

## Teaching Caselettes

# MUHURU BAY, KENYA

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An American student at a civic engagement site is faced with the choice of whether, against the express wishes of the community, to take an HIV-positive child on a dangerous overnight drive to a medical clinic. The next day, the student's situation is further complicated by her group's decision to call in a medical helicopter to evacuate a fellow student who has been bitten by a scorpion.

This case presses students to assess trade-offs between relieving suffering in the short-term and setting a precedent the program can't sustain in the long run and between helping an individual and respecting the wishes of the local community. At the same time, the specific dilemmas raise the broader issue of what a more systemic approach to solving problems of health care delivery might look like and what kind of knowledge students will need to advance such an approach.

Please refer to the "Ethics of Engagement" overview at the end of this document to familiarize yourself with the general ethical framework this case was created to illustrate.

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Kristen is in Muhuru Bay, Kenya, running a summer camp for children in the village. The summer camp, run by a non-governmental organization (NGO) affiliated with an American university, has a fairly good relationship with the local school authority, which has agreed to allow the group to use their facilities for the two-week session. In her classes, Kristen particularly notices one girl who is articulate, outgoing (most of the girls don't speak in class), and one of the brightest in the class regardless of gender. The girl becomes ill with the chills and a terrible cough. She borrows a pair of pants to keep warm in the dorm room where she and the other students stay during camp. Kristen is visiting the resting girl in her dorm room when the head school mistress walks in. The administrator greets them with friendly formalities and speaks in Luo to the sick girl. The girl then begins to change back into her skirt, telling Kristen that the administrator gave her a stern reminder that girls are not allowed to wear pants on school grounds. Kristen is tempted to say something to the administrator in the girl's defense. Her understanding is that the summer camp has rented the school property from the school board, and she questions what right the school's administrators have to enforce what she thought were rules particular only during the school year. The girl doesn't want Kristen to bring up the conflict to the administrator and quietly changes back into her skirt.

Over the next week, the girl becomes more and more sick. One night she experiences severe difficulty breathing, and Kristen and several other American students deliberate about whether to take her to the nearest clinic, a 1.5-hour trip by car. Kristen is afraid that the girl might die while in her care. At the same time, the roads to the clinic are very dangerous after dark; the car may be hijacked; and everyone in the car could be injured or even killed. One of Kristen's friends decides to call a prominent American hospital on her international cell phone to consult with a doctor. Based on the severity of the symptoms and the long period of sickness the girl has endured, the doctor suggests that she may have end-stage AIDS-induced pneumonia. Kristen discusses this with the girl, and she responds that she is, in fact, HIV positive. Kristen knows that people in the village are severely stigmatized if they are known to be infected with HIV. Even if Kristen was able to get the girl to the clinic, she would have to pay out-of-pocket for any medical expenses, as the girl has no money. Further, it is likely that while medical treatment might make the girl more comfortable in the short-term, given her HIV status, she will never fully recover.

After much soul searching and deliberation, Kristen and her friends decide not to risk the trip to the clinic. They fear that they might set a precedent of favoritism or create unrealistic expectations among the villagers about what resources the American NGO, which was there to run a summer camp, not provide healthcare, can offer. Several in the group recognize that this girl may die within the next few days. In fact, one of the American students, Jan, pulls her mattress up next to the girl's bed and sets her cell phone alarm for every half-hour in order to check on the girl and make sure she is okay.

The next morning, as Jan is moving her mattress back to her own room, she is bitten by a scorpion. Knowing some scorpion bites are deadly, the American students decide to have Jan evacuated to the nearest clinic by the medevac doctors that are on-call for the American NGO. That same afternoon, the girl continues to experience labored breathing and seems to be worsening. Kristen now has the opportunity to take her to the clinic along with Jan during daylight hours. What should Kristen do?

## Overview of Ethics of Engagement Case Studies

These case studies were developed as part of a workshop series the Kenan Institute for Ethics provided for students preparing for intensive civic engagement experiences. The goals for the summer experience were three-fold: to gain self-knowledge, to deepen students' commitment to life-long civic engagement, and to help the communities in which they lived and worked for the summer. Student projects took place in local and global locations, ranging from working with African immigrants in Ireland, to documenting social change movements in South Africa, to managing environmental organizations in Portland, Oregon.

We have included two cases based on actual student experiences in the field--one domestic, set in Durham, North Carolina, and another abroad, set in Muhuru Bay, Kenya. These cases set forward the ethical dilemmas the students faced on personal, organizational, and systemic levels. They also present scenarios in which there is no clear right answer. Rather, the students in each case study are challenged by seemingly intractable problems for which there seem to be only wrong and perhaps less wrong solutions.

In constructing the teaching notes, we referred to the "Right-Right Dilemmas" paradigm drawn from Rush Kidder's book, *How Good People Make Tough Choices*. We modified this concept, suggesting that the students will likely face "Wrong-Wrong Dilemmas" in their summer placements, in which both the community and individual goods are compromised; neither loyalty nor truth can be fully achieved; long-term and short-term prospects are equally pessimistic; and neither justice nor mercy can be experienced by all those affected by the dilemma.

In the workshop, we also introduced the students to three "Resolution Principles," which we offered as frameworks to enable clear thinking about ethical dilemmas. These principles are the classical ethical principles of

*Utilitarianism* - providing the greatest good for the greatest number

*Deontology / Principle-Based (Kantianism)* - following the highest principle as absolutely as possible

*Care-Based* - emphasizing the importance of relationships and paying attention to the particular context and individuals involved

After reading the cases, students in the workshop were divided into small groups to discuss the questions listed in the teaching notes and then returned to the large group for a facilitator-led discussion. Given the significance and difficulty of the tensions faced by the characters in the cases, a good session often ended with significant debate, rather than consensus about a right course of action.

Our aim with these cases is to provide students preparing for civic engagement experiences with tools they will find helpful as they face morally serious dilemmas in real-world contexts radically different than those in a university setting.