

Charles' problem

1 The question

Dear John

I am a film PhD student of first year, currently I have got a bad and unacceptable information from committee of film studies for preparing to raise me as a student who can not pursue my progression of second year study and this decision is going to be sent to postgraduate school and I can not accept this absolutely.

The main reason lies in the proficiency of my spoken English and chair person said I did not submit any proof for my English ability in my application form, but when I applied Wessex University, there was not a requirement that I had to do this, because I finished my Master degree in USA and the offer got by me was unconditional admission. My chair person also mentioned I do need to enrol on an MA course in Film studies, but I have been awarded bachelor and master film degrees from USA.

The other reason forces me to leave school is I did bad presentation in first year PhD board, but I feel that I still have the room to improve my spoken English. If the above statement can be established, I do doubt why school formerly decided to accept me and gave me a unconditional offer. I do not find any school hand book to regulate the rules to judge student's performance and I do feel satisfied with the paper I submitted to my supervisor and the efforts I have done for my study.

I have asked other schools' students about my problem and they also felt strange and told me in their school regarding this case will only prolong the time of PhD study to 4 or 5 years and will force student to leave only according to his performance of first year and deprive of his right of study.

I am a international student coming from China and as you have known that I have to higher tuition than that of British student, so if my school wants me to leave that will make me a considerable money and force me to lose the courage to live in this world. I do fell unfair to be treated in such way and strongly protest this inhuman decision.

If school regards my ability is not good enough to pursue my second year, it should give me the more chance to try hard to improve this; even though I can spend longer time for my PhD study and do not accept committee abandoning me just when I just start and does not give me the time to improve my study.

I have told my case with one of my Chinese friend studying in Law school and he told me has the same experience as my and he had expressed to his supervisor already that he is willing to study here longer for his not good present performance and his opinion also has been accepted by his supervisor and school, therefore I do doubt, a university, an educational institute, wanting me to leave just being unsatisfied with my first performance.

I am an international student and came here studying with my son; if school wants me to leave, this will make me do not know how to open my mouth to tell my son and my family in China and to face my future.

I strongly claim that I have right and intension to study here, being an educational unit should give this chance otherwise gives me back the money.

I do wish you can deal with this case for me.

The email below I got from my supervisor are the descriptive reasons why I can not continue my PhD study of second year.

Regards

Charles

Letter from the supervisor:

Dear Charles,

You are not a lazy student far from it!

You have worked very hard indeed to try and come to grips with the nature of a PhD programme within a British University.

What primarily hinders your development is of course your language skill in English -it is such an impediment for you. Realistically you need to be near fluent to cope. And your application form gave us no indication that your level of English was far from strong.

I know you have made progress since that time with your language skills but there is still a long way to go before you are actually able to express complex ideas coherently.

The second problem for you is of course your ability to express the actual complexity of the theoretical ideas themselves. Here again for the first year board it was very difficult to make any sense either of your abstract or your presentation.



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It is our view as a committee that you cannot really expect to complete the PhD with us. I am very sorry that we have had to come to that view. The director of graduate studies within the school and then the Graduate School will of course have to make the final decision. But we went in all fairness by recommending that you continue.

Your only recourse if you want to stay in the UK is to take intensive English language courses until you can express yourself coherently (probably a year) - then I think you may well need to enrol on an MA course in Film Studies first. I am sure there are programmes in the UK where this should be possible. But not sadly at Wessex.

But all of this is going to be so expensive and still might not produce the results you wish for.

I am truly sorry we at Wessex cannot be more helpful.

Kind regards

Sara

Dear John

If you think it is necessary that I am willing to see you. I really get no way to go
Regards Charles

2 John's response

Dear Charles,

Thank you for writing to me. I assume you got my name from a colleague who has attended one of my courses?

From your two emails I think I understand your very difficult problem. You have been accepted on a MPhil/PhD programme where the committee reviewing your progress at the end of the first year has decided to recommend that your performance is, in their view, so poor that that you not be allowed to continue.

First, it is better that this is addressed now rather than being left for three years - when, having spent more time and money, you could be failing your whole degree. But what is the best way forward?

1. I think that there should be advisors at the University. The Student Union should have a postgraduate representative who would be willing to advise you, for instance. There may also be someone in the international office who could do so too. You would need to ask them about the experience of other students in the same position as you.
2. I do not think you should try and challenge the judgment of the committee on your English language ability, but ask, instead, that your registration be suspended for one year to enable you to improve your language skills, and that resumption of study for your degree be dependent on their judgment of the standard of your English at the end of that year.
3. Your grounds for this are that in accepting a place on the MPhil/PhD programme, you understood that the University had made the judgment that you were qualified and able to study for it. Apparently they did not take enough care to examine your English language skills, and it is therefore unjust of them to exclude you one year later on this basis.
4. Your alternative, but probably not one you prefer, would be to accept their decision but reclaim your expenses of the last year on the grounds that the University had not taken enough care in their consideration of your application, particularly in their assessment of your language ability.

I don't think we need a meeting, but I would be happy to continue to give my views, from the outside, if that is any help. In any case may I keep your experience on file, in an anonymous form naming neither you nor the University, so that, unless you object, I can use it to prepare other international students for their studies in the UK?

With best wishes, John

Team task

What are the lessons here for

1. students
2. supervisors
3. institutions?