

High Ethical Regard in Higher Education: How Administrators Affect Lives

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Regardless of what field professionals work in, it is imperative that they uphold high ethical regard in their duties. Professionals in student services greatly benefit from understanding that their willingness and ability to operate ethically can benefit or detriment the lives of those in whom they have a stake. At times, student affairs administrators find themselves facing a situation where the ethical decision is clear, such as when an academic dean sanctions a student who was caught cheating on an exam. Other times, student affairs administrators end up in a predicament where the ethical decision is unclear as many complex layers are present.

Professional Student Services Code of Ethics for Analysis

There are a few professional organizations whose core is student services, including Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), and College Student Educators International (ACPA). We will use The Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2004) ethics framework, known as the CAS Statement of Shared Ethical Principles for Student Services in Higher Education, to analyze the real-life ethical dilemma we will discuss. While the ethics frameworks from NASPA, ASHE and ACPA are specific and well-written, the CAS Statement of Shared Ethical Principles, in its entirety, touches upon all facets of the real-life dilemma we will focus on. In this case study, we will examine two potential actions that could be taken to resolve the ethical dilemma.

An Ethical Decision Exacerbated Into an Ethical Dilemma

Before we get to the dilemma at hand, we will discuss the events leading up to the eventual crossroads the Director of Residence Life faced. Absent of the events leading up to the dilemma, we would likely view a clear ethical decision to make in this case. However, given the

complex layers associated with it, we will see how this case poses an ethical dilemma. Within this case study, pseudonyms, fictitious organization, university, and education system names are used to protect the confidentiality of all relevant parties involved.

The Sexual Assaulter and the Victim: Student Overpowers Graduate Intern

In July 2025, Justin, a male graduate intern hall director at Mid-State University, a public university, was sexually assaulted and chemically coerced in their hall director apartment by Donald, a male student. Donald was enrolled at Quartet Community College, another institution within Triboro States Colleges and Universities, the same public higher education system as Mid-State University. In this section, we will discuss the dynamic differential between Justin and Donald. We will also discuss how Justin's safety was compromised due to this dynamic differential.

Donald Setting the Stage

Upon their first encounter, Donald shared that he was a coprophiliac with Justin, who was taken aback by said revelation. Since Donald had twice the muscle mass of Justin, Justin was terrified because Donald revealed this while resting on Justin's leg. Within this encounter, Donald asked if Justin would be open to ingesting magnesium products, such as magnesium citrate and milk of magnesia, to entertain Donald's fetish.

Within the same encounter, Donald informed Justin that he "brought my (Donald's) medications over to stay the night" (Donald, personal communication, July 4, 2025). While Donald covered his mouth immediately after he revealed his intention to Justin, Justin saw this as an act of sarcasm disguised as nervousness. Since Justin was terrified of Donald's muscle mass, he reluctantly agreed to allow Donald to spend the night in his hall director apartment. When Donald indicated he wanted to cuddle with Justin, Justin's terror increased significantly.

Donald Sexually Assaults Justin

Within the first few days of Donald and Justin meeting, Donald expressed that he had a fascination with male anuses (Donald, personal communication, July 6, 2025). Despite Justin making it clear that he did not want to be touched or spoken to in any sexual way, Donald constantly spoke sexually to Justin and joked about his anus (Justin, personal communication, July 4, 2025; Donald, personal communication, July 8, 2025). After coercing Justin into allowing Donald to cut his hair, Donald smacked Justin's anus from the sexual arousal he achieved from seeing Justin's hair poorly cut (Donald, personal communication, July 6, 2025). Feeling entrapped at this point, Justin wanted to exile Donald from his life.

Chemical Coercion Gone Wrong: Justin Nearly Faces Death

Only eight days after meeting, Donald asked Justin to ingest milk of magnesia to entertain Donald's coprophilia (Donald, personal communication, July 12, 2025). Donald purchased milk of magnesia without obtaining Justin's consent immediately before making the purchase. Donald gave Justin the directive to take thirty milliliters above the recommended adult dose to expedite the bowel movement. Within a few hours of Justin ingesting milk of magnesia, Justin began to feel nauseous. Little did Justin know, he was going into hypermagnesemia, which if left unchecked, can lead to death.

The following day, Justin went to work in the housing office and had severe stomach cramps. While Justin was physically at work, he could barely move. Resultingly, Justin was only able to complete a fraction of the work he would typically complete on a summer day in housing. Justin truly hoped someone working in the housing office with him would notice him keeling over in his seat and intervene.

Supervisor Intervention: Housing Administrators and the Title IX Coordinator

Justin had already eliminated all contact with Donald when he began the formal Title IX complaint process at Mid-State University. Believing that student affairs professionals operated within ethical guardrails, Justin approached a few supervisors on campus. Initially, Justin approached Alfalfa, his Residence Life Coordinator (Alfalfa, personal communication, July 17, 2025; Justin, personal communication, July 17, 2025). Next, Justin approached Pernell, the Director of Housing (Justin, personal communication, July 21, 2025; Pernell, July 21, 2025). Ultimately, Justin spoke to Sheila, Title IX Coordinator at Mid-State University (Justin, personal communication, July 23, 2025; Sheila, July 23, 2025).

Residence Life Coordinator: The Attempted Savior

Much to Justin's relief, Alfalfa noticed Justin keeling over in his seat after coming over to check in. He asked Justin, "You okay?" (Alfalfa, personal communication, July 14, 2025). Justin responded to Alfalfa by expressing that although he was not comfortable going into all the details, Justin was a victim of a Title IX incident; by mentioning Title IX, Justin hoped that Alfalfa would implicitly take this to mean sexual assault (Justin, personal communication, July 14, 2025). Alfalfa told Justin that he was willing to listen anytime "you [Justin] want[ed] or need[ed] to talk" (Alfalfa, personal communication, July 14, 2025).

About two days after Alfalfa noticed Justin hurting at work, Justin had a one-on-one conversation about what happened with Alfalfa (Alfalfa, personal communication, July 17, 2025; Justin, personal communication, July 17, 2025). Alfalfa heard what Justin was saying and was slightly listening intently. While Alfalfa did apologize to Justin for what he went through, Alfalfa ended by saying that he was "not sure" if this would classify as a Title IX issue (Alfalfa, personal communication, July 17, 2025). Once Justin repeated that there was a fetish component involved

within his interactions with Donald, Alfalfa only then realized that the issue falls within the purview of Title IX. Ultimately, Alfalfa referred Justin to Pernell.

The Housing Director

Shortly after Alfalfa made said referral, Justin met with Pernell. Pernell listened intently to Justin as he explained what Donald did and the accelerated timeline in which everything happened (Justin, personal communication, July 21, 2025). Pernell apologized to Justin for what he went through (Pernell, personal communication, July 21, 2025). Ultimately, he referred Justin to Shelia, the Title IX Coordinator at Mid-State University (Justin, personal communication, July 23, 2025; Sheila, personal communication, July 23, 2025).

The Title IX Coordinator

Justin recanted his turmoil and near-death experience to Sheila (Justin, personal communication, July 23, 2025). Justin expressed that the haircut was a constant reminder of the abuse he endured. She reassured him that the haircut Donald gave him did not look as bad as what he suspected (Sheila, personal communication, July 23, 2025). Ultimately, Sheila explained to Justin that she was uncertain if she could get Donald banned from campus, especially because Quartet Community College and Mid-State University have “shared resources”.

Acute Stress From Sexual Assault: Job Performance Decline

Just six weeks after Justin recanted his trauma to Sheila, Alfalfa emailed Justin to ask about his declining work performance (Alfalfa, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Justin had missed deadlines for things such as alphabetizing the emergency contact binder by last name, setting up one-on-one meetings with his resident assistants, and issuing a resident assistant progressive discipline for a relatively minor issue. By the time Alfalfa sent the email, Justin had already disclosed to him that he had Attention Deficit-Hyperactive Disorder (Justin, personal

communication, August 8, 2025) and autism spectrum disorder (Justin, personal communication, August 28, 2025). Justin was taken aback by Alfalfa's email due to its laundry-list format, almost as if Alfalfa was exerting a power play.

Graduate Intern Puts Mid-State University on Notice: Protection Under Title IX

Justin replied to Alfalfa's email disclosing that it was "becoming clear to me [Justin] that I nearly faced death as a result of the Title IX incident I experienced in July" (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Within his reply email, Justin also indicated, "I am pleading with you to give me some grace as I am processing the trauma" (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Justin copied the Associate Director of Residential Engagement, Tiana, in his reply email to Alfalfa. Tiana was the supervisor above Alfalfa. Neither Alfalfa nor Tiana responded to Justin's email. Tiana simply spoke to Justin about the email briefly during their scheduled one-on-one meeting that day (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Tiana, personal communication, September 4, 2025).

Resident Assistants: Joint Confrontation of Traumatized Graduate Hall Director

About nine hours after Justin put Alfalfa and Tiana on notice about his Title IX stress hindering his job performance (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025), Justin had his first staff meeting of the semester with his resident assistants. Unbeknownst to Justin, the resident assistants created their own agenda for the meeting. The agenda was laden with criticisms, which focused on Justin's perceived inability to meet deadlines and lack of timeliness with approving resident assistant program proposals.

Justin quickly scanned the agenda he was given by his resident assistants and was visibly disappointed. When the resident assistants asked Justin if he was okay, he said that he was, despite truly internally shattering. For Justin, it was even more embarrassing that he allowed

Aaron, a resident who was not a resident assistant, to join the staff meeting since Aaron had a good rapport with the resident assistants (Aaron, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Additionally, Aaron had an interest in becoming a resident assistant himself. The resident assistants ran the meeting and disallowed Justin from doing so. As some points made were made by one resident assistant, other resident assistants echoed the sentiments by saying “I agree” or “I also agree” in rapid succession (Amica, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Aster, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Larry, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Mitchell, personal communication, September 4, 2025).

Feeling horrendous and utterly embarrassed, Justin apologized to his resident assistants (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Due to Justin’s compounded stress, his apology to his resident assistants was more than a simple “I am sorry.” Rather, Justin’s apology included how he was looking to do better and turned into what seemed like a speech. Resultingly, Larry, a resident assistant attempted to shut Justin down by saying “We’re not comin’ at you” and “We accept your apology ... let’s move on” (Larry, personal communication, September 4, 2025).

The Graduate Intern: Downward Mental Spiral

The day after the first staff meeting, Justin’s mental health started to deteriorate from the compounded stress of being sexually assaulted about nine weeks prior combined with having just been humiliated by his resident assistants. Granted, Justin’s resident assistants were unaware of his recent sexual assault victimization. On this same day, Justin also started withdrawing from his residence hall community and housing administrators, namely Alfalfa. Over the following two days, Justin had mental breakdowns in his hall director apartment. While acute, the

breakdowns in his apartment scared Justin as they were happening since Justin felt they were involuntary; he believed this because he failed to take his medications that assist with his ADHD for the three days on which he had mental breakdowns.

Mental Breakdown Prelude: The Night of Joint Resident Assistant Confrontation

Right after being humiliated by his resident assistants, Justin began contemplating everything that happened to him at Mid-State University from when he met Donald to when the first staff meeting of the semester ended. Justin wondered what he did to deserve such concentrated, heavy misfortune, especially since Justin goes out of his way to show kindness to others and sacrifices his own needs or desires to assist others. In the context of his resident assistants, his kindness was evident when he used his graduate intern meal card to purchase his resident assistants ice cream and allowed them to select their own times for their one-on-one meetings with Justin, respectively. Justin had extreme difficulty sleeping that night. Despite needing to begin work at 10:00 AM the next day, Justin fell asleep around 5:00 AM the following day, allotting him just five hours of sleep.

Mental Breakdown Saga: Day One

The day after the staff meeting, Justin began visibly withdrawing. He took down his bulletin board that outlined fun facts about him and outlined his favorites of various things, such as food and songs. Justin replaced the once vibrant, colorful board with black backing. As Justin was tacking up the black backing, Amica, the resident assistant who led most of the meeting, walked into the residence hall. Nervously looking at him, she asked Justin how things were going (Amica, personal communication, September 5, 2025; Justin, personal communication, September 5, 2025). Justin again answered that things were okay, despite his continued internal shattering.

Mental Breakdown Saga: Day Two

On the second day after the meeting, Justin awoke in a trance and found himself grabbing his oscillating fan and hurling it across the room. Resultingly, Justin caused the fan to unplug itself from the power outlet and shatter into at least twenty pieces. Justin shouted profanities while this occurred, resulting from a flashback of seeing the security footage revealing one of his resident assistants destroying a decoration he put up in the residence hall to celebrate the incoming students' college journey. Next, Justin ran around his apartment, throwing trash cans around and using a profanity that expressed disdain for his resident assistants, stemming from their humiliation of him. Ultimately, Justin started praying that he would never engage in such violent behavior ever again, realizing that it was extremely out of character for him.

Mental Breakdown Saga: The Finale

On the third day after the meeting, Justin found himself upset that he had a one-on-one later that day with Larry, who attempted to downplay Justin's apology at the staff meeting (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Larry, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Resultingly, Justin started throwing more things around his hall director apartment. Specifically, Justin broke at least two of his appliances and caused bagged items, such as fishing line, to rest scattered across the ground. While acting on his rage, Justin shouted an expletive that expressed his disdain for Larry because of his public shutdown of Justin's apology. The rage fit Justin engaged in ended with him flipping over his folding table, causing him to bloody his right eye.

Failure to Notice Ocular Injury

Shortly after Justin bloodied his right eye, he went on a trip hosted by Mid-State University to see a movie. Despite Justin looking Lester, another hall director chaperoning the

trip, directly in his eyes, Lester did not notice Justin's bloodied eye. Justin also looked the bus operator driving the group to the movie theater in the eye as he boarded and they also said nothing about Justin's bloodied eye. None of the students attending the trip noticed Justin's bloody eye either. Justin hoped that once someone noticed his bloody eye, he could put Mid-State on yet another notice that the stress from being sexually assaulted compounded by the recent collective criticism from his resident assistants was taking a mental toll on him (Amica, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Aster, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Larry, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Mitchell, personal communication, September 4, 2025).

Graduate Intern Takes Control of Mental Health

While at the movie theater, Justin realized that his rapid acute mental health decline was a serious matter. Justin had contemplated ending his life by suicide by overdosing on milk of magnesia and had thoughts of throwing things at his resident assistants. While sitting at a table in the movie theater foyer, Justin had reached his breaking point. He realized he reached his breaking point when he tossed his books on the ground out of anger because a person sat at a nearby table and started talking when Justin wanted silence. Justin then walked out of the movie theater, walked to another storefront in the same plaza, and sought necessary psychiatric intervention.

Graduate Intern Informs Housing Director of Impending Hospitalization

After making it to the new storefront, Justin sent Pernell a text message indicating that he was "awaiting medical transport due to suicidal ideation and a PTSD flare-up" (Justin, personal communication, September 7, 2025). Pernell called Justin shortly after receiving the text message to clarify his understanding. Justin explained to Pernell that he was dealing with a lot of

stress (Justin, personal communication, September 7, 2025). Pernell told Justin “Don’t worry about work right now ... it’s important that you get the help you need” (Pernell, personal communication, September 7, 2025).

Graduate Intern Connects with Clinician

With Justin now in the emergency room at Bayview General Hospital, he was evaluated by Charlotte, a clinical social worker, to assess his risk of dangerousness. Justin admitted to Charlotte that he felt unsafe returning to the residence hall where he endured so much over the past three months (Charlotte, personal communication, September 7, 2025; Justin, personal communication, September 7, 2025). He told Charlotte that he wanted to ingest milk of magnesia to induce death as a suicide method after explaining that he was sexually assaulted by a male about three months prior. Justin also explained that he felt that his resident assistants ambushed him at the staff meeting and he wanted to throw things at them as a result (Amica, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Aster, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Larry, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Mitchell, personal communication, September 4, 2025). He admitted to Charlotte that he had mental breakdowns in his hall director apartment that resulted in personal appliance shrapnel being spread across the floor. Charlotte then explained to Justin that as a mandated reporter, she needed to tell any relevant parties about his desire to hurt himself or others, which included Pernell. When Justin explained that he brought himself to the hospital to prevent things from getting to a point where he would act on his thoughts to throw things at the resident assistants, Charlotte said she would relay this when she contacted Pernell. While Justin did not verbalize it, he just needed some time away to cool down from the setting of Mid-State University.

Graduate Intern Requests Title IX Accommodation While Hospitalized

Justin ultimately got admitted to the psychiatric inpatient unit at Bayview General Hospital where he was paired with Maggie, his unit social worker. Maggie reevaluated Justin, and he explained that he was in a poor place mentally due to all that he had endured over the past three months (Justin, personal communication, September 8, 2025; Maggie, personal communication, September 8, 2025). Justin also expressed to Maggie that he was seeking a new living space, or a new mattress if the new living space could not be accommodated by Mid-State University, clarifying that he sought a “Title IX accommodation” (Justin, personal communication, September 8, 2025). When Justin expressed that he desired to continue his position at Mid-State University, Maggie explained that many employers, particularly higher education institutions, are hesitant to allow employees to return to their position if “there are perceived threats” (Maggie, personal communication, September 8, 2025).

Mid-State University and the Graduate Intern: Ethical Crossroads

Mid-State University reached a point where Justin was now hospitalized due to mental breakdowns resulting directly from being humiliated by his resident assistants, with the underlying factor being his recent chemical coercion and victimization in a sexual assault (Amica, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Aster, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Larry, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Mitchell, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Thus, Mid-State University reached an ethical crossroads. How could they handle Justin’s future in his position there as a graduate intern hall director? While the answer to this question is already complex given the context we have so far, there are a few more layers necessary to consider when deciding how to move forward with Justin.

Additional Context: Interinstitutional Dual Relationships

Within this case, it is important to note that similarly to Justin having a dual relationship within Triboro States Colleges and Universities as a graduate intern at Mid-State University and a student at Grand-State University, Pernell also had a similar interinstitutional duality. Pernell was the Director of Housing at Mid-State University and a student in the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program at Grand-State University. By the time Justin was hospitalized, Pernell made it to the dissertation course which focused on stress, time management, and ethics. At most, Pernell would have two more academic years prior to completing his doctorate requirements and receiving his degree.

Additional Context: Institutional Negligence and Marginalization of Graduate Intern

When Justin started his position about three months before his hospitalization, he indicated to the housing staff at Mid-State University that by obtaining the position, he escaped homelessness (Justin, personal communication, June 5, 2025). He indicated to a resident assistant who worked with him in the summer office that he was neurodivergent and had dealt with discrimination before, which led to his homelessness status (Justin, personal communication, June 13, 2025). Additionally, when Justin started the graduate intern hall director position, he was working with his credit card issuer to restore his credit card to “current” status before an impending charge-off, which would damage his credit score. Mid-State University failed to update his address when he turned in his graduate intern contract to their human resources department; thus, Justin did not receive his check in time to make the restoration payment. Justin informed Alfalfa that his credit score was negatively impacted for seven years right after Mid-State University’s negligence caused this (Justin, personal communication, July 10, 2025).

First Potential Action: Mitigate Institutional Liability

In this section, we will discuss the rationale Mid-State University could use if the institution chose to remain risk averse as pertinent to Justin's case. Since Justin indicated to both Charlotte and Maggie that he had desires to throw things at his resident assistants, Mid-State University could argue that allowing Justin to remain in his position would make the university susceptible to litigation if Justin's anger ever reached such a high level again (Justin, personal communication, September 7, 2025; Justin, personal communication, September 8, 2025). Making the decision to end Justin's internship would serve as the best option in this case as his immediate removal would equate to immediate vindication of university liability. Mid-State University student services officials, including but not limited to Pernell and Alfalfa, would be preemptive heroes. In alignment with this heroic spirit, Mid-State University would need to impose a permanently severing sanction upon Justin to ensure the permanent safety of its students, faculty, and staff.

Stakeholders

To facilitate Justin's removal from Mid-State University, there would be multiple relevant parties, up to and including student affairs professionals at his educational institution, Grand-State University. Grand-State University has a stake in Justin's wellbeing as that is his educational institution. At Grand-State University, the stakeholders include (a) Mitchell, the Vice President of Student Affairs, (b) Kylie, the Dean of Student Affairs, (c) Kira, the Director of Counseling Services, and (d) Jeanne, Justin's educational program advisor. Of all stakeholders at Grand-State University, Jeanne's stake is high as Justin is pursuing a degree in student affairs whose central focus is counseling.

However, at Mid-State University, there are many more stakeholders than there are at Grand-State University, since Justin's potential threat to campus society is only present at the

former. The stakeholders at Mid-State University include (a) Pernell, (b) Alfalfa, (c) Tiana, (d) Marcela, their Vice President of Student Affairs, (e) Mid-State Campus Safety, including but not limited to their police chief, and (f) all current and prospective students, staff, visitors, and faculty members. The prospective students, staff, visitors, and faculty members are relevant because Justin's internship is designed as a two-year appointment and in higher education, populations constantly change. An additional set of stakeholders at Mid-State University would be those faculty and staff members who sit on their student intervention or behavioral intervention team, as said teams are designed to assess risk to students' safety; their stake would be higher than that of general faculty and staff members as the intervention team has a higher duty of care to campus society.

Immediacy: Remove Graduate Intern from Role

To facilitate Justin's removal, many steps are involved, especially because Mid-State and Grand-State Universities have stakes in Justin's interinstitutional duality. First, Pernell would need to immediately alert Marcela that Justin is a risk to students' safety; his rationale would be that since resident assistants are students, his risk of dangerousness transcends to the entire campus population. Pernell and Marcela would also need to consult with Mid-State Campus Safety to facilitate issuing Justin a Criminal Trespass Warning status, ensuring that Justin's ties with Mid-State University are fully severed upon his termination. As a precautionary measure, Marcela would need to inform Kylie, Kira, and Mitchell that Justin would be permanently banned from Mid-State University. Jeanne would likely be informed by Kylie or Mitchell of Justin's ban as it could affect his fitness for continuing in his student affairs program at Grand-State University. Lastly, serving Justin with a Criminal Trespass Warning would highly inhibit him returning to Mid-State University due to its nature; Justin would be "subject to

arrest” if he were to return after being served (Frankl, personal communication, September 18, 2025).

Newfound Litigious Graduate Intern Risk: Notifying Vice President of Student Affairs

Upon Charlotte calling Pernell to inform him that Justin revealed his desire to throw things at his resident assistants, Pernell would ensure to immediately notify Marcela by phone, since Justin was admitted to Bayview General Hospital’s emergency room on a Sunday evening. Pernell would also inform Marcela about this in writing to maintain a paper trail. Given Justin’s risk of dangerousness overshadowing Justin’s recent compounded sexual assault stress contributing to it, Pernell would omit any information about this in his communications with Marcela. Marcela would virtually instantly concur with Pernell and indicate her endorsement to remove Justin; Marcela would provide this endorsement verbally and in writing to Pernell to maintain a paper trail. Marcela would then assist Pernell to initiate the process of having Justin served with a Criminal Trespass Warning status upon his return to campus directly after his discharge.

CAS Ethical Framework. In this section, we will discuss how Pernell and Marcela aligned with, or violated, the CAS (2004) Statement of Shared Ethical Principles for Student Services in Higher Education. Specifically, we will analyze their alignment, or lack thereof, with the principles of beneficence, veracity, justice, and fidelity.

Beneficence. In the context of this case, the principle of beneficence calls on Pernell and Marcela to act in ways that uphold the best interest of all other involved parties (CAS, 2004, p. 2). While Pernell is acting in the best interest of Mid-State University by putting Marcela on notice that Justin is a potential safety risk to others, Pernell is also acting against Justin’s best interest. Pernell would have upheld Justin’s best interest by informing Marcela that Justin

admitted himself to the hospital, where he also expressed that the stress from his crises (i.e. sexual assault victimization and resident assistant confrontation) were the catalysts fueling him to seek care. Justin's self-concerted effort to admit himself to a psychiatric inpatient unit shows that he was acting in the best interest of everyone whose safety he would likely compromise had he not obtained psychiatric intervention.

Veracity. Student affairs professionals are called upon to be honest up to the extent that confidentiality is upheld when they communicate with others (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Contextually, Pernell rebuked veraciousness by not informing Marcela that Justin voluntarily sought medical care and failing to disclose Justin's recent sexual assault. Contrastingly, Justin acted veraciously by informing Charlotte and Maggie about the cascading events he experienced that led up to his hospitalization, including, but not limited to, being sexually assaulted and being humiliated by his resident assistants (Justin, personal communication, September 7, 2025). Had Pernell informed Marcela about Justin's recent sexual assault, he would have legally maintained confidentiality because under federal law, identifying a sexual assault victim to another institutional stakeholder in a decision regarding their or others' safety is permitted (34 C.F.R. §106.71, 2020, pp. 379-380; 34 C.F.R. §99.36, 2024, p. 271). Legal implications that affect veracity presented in this case intersect with the principle of justice; the latter requires that student affairs professionals operate within the scope of the law (CAS, 2004, p. 2).

Justice. Marcela and Pernell also had a duty to avoid imparting disparate treatment on Justin. The principle of justice calls on student affairs professionals to ensure the well-being and safety of all those whom their work affects (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Pernell knew well in advance of Justin's hospitalization that Justin escaped homelessness as a direct result of obtaining the hall director position and that Justin endured sexual assault and chemical coercion less than three

months prior to this (Justin, personal communication, June 7, 2025; Justin, personal communication, July 21, 2025). Pernell would have ensured Justin's welfare by emphasizing to Marcela that Justin would very likely end up homeless if he was terminated; this would likely lead Justin to be further marginalized. If Justin ended up homeless as the final product of reporting a sexual assault, this would go against operating lawfully (34 C.F.R. §106.71, 2020, pp. 379-380) and immediately compromise Justin's wellbeing (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Additionally, under the Patsy Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act (1972), also known as Title IX, federal law regulates how educational institutions in the United States must handle complaints of sexual assault.

Title IX. The Patsy Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act (1972) prohibits “discrimination on the basis of sex ... which encompasses sexual violence” (p. 1050). Justin's request to be reassigned to a new living space or be given a new mattress (Justin, personal communication, September 8, 2025) is a “supportive measure[s]” under Title IX (34 C.F.R. §106.30, 2024, p. 371). By not complying with Justin's request, Pernell and Marcela would open Mid-State University up to a potential Title IX retaliation lawsuit. Title IX's prohibition of retaliation includes, but is not limited to, refraining from issuing discipline to a member of an educational institution that arises from filing a formal Title IX complaint (34 C.F.R. §106.71, 2020, pp. 379-380). The imminency of a lawsuit Mid-State would face for retaliating against Justin because he asked for a Title IX accommodation would be a big deterrent for terminating Justin alone.

Fidelity. The principle of fidelity calls on student affairs professionals to show respect and unconditional high regard to their educational institutions (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Terminating Justin would align with showing their honored commitment to Mid-State University. The fidelity

principle maintains that student affairs professionals “are faithful to an obligation, trust, or duty” (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Thus, terminating Justin would dishonor Mid-State’s duty of care to him. Doing so would also cause Justin’s trust to be diminished in Mid-State University and higher education overall.

Prevent Graduate Intern from Inflicting Future Harm

While Justin's mental breakdowns seemed acute, Pernell would need to assess the severity of the damage he did in his hall director apartment by inspecting it. Irrespective of the damage severity, Pernell would need to consider implementing a measure that would permanently deny Justin access to any part of the university to keep current and future Mid-State University populations safe (Marcela, personal communication, September 16, 2025). With this component of the decision to terminate Justin, we ought to consider the principles of non-maleficence, beneficence, veracity, and affiliation from the CAS (2004) Statement of Shared Ethical Principles for Student Services in Higher Education.

Non-Maleficence

The principle of non-maleficence mirrors the Latin saying “Primum non nocere,” which literally translates to “do no harm” (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Issuing Justin a Criminal Trespass Warning would be a double-edged sword. While doing so would keep the current and future campus populations safe, it would render Justin unable to return for any reason, even years later when his frustration would likely have blown over. Marcela and Pernell would need to work together with Mid-State University Campus Safety to have Justin served with the trespass warning.

Beneficence

One facet of beneficence is working toward mutually sound outcomes (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Removing Justin from Mid-State University permanently presents a challenge – while some stakeholders involved in this decision would agree (e.g. student intervention team, Pernell, and Marcela), others might push back on its hastiness (e.g. Sheila, the Title IX Coordinator at Mid-State University). From Pernell and Marcela’s perspective, having Justin issued the trespass warning would be an immediate release of liability (Marcela, personal communication, September 16, 2025). To Mid-State University Campus Safety, this would be a measure that would immediately mitigate potential crime risk, thereby causing one less crime reported on their annual Clery Report (Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1990 [Clery, 2018]). Sheila would likely be hesitant to agree to have Justin served with the trespass warning because it would be a clear indication of retaliation; doing so would likely be seen as a way to “intimidate ... [Justin] for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by title IX ... or because ... [he] ... made a report or complaint” (34 C.F.R. §106.71, 2020, p. 379).

Veracity

Veracity requires student affairs professionals to be honest and maintain high integrity (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Issuing Justin the trespass warning would grossly violate veracity since doing so would give off the perception that he is a threat to others' safety. This would create a false narrative as while Justin did break items in his apartment, no Mid-State University property was broken. When Pernell conferred with Mid-State University Campus Safety about Justin's risk of dangerousness, he would only be veracious if he expressed that Justin was recently sexually assaulted and admitted himself to the hospital for psychiatric care. The distrust Justin would likely inherit from his termination would be amplified due to the power differential caused by

institutional duality – Pernell was his supervisor at Mid-State University pursuing his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Grand State University, where Justin was also pursuing his Master of Science in Student Development in Higher Education. Justin’s inherited distrust would also diminish affiliation, as we will discuss next.

Affiliation

Affiliation requires student affairs professionals to maintain a coherent community and ensure a healthy balance of power (CAS, 2004, pp. 2-3). Mid-State University could instantly recultivate a safe power dynamic by issuing Justin the trespass warning, as their stance could be that he was unstable to lead. Allowing Justin to return to his role after his mental episodes could efficaciously “mitigate the [huge] risk” (Pernell, personal communication, September 8, 2025) as it is “sensitive ... living with students” (Marcela, personal communication, September 16, 2025). Since symptoms of people who have mood disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are exacerbated by loud noises, Justin could disband the sense of community within his residence hall if he were to yell and throw things in his apartment again, which misaligns with affiliation’s facet of community building (CAS, 2004, p. 2).

Second Potential Action: Trauma-Informed Reintegration of Graduate Hall Director

Rather than instantly mitigate institutional risk, Mid-State University could also take a trauma-informed approach to reintegrate Justin back into his hall director role. In this section, we will revisit the roles of Residence Life Coordinator Alfalfa and Associate Director of Residential Engagement Tiana because a trauma-informed approach would have started the moment Justin’s notice of his sexual assault stress reached their inboxes. While more nuanced, we will also examine how Justin would be reintegrated if he was admitted to the hospital before Alfalfa or

Tiana read Justin's email. Again, we will use the CAS Statement of Shared Ethical Principles for Student Services in Higher Education to analyze these scenarios (CAS, 2004).

First Divergence: Immediate Intervention

Once Alfalfa or Tiana received Justin's email requesting flexibility as he was "processing the trauma" (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025), they could have responded to Justin's email to indicate their willingness and ability to work with him on deadline flexibility, with Sheila copied on the email to keep her informed. Tiana, Alfalfa, or Sheila could then set up a safety check-in with Justin to see where his headspace was. While Justin was sexually assaulted just three months prior to Alfalfa's inquiry about his work performance (Alfalfa, personal communication, September 4, 2025), trauma-informed professionals ought to know that any stressors that occur in the acute trauma stage could aggravate the initial stressor. Student affairs professionals would greatly benefit from being trauma-informed, and Mid-State University likely saw this firsthand with Justin.

CAS Standards

In this section, we will discuss how the CAS Statement of Shared Ethical Principles for Student Services in Higher Education would tie into this first diverging point where Alfalfa, Tiana, and Sheila would intervene (CAS, 2004). Singularly, this would strongly uphold all seven principles: (a) autonomy, (b) non-maleficence, (c) beneficence, (d) justice, (e) fidelity, (f) veracity, and (g) affiliation. Employing an inclusive approach with Justin would promote his safety and security. Additionally, by using a trauma-informed approach with Justin, Mid-Campus would break the stigma of educational institutions' hyperfocus on avoiding litigation (Licata-Hoang, 2024).

Autonomy. Autonomy promotes individual and external accountability; it also embraces that an employee has agency over their actions and words (CAS, 2004, p. 1). In alignment with autonomy, Justin took the initiative to inform Alfalfa and Tiana that he was seeking help. By responding to Justin in a way that established a collaborative effort to assist him with his duties, Alfalfa and Tiana would celebrate that Justin sought help when needed. By informing Sheila that Justin sought help, Alfalfa and Tiana would also hold themselves accountable for informing the appropriate administrator. Since Tiana and Alfalfa might have little understanding of sexual assault issues, they could do some research on ways to assist those in need; autonomy calls on student affairs professionals to grow professionally and personally (CAS, 2004, p. 1).

Non-Maleficance. On a high level, approaching Justin's notice of his trauma from sexual assault rearising with a trauma-informed care approach is the virtual equivalent of "do no harm" (CAS, 2004, p. 2). In his email to Alfalfa and Tiana, Justin shared that he understood the value of non-maleficance when he admitted, "shutting down gets us nowhere and causes ripple effects" (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Keeping Justin within the campus community would increase the likelihood that he would remain safe. It would also prevent others from experiencing compassion fatigue or burnout due to Justin's trauma being allowed to fester. Compared to mitigating institutional risk by issuing Justin a criminal trespass warning, integrating support into Justin's care plan would uphold the values of non-maleficance (CAS, 2004, p. 2).

Beneficence. Abruptly dismissing Justin would create space for hostility and grief. Justin's resident assistants would be most strongly affected as their roles entailed such frequent exposure to and connection with him. The grief felt by everyone at Mid-State University from Justin's removal would be amplified because it would encompass his professional and personal

personas. However, moving forward with Justin collaboratively would transcend from his resident assistants to the good of the residents in his hall; integrating Sheila, Tiana, and Alfalfa into Justin's care plan would cultivate said culture.

Justice. In today's world, injustice runs rampant. Many sexual assault victims have their reports fall upon deaf ears and blind eyes. To defy this narrative, Mid-State could provide Justin with the necessary resources to assist him with navigating his survivor journey. Tiana, Alfalfa, or Sheila could help Justin obtain information for Mid-State University's employee assistance program, if he was eligible, or connect Justin with off-campus resources who assist sexual assault victims. Helping Justin sustain himself in the face of adversity would be one of the most powerful and just things Mid-State University could do for him and others worldwide.

Fidelity. Fidelity calls on student affairs professionals to keep a healthy rapport with their institutions (CAS, 2004, p. 2). If Justin were abruptly dismissed, he would lose trust in higher education professionals and grow a stronger overall skepticism. In the spirit of maintaining a healthy rapport with Mid-State University, working with Justin to reach a healing point where he could maintain deadlines would be paramount. Using a trauma-informed care approach with Justin creates a strong bond and trust that is bilateral between him and Mid-State University. Justin would see that the university trusts that he knows when he needs to reach out for help and Mid-State University would confide in Justin to reach out for help when he believes it is necessary in return.

Veracity. Transparency is paramount in this case. Alfalfa and Tiana would operate veraciously if they informed Sheila of Justin's trauma stress notice, especially because he put her on initial notice three months before Alfalfa's email (Justin, personal communication, July 23, 2025; Alfalfa, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Veracity requires that student

affairs professionals "communicate all relevant facts ... [while maintaining] confidentiality" (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Informing Sheila on Justin's behalf would be a safe bet, especially because 34 C.F.R. §106.71 (2020, pp. 379-380) and 34 C.F.R. §99.36 (2024, p. 271) allow for complainants' identities to be shared to protect their safety and for matters related to complying with Title IX. Justin exhibited veracity by being transparent when Alfalfa questioned his missed work deadlines; he "admit[ted] that I [Justin] need[ed] to be more communicative and timely" (Justin, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Justin astutely worded the rationale behind veracity – siloing information is bound to backfire, as it likely would with the institutional risk mitigation mindset.

Affiliation. CAS (2004, pp. 2-3) calls on student affairs professionals to synergize with all groups of people and maintain a healthy rapport with other organizations. Showing respect for Justin as he was in his acute trauma phase would immediately honor trauma victims; rather than be shunned, Justin would be respected. This level of respect would prevent Justin from believing he is helpless; in turn, he would likely want to help others and continue the cycle of cultivating a community that enacts positive change. Students would be happier since Justin's support system at Mid-State University would be an important catalyst for his sustenance. Sheila, Tiana, and Alfalfa working together with Justin would equate to them synergizing.

Second Divergence: Graduate Intern Hospitalized

In this section, we will examine how a trauma-informed care approach could have been implemented if Tiana or Alfalfa had not read Justin's email; this would likely result in Justin getting admitted to the hospital after he was humiliated by his resident assistants and had his series of mental breakdowns (Amica, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Aster, personal communication, September 4, 2025; Larry, personal communication, September 4,

2025; Mitchell, personal communication, September 4, 2025). Mid-State University's obligation to approach Justin's situation with a trauma-informed care approach transcends a potential legal mandate imposed by states such as Connecticut (An Act Concerning Sexual Assault, Stalking and Intimate Partner Violence on Campus [CT PA 14-11], 2014). Irrespective of whether Justin was hospitalized, Mid-State University would best approach his situation with unconditional positive regard.

CAS Standards

Again, all seven principles of the CAS (2004) Statement of Shared Ethical Principles for Student Services in Higher Education could be exemplified even if Justin was hospitalized. Pernell and Marcela would likely be the key players at Mid-State University. Pernell's interinstitutional duality has a strong obligation to operate within ethical guardrails. Pernell could compromise the integrity of Grand-State University's Ed.D. in Educational Leadership program and Triboro States Colleges and Universities if he made a hasty decision regarding Justin's employment.

Autonomy. Upon learning Justin was hospitalized, Pernell could instantly recognize that Justin took the initiative to admit himself to prevent loss of control over his emotions. Pernell could listen intently to Charlotte and Maggie, Justin's emergency room and inpatient unit social workers, respectively, from Bayview General Hospital when they called him. Pernell may have gotten in direct contact with Justin to hear his self-reported account of what happened and get an idea of his headspace. Naturally, the intake process of hospitalization is stressful; thus, if Pernell spoke directly to Justin after he was settled on the inpatient unit, he could have gotten a better understanding of the situation. While Justin was responsible for his mental breakdowns and bringing himself to get necessary help, Pernell was also responsible for his actions or inactions.

Non-Maleficence. The first thing Pernell could do when he contacted Marcela was tell her that Justin was in crisis and hospitalized for a psychiatric emergency. Even if communicated professionally, terminating Justin upon discharge would instantly damage relationships and reputations at Mid-State and Grand-State Universities. As leaders in student affairs, Marcela and Pernell ought to know that making such a hasty decision would inflict harm on Mid-State and Grand-State Universities. Since the “supportive measures” (34 C.F.R. §106.30, 2024, p. 371) Justin requested while hospitalized included either a new mattress or new living space to help him handle his trauma stress from being sexually assaulted, terminating his employment would result in an illegal case of Title IX retaliation (34 C.F.R. §106.71, 2020, pp. 379-380).

Amplification of Effect on Pernell. Pernell severing Justin’s employment relationship could cause immediate consequences for him, such as dismissal from his doctorate program, or degree revocation if he already graduated. Even if Justin had not put Maggie on notice about his request for an accommodation, Pernell already knew that Justin was a sexual assault victim. If Justin pursued litigation against Mid-State University, a few things would likely happen. First, Justin would likely tell officials at Grand-State University about the sexual assault and associated accommodation request culminating in Pernell endorsing his termination at Mid-State University. Second, Grand-State University would be grossly ethically compromised and get bad press. The court of public opinion would likely heavily outweigh any monetary compensation owed to Justin by Mid-State University such that Grand-State University could decide to swiftly dissociate from Pernell to maintain its program and institutional integrity.

Beneficence. Keeping Justin at Mid-State University after his hospitalization would be mutually beneficial. If Justin remained housed, he would have consistent income, and the university would eliminate all costs associated with finding a replacement intern to fill Justin’s

role. The residents would be relieved of the stressors associated with wondering what caused Justin's sudden departure. The resident assistants would also be relieved of wondering whether their jobs were at stake if they sought help for a mental crisis. Ultimately, by employing a trauma-informed approach with Justin, Mid-State University could create a dynamic that encourages those struggling to seek help rather than withhold their mental stressors.

Justice. In alignment with justice, Pernell could have virtually contacted Justin using Microsoft Teams or another video chat service while he was hospitalized. By doing so, they could see Justin's demeanor and nonverbal cues, creating a fairer chance at keeping his job and keeping things equitable, which is a core tenet of justice (CAS, 2004, p. 2). Marcela and Pernell could also include Maggie in their discussions regarding their concerns about Justin's risk of dangerousness. Failing to speak to Justin directly before proceeding with a decision about how to proceed with his employment is a crucial misstep because the opportunity to "extend due process" is eradicated (CAS, 2004, p. 2).

Fidelity. Using a trauma-informed care approach with Justin would have many moving parts. While he worked at Mid-State, he also took classes at Grand-State, which is the unique space graduate interns are in; graduate interns have institutional or interinstitutional duality as a student and an employee. Pernell had a duty to show Justin, Mid-State University, and Grand-State University, and Triboro States Colleges and Universities patronage (CAS, 2004, p. 2). He could have done so by integrating Justin into his post-discharge plan. While Justin was hospitalized, Pernell and Marcela could have conferred with Maggie to set up a plan for Justin to achieve academic, work, and personal success after discharge. Granted, Justin's care plan would transcend Mid-State University and include Grand-State University since he studied at the latter.

Allowing Justin to have autonomy in his care plan is one of the core tenets of trauma-informed care.

Veracity. Pernell, Marcela, and Sheila were all owed the truth regarding Justin's hospitalization. Pernell could have told Marcela Justin was recently sexually assaulted on campus. Veracity requires that we "act with integrity" (CAS, 2004, p. 2). As Justin texted Pernell to indicate that he was "awaiting medical transport due to suicidal ideation and a PTSD flare-up" (Justin, personal communication, September 7, 2025), Pernell could maintain that same level of transparency with all the stakeholders he spoke to regarding Justin's situation. Informing the student intervention team at Mid-State University of the circumstances surrounding Justin's hospitalization would likely result in a calm, calculated outcome rather than a hasty one. Grand-State University stakeholders would benefit from knowing about Justin's situation since his academia would likely be affected due to his hospitalization.

Affiliation. Student affairs professionals ought to cultivate strong and amicable relationships among themselves and everyone who their work affects (CAS, 2004, pp. 2-3). Together, Pernell, Marcela, Maggie, and Justin could connect with the stakeholders at Grand-State University. Connecting Justin to Kira, the Counseling Services Supervisor, at Grand-State University would allow Justin the space to possibly process his sexual trauma and potential stressors. Connecting Justin with Mitchell, their Vice President of Student Affairs and Kylie, their Dean of Student Affairs, would give Justin a sense of agency over his academic life if he needed said assistance. Finally, connecting Justin with Jeanne, his academic advisor, would allow Justin to have a direct conversation with her about his academic trajectory.

The End of the Road: Which Road to Traverse

By now, we see that both Mid-State University and Grand-State University have stakeholders in the case of Justin's mental health. Mid-State could choose to take the expedient escape route and terminate Justin because his perceived threat to campus society overshadowed his sexual assault trauma being its catalyst. Conversely, Mid-State could also choose to reintegrate Justin right after he put Mid-State University on a second notice, or Justin could have been reintegrated while and after he was hospitalized. Of all stakeholders involved, Pernell had the greatest liability because he faced a real-life version of an ethics course, one of which he will inevitably be exposed to in his doctorate program. It is imperative that all professionals, especially those in student services, operate within strong ethical guardrails. If nothing else, taking the morally high road requires professionals to sideline their litigious inhibitions.

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