

# Scenario 6

## ***Introductory Description (Narrated on Videotape)***

Maria, a new graduate student in mechanical engineering, is meeting for the first time with Professor Stratton, a mechanical engineering professor, to discuss a potential research assistantship and mentoring relationship.

## ***Additional Description***

*Remember before viewing:*

- . Give a brief overview of what the audience will be viewing and how long it will take.
- . Tell them how much time they will have for discussion.
- . Ask them to refrain from talking during the video.

Maria has come to Professor Stratton's office to find out about being a research assistant for him and having him serve as her mentor. Maria is forced to make up her mind on which of three projects she wants to work on, after hearing only brief descriptions of them. Professor Stratton has senior status and his behavior is intimidating, overbearing, and controlling. Maria is overwhelmed by his abrasive attitude and reluctant to ask questions or upset him in anyway. She is clearly intimidated but keeps stating that she will do her best and work very hard. Professor Stratton makes several blatant remarks about her gender and race. He also insinuates that she will not get to party, that she will have to work hard and long hours with him, but that he is "willing to do that" for her. Professor Stratton makes her agree to start the next day and then he writes her name on a Research Assistant contract and on a mentoring agreement without letting her read the documents. Maria is feeling totally intimidated and afraid of disappointing him. She feels that she is committed to doing anything he says.

## ***Learning Summary (Narrated on Videotape)***

This scenario is primarily about faculty-student mentoring. It is a very sensitive scenario and includes the overbearing behavior of an older male professor and the innocent behavior of a young new graduate student. The scenario *does not* exhibit recommended behavior or behavior that is expressly considered *typical*. It shows students that they may come in contact with situations that are similar to this one. It also shows the

potential control that faculty might knowingly have over their students. While there is attention to overt intimidating behavior, there is also strong evidence of poor mentoring dynamics. There are also strong issues related to cross-gender and cross-racial mentoring, and stereotypes, biases, and discrimination.

### ***Possible Questions***

- . What was this scenario about in general?
- . What was the meeting atmosphere like?
- . Do you think this meeting involved two-way communication? Who was in control of the meeting?
- . How do you think Maria was feeling about Professor Stratton at the beginning of this meeting? How do you think she felt at the end? What, if anything, caused a change?
- . How assertive and self-confident do you think Maria was in this meeting? Do you think she should have been more assertive?
- . Do you think it is a good idea to have the same professor as your Research Assistant advisor and your mentor? What are the advantages and what are the disadvantages?
- . How much did Professor Stratton and Maria discuss about their mentoring relationship? Did they implement any recommended ways to begin a mentoring relationship? (e.g., discuss expectations, set goals, make commitments)
- . Do you think Maria was aware of what was actually happening? Do you think that she realized she had any other choice? What are her alternatives? Is it too late to make a change?
- . Why do you think Professor Stratton was speaking so harshly? Did you sense other emotions in his speech, like anger? What do you think was underlying his tone?
- . Have you ever had to deal with people like Professor Stratton? How did you react and what did you do?
- . How do you get people like Professor Stratton to change his behavior and attitudes?
- . How did you feel when he told Maria, "It's going to be especially hard for you, since mechanical engineering doesn't come easy for women and other minorities."?
- . Do you think this will be a successful mentoring relationship?

*Remember after viewing:*

- . *Remind the audience that these scenarios are not necessarily "typical" or "exemplary."*
- . *Encourage the audience to respect others opinions.*
- . *Diligently keep the discussion focused and polite.*
- . *Keep questions open ended.*
- . *Let the audience decide good from bad.*