to open doors for her. "Getting involved with Diversity Day planning would look great on your résumé."

Cassandra's reasons weren't entirely unselfish. Rachel's positive, feel-good story would be a big improvement over last month's negative news articles. Cassandra wanted to highlight what was going right at the college instead of dwelling on Morton's shortcomings.

Rachel put up two hands. "Whoa. I'm not role model material. I don't get the best grades. Half the time I don't even know what's going on."

"Can I ask, how do you know what people are saying?"

"I can hear which direction the talking is coming from. Then I look at people's lips or the situation and . . . pretty much guess what they're saying."

"What happens when you guess wrong?" Cassandra wondered.

"I either fake it or ask them to repeat."

Meaning she'd gotten this far by observation and winging it. "Wow. I imagine that feels super stressful," said Cassandra. "You don't have to help with Diversity Day if you don't want

to. Think about it and let me know. Now, you had asked about whether you should tell Taylor your whole story, or just keep it limited to the class advocacy project?”

“If I tell everyone, how will people treat me once they find out I’m deaf?”

“Maybe some people will treat you differently, but —.”

“Will deaf people assume I know sign?” Rachel’s hands fluttered up in exasperation.

“Will people who can hear ignore me because it’s a pain to repeat things to me?” Her eyes welled up. “I’m not culturally Deaf-with-a-capital-D, and I’m not fully hearing. I’m in between. I don’t fit anywhere.”

Cassandra had no idea it was so complicated. Her throat constricted. “Rachel, you control who knows your personal medical information and which details are included in the newspaper article your friend publishes. If you aren’t ready yet, that’s okay.”

“I want to tell my story and fight for my rights like Dr. Bryant.” Rachel wiped under her eyes with a Kleenex from the box on Cassandra’s desk. “I want to help people. But I don’t want to lose my friends.”

“All I can tell you is that you’ve opened my eyes about how it feels to be in your shoes. When you’re ready to tell everyone, I’ll have your back. Whenever you need me.”

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Kelly

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