

DR. FARMER

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Dr. Farmer is a new assistant professor in agricultural sciences and is teaching a junior-senior level course on food production. Most of the students in her class are male (25 males, 7 females). So far, everything has been going smoothly. However, she notices that the students want to call her by her first name, Beth. She has never introduced herself that way, but her first name is on her door and on her syllabus. Dr. Farmer has attempted to manage the situation by either ignoring it or correcting students. In turn, the students have either ignored her corrections or have made some snide remark under their breath (e.g., “Boy, she’s power-tripping!”). A few students have been responsive to her request and have started calling her Dr. Farmer. She would not have made an issue out of it, but she has observed that the students call most of her male colleagues Dr. XXX. When she has made the observations to her male colleagues, they have either told her that she is too sensitive or that the situation will improve over time. However, she finds that her male colleagues refer to her by her first name to students. She is troubled by the entire atmosphere, but doesn’t know what to do. Since she is new, she has decided to remain quiet.

During one of Dr. Farmer’s class lectures, the discussion turns to food preferences and health. One of the female students, Natalie, comments that the general public needs to be encouraged more to eat a vegetarian diet. A male student tells Natalie that she must be a tree-hugger and one of those PETA supporters. Before she can respond, the other males in the class start to laugh and tease her. She doesn’t know what to say, but feels ganged up on at the time. So she gets quiet. However, she checks to see the reaction of the professor. Professor Farmer is quiet for a moment, but then returns to lecturing the class about the current topic.

After class, Natalie approaches Dr. Farmer to get her reaction to the classroom incident as well as to seek advice about handling the situation. Dr. Farmer listens to Natalie, but doesn’t offer much assistance. She tells Natalie that she has got to get used to comments like that and to ignore these kinds of antics. Natalie says okay, but is feeling very disappointed. She thought Dr. Farmer would understand because of her gender.

In classes after the incident, Natalie is quiet and doesn’t offer her opinion anymore. She is occasionally teased by a couple of male students about the vegetarian comment. In addition, Natalie has become more disrespectful to Dr. Farmer. Dr. Farmer is puzzled and doesn’t understand Natalie’s response. She wonders whether she should say something to Natalie. Dr. Farmer has admitted to herself that she didn’t like what had happened in class and wanted to intervene, but she was worried that the male students might turn against her and that she would receive negative teaching evaluations from them.

Questions About Dr. Farmer Case

1. What are the issues that Dr. Farmer is facing?
2. What issues are the female students facing? the male students?
3. Did Dr. Farmer handle the situations poorly? If so, how?
4. Did Dr. Farmer handle the situations well? If so, how?
5. How should Dr. Farmer tackle the issues she is facing?