

NaBITA

# Difficult Conversations: Practical Application Through Case Scenarios

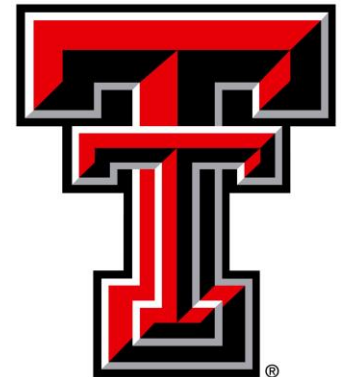


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# Introduction

1. What's your Major?: Student is unsure his major is a match for him
2. A Better Fit: Student wants a major but isn't cut out for it
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# Introduction

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7. I'm freaking out!: Student experiencing panic attacks and anxiety
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1. What's your Major?: Student is unsure his major is a match for him



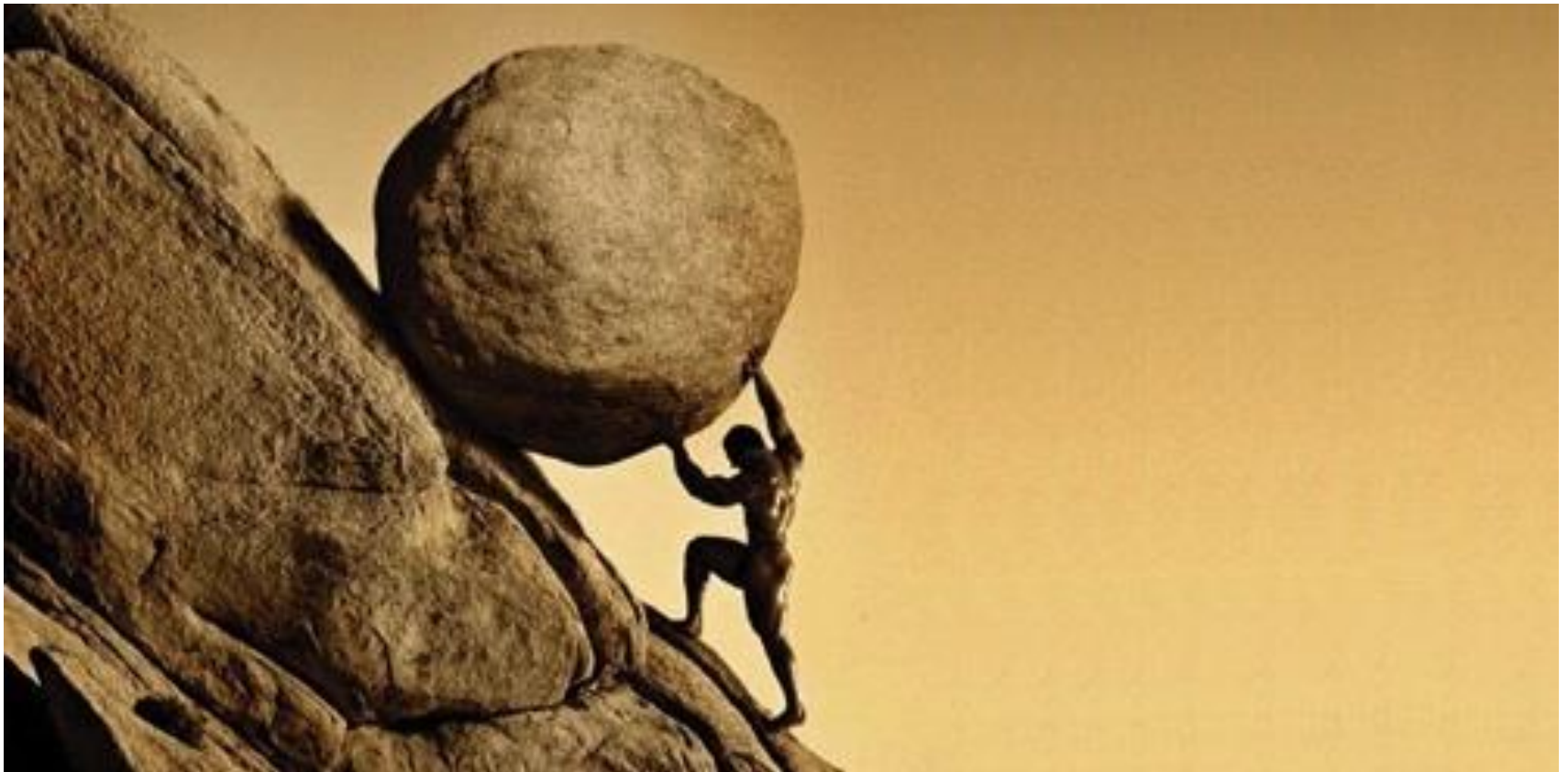
# 1. What's your Major?: Student is unsure his major is a match for him

- Second year student starts to realize he doesn't like his major in biology.
- He struggles in his classes. He feels family pressure to perform better so he can get into med school. His parents have wanted this for him since he was little.
- He feels overwhelmed and stuck. He isn't sure what to do.
- He is sad, frustrated and hopelessness.

# 1. What's your Major?: Student is unsure his major is a match for him

- Use active listening
- Express empathy
- Offering options and hope, forward focus
- Addressing family expectations
- Connecting with personal stories
- Referral to counseling, career services
- Academic advisor meeting with parents and student
- Case management

## 2. A Better Fit: Student wants a major but isn't cut out for it



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- First year student very excited about being a writer.
- She continues to receive harsh feedback from her professor on writing assignments.
- Frequent referrals to academic tutoring to review papers.
- Student feels misunderstood and argues the assignments she gets in class are just not a good matches for her writing style.
- There is a question of dyslexia or another expressive disorder that may be contributing to her writing problems.



## 2. A Better Fit: Student wants a major but isn't cut out for it

- Active listening and expressing empathy
- Simple/Summary reflection and reframing
- Share a personal experience about your search for major and similar struggles in college
- Use clarifying questions or referral to career services
- Explore what she does well in with her studies, support self-efficacy
- Avoid the traps: expert with the answer, confronting or moving too quickly to solution

### 3. Anchor Around the Neck: Student overwhelmed by a single course



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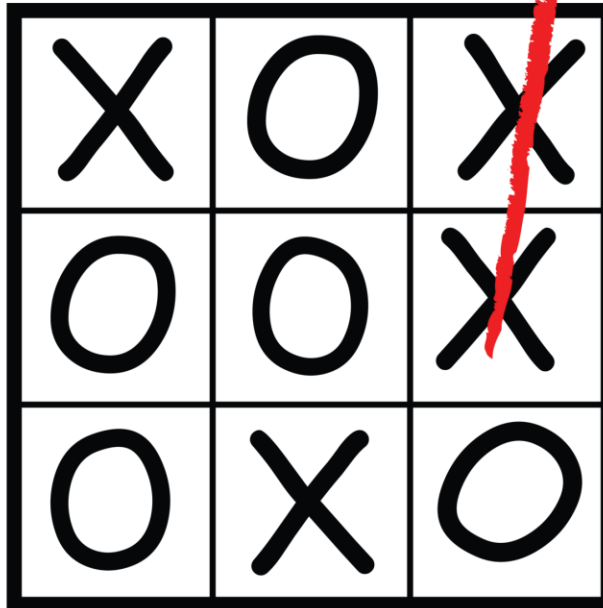
- A student comes to your office irate and frustrated.
- He expresses anger that the professor isn't clear on assignments in class and says "The professor is crazy if he thinks I have two hours per night to read for his course!"
- The student needs this course for his major
- Student shares he is overwhelmed and isn't sure how to move forward and pass the class
- He begins to feel panicked that he will fail this required course for his major

### 3. Anchor Around the Neck: Student overwhelmed by a single course

- Use active listening, simple reflection. Allow the student to vent and be overwhelmed
- Further explore trapped feelings around struggling with the course and it being required for his major
- Avoid confrontation and argumentation
- Be proactive and solution focused
- Look to uncover a win-win situation
- Connect in a genuine way around stress
- Brainstorm potential outcomes once she feels heard and understood around her frustrations

4. Work Smarter, Not Harder: Student requires new study skills focus

**THINK  
OUTSIDE  
THE BOX**



## 4. Work Smarter, Not Harder: Student requires new study skills focus

- A student spends four hours a night on course work for one class. She comes into your office upset she isn't doing better given her effort.
- She blames the professor for the problem and shares that she is “studying harder then she can even deal with for this class.”
- She becomes tearful and upset. She is unsure on how to move forward and fix this problem.

## 4. Work Smarter, Not Harder: Student requires new study skills focus

- Explore the problem, allow the student a chance to vent about professor. Understand and then be understood
- Create dissonance around current approach and not achieving goal. Develop discrepancy
- Reframe to allow student to feel ok about needing a new approach to studying
- Redirect to solution focused, synergistic manner
- Critical thinking and problem solving skills.  
Reorganizing focus

## 5. I can't get up: Student with depression and suicidal feelings





## 5. I can't get up: Student with depression and suicidal feelings

- A junior becomes withdrawn from his friends and peers on campus and spends more time isolated in his room.
- He shares with you, “I feel lost and unsure of what I want to do in the future. I’ve taken all of my required class and I still can’t figure out a major. My parents are going to kill me.”
- He shares with you feelings of suicidal thoughts and “not wanting to go on here at Tech anymore.”

## 5. I can't get up: Student with depression and suicidal feelings

- Active listening, simple/summary reflection
- Referral to counseling and potential screening for suicidal thoughts or ideas
- Discuss options, inspire a sense of hope, reframe
- Offer a sense of genuine, unconditional positive regard and empathy
- Creation of a “we are in this together” connection
- Inspire hope, be solution focused
- Avoiding platitudes and bumper sticker advice

6. Overwhelmed: Student needs help with triage and planning



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- A first year student is near hysterical in your office after the first week of classes.
- She says, “I can’t figure out what to do first! Every single professor wants something from me and I just sit down and stare at my desk for hours without doing anything. I don’t know what to do first!!!”
- She breaks down into tears when you try to calm her down or offer suggestions to help.

## 6. Overwhelmed: Student needs help with triage and planning

- Focus on listening and allowing to vent
- Move student toward talking and expressing herself rather than being overwhelmed and non-verbal
- Explore areas that are safe to talk about without a hysterical reaction, ‘Continue slowly, wait for your luck to change’
- Move to solution focused, inspire hope
- Plan next steps, taking a more directive role outlining a path to a happier place

## 7. I'm freaking out!: Student experiencing panic attacks and anxiety



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- A senior student is upset about a requirement in class to give an oral presentation.
- He says, "I've gotten this far at Tech without having to present material in front of people, but this one professor won't budge. Each time I think about standing up talking I get cold sweats and think about running from the classroom. Like the whole world is going to collapse around me. I don't know what to do!"

## 7. I'm freaking out!: Student experiencing panic attacks and anxiety

- Allow the student to vent, use active listening, simple/summary reflection
- Further explore anxiety and frustrations
- Find positive behaviors and offer a normative perspective (e.g. just because this one thing didn't work out doesn't mean everything is bad)
- Avoid platitudes and telling him to just "buckle down" and "college is hard sometimes, that's why it isn't for everyone"
- Referral to counseling and support services, medication potential



## 8. Lost and Alone: Student not connected socially to institution



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- A male sophomore comes to your office for academic help. You've recently heard about this student from the BIT. There has been some recent concerns around his socially odd behavior, particularly to females around campus.
- While the student isn't in your office for help with his behavior or making friends, you wonder if this is a good time to begin a conversation with him about his behavior.

## 8. Lost and Alone: Student not connected socially to institution

- Build rapport and connection
- Offer genuine, positive regard, build a bridge (look for commonalities)
- Address academic request for help first
- Explore social difficulties with active listening, simple/summary reflection
- Shape behaviors from strengths (support self-efficacy)
- Refer to counseling

9. Not for You: Student fails a key entrance requirement, not a match for career



## 9. Not for You: Student fails a key entrance requirement, not a match for career

- A junior comes into your office upset and tearful. He has failed a key teaching exam required before signing up for his student teaching.
- He says, “I had my whole schedule for next semester set up. This failing test changes everything. I don’t know what to do now! All my plans are scattered to the wind. What’s the point of even going to class!”

## 9. Not for You: Student fails a key entrance requirement, not a match for career

- Offer support and reassurances
- Active listening and simple/summary reflection
- Avoid expert trap (fixing the problem too soon)
- Encourage A-B-C thinking, what good can come from this? How can we change our B?
- Help student avoid catastrophization
- Shift focus forward---stay solution focused
- Pair with academic advising to look at other solutions and options