The Student Occupy Movement at Louis Vuitton University (LVU)

Setting

Louis Vuitton University (LVU) is a large land grant University in the heart of south. Some say its campus resembles that of a country club, with large green lawns, Georgian-style brick buildings, and state of the art resources for it's approximately 19,000 students. LVU is strong mix of undergraduate and graduate students, with several selective master's and doctoral programs across disciplines.

LVU has historically enjoyed a strong, mutually beneficial relationship with its host town, Vuittonburg. Vuittonburg, a small town of 25,000 citizens, finds that the University is one of the main reasons families are attracted to reside in the town. The University frequently sponsors cultural events, has a winning sports team, and is the number-one employer in the region. Students have often been hired in the town for internships, and these positions typically result in full-time job offers – creating an intense affinity and alumni network in Vuittonburg.

LVU heavily recruits across the United States and has a growing international presence. Given the increasing role of Master's and doctoral programs, this has also contributed to the internationalization of Vuittonburg.
LVU's student population is:

- 60% White,
- 12% African American,
- 13% International Students,
- 10% Asian American,
- 4% Latino/a, and
- 1% Other.

LVU, like many state-governed institutions, has suffered due to recent state and federal budgetary cuts. As a result, the Board of Trustees (BOT) has approved several controversial decisions that directly affect students for the upcoming academic year. While the exact details are unknown, the campus newspaper has been reporting evidence of a significant tuition increase for students and fewer resources for student financial aid.

Characters

- **Arianna Schaefer**, senior philosophy major from Shreveport, Louisiana
- **Jeff Rodriguez**, program assistant in campus activities (new professional)
- **Claudia Wittstein**, dean of students
- **Quinn Davis IV**, president LVU
- **Elaine Johnston**, vice president of external relations

Case

Arianna Schaefer, LVU student

Arianna has just received her acceptance letter for graduate school. She has been admitted into the prestigious MA program in medieval and religious studies at LVU. She is also elated to read that she has been selected to receive a graduate assistantship in

the department, pending final budgetary approval. This is the perfect opportunity for her to use her philosophy degree, and to demonstrate to her parents that her major was a good choice after all.

She goes to tell her philosophy professors and fellow students the good news, but is greeted with significantly less enthusiasm than she had hoped. They direct her toward an article in that day's campus newspaper, in which tremendous tuition increases and ruthless budget cuts affecting graduate students specifically are reported. She immediately contacts the department, who states that she can do nothing but "wait and see". Recognizing that she cannot be the only one facing such traumatic circumstances, Arianna writes a scathing letter to both the campus newspaper and the local Vuittonburg newspaper. In her letter she bemoans the potential lack of funding and the ways in which this lack of funding will change her career path and eliminate her educational opportunities. Intending to build support from both the campus and town, Arianna includes her Twitter handle so that people can contact her and a link to a Facebook page where people can pledge their commitment to restoring graduate assistantship funds. She also makes a clarion call for people to protest the administration's decision by meeting in front of Bureaucracy Hall in a show of solidarity.

Claudia Wittstein, Dean of Students

Claudia Wittstein, the dean of students, is also quite concerned about the effects of the budget constraints on the students, and reads Arianna's letter in both newspapers. As she reads, she feels conflicted: on one hand, she sympathizes with Arianna and fondly remembers her own youthful protests while on the other, she must now consider the potential consequences of such media attention for her campus. In order to mitigate any potential backlash from the community, Claudia contacts Elaine Johnston to write a letter of response to Arianna and any other students who may be affected by the budget cuts. Claudia also tweets to Arianna that she understands and would like to talk with her about the situation, but her communication goes unanswered. In a rare move, Claudia also reaches out to Arianna through her office's Facebook page but receives nothing in return.

Upon coming into the office, Claudia sees that Arianna has submitted an application for a campus protest permit. Given the already high level of campus and community scrutiny about the situation, Claudia has no choice but to approve the permit. However, Claudia also notes that the permit is only valid on Friday, from 10 am – 7 pm. Should students be found to be protesting or gathering outside of those hours, they will be in direct violation of campus policy and will be subject to disciplinary action. Claudia recognizes that campus security should also be notified; when she calls them, they dismiss her concerns and say that they will only arrive on the scene if there is a disturbance. Claudia watches from her office in Bureaucracy Hall as the crowds begin to swell in solidarity with Arianna.

From her position in Bureaucracy Hall, Claudia sees the group of protesters grow exponentially, and she sees Arianna in the middle of the action. Although her first two social media messages had been ignored, Claudia is determined to try to contact

Arianna and work with her through suitable channels to address her funding and graduate school concerns. Stepping out of Bureaucracy Hall, Claudia is immediately aware of the size of the crowd and their almost palpable anger at the perceived injustices of LVU. She approaches Arianna and gets her attention. Introducing herself, Claudia again offers to meet with her to discuss her concerns in a calm, rational way. Arianna agrees that she will come in on Monday morning.

Over the weekend, Claudia watches local news coverage of the protest; she sees that the group has ignored the parameters of their permit and has entrenched itself on campus.

On Monday morning, Elaine calls Claudia and excoriates her for even authorizing a campus protest in the first place; Elaine must now confront the public relations spectacle of the protest and ensure that no irreparable harm is done to LVU's brand identity. The next phone call Claudia receives is from the President Quinn Davis' office: several members of the Board of Trustees have contacted him with their concerns about LVU's image and general campus unrest. President Davis states that this is Claudia's mess to clean up and he expects it to be done today. He states that Claudia has taken her role as student advocate too far, and that she needs to prioritize the needs of the institution over the needs of a small subset of students. Claudia listens with one ear, but she is also waiting for Arianna to come in for their arranged meeting. Arianna misses her appointment and Claudia sees her, staying with and speaking to the crowd. Claudia admires her dedication to the cause, but wonders at what cost to Arianna's own future and opportunities.

Claudia turns her attention to the protest, mindful of Arianna's willful ignoring of meetings and messages as well as the recent phone calls from Elaine and President Quinn. Her role as the voice of students has never been so muddled.

Back to the Protest

At first Arianna didn't know exactly how to react to the popularity of her newspaper editorials and the Facebook page, but now that a protest was planned for Friday in front of Bureaucracy Hall she felt empowered. With an approved "rally permit" from the dean of student's office in hand, she began working with a small committee of friends to organize speakers and events for the protest. The nine hours allocated for the rally seemed like a lot, but with over 250 posts on the Facebook page per day, many volunteers and speakers were coming forward to fill the agenda. Arianna could barely sleep at night with all the planning for the event. Faculty members, LVU students, alumni, community members, and neighboring university students had all indicated that they would participate in the protest in support of the cause.

The big day finally arrived. By late-afternoon the crowd had exceeded 300 people—all actively listening and cheering for the various speakers of the day. Arianna, somewhat of a hero on campus at this point, kicked off the event as she told her story. Other speakers echoed her anxiety of high tuition costs, the declining job market, and crushing student loans. Speaker after speaker moved the crowd with their personal and

real accounts of being a student at LVU. The closing speech, organized by Arianna herself was scheduled to start at 6:30 pm. In this speech, Arianna planned to summarize the events of the day and encourage her fellow classmates to write letters to the board of trustee members when they returned to their homes. This was the last speech of the event, but Arianna felt compelled to do something more.

Fueled by the emotions of the day and the now 500 audience members, Arianna did something that she didn't plan to do at the beginning of the speech. As she was speaking, she realized that letters to the board of trustee members was not the solution that she desired. She wanted more. She compelled her audience to make a difference by extending the protest indefinitely. She urged each audience member to recruit more protesters, to bring tents for shelter, and to form committees to organize – she started a movement for change. And, the crowd cheered in support.

By Monday morning, Arianna had created a fully-functioning community of protesters directly in front of Bureaucracy Hall. Labeled "Occupy LVU", committees of students were organized around themes of nonviolent action. Committees were responsible for protest events like creating poster signs and banners, drafting letters to BOT members, government representatives, and campus administration, making phone calls to key decision makers on campus, and canvassing the campus for new student members. The biggest team was the group charged with documenting the protest. Students were blogging, tweeting, filming, and reporting the protest events to the campus and town newspapers. Occupy LVU had a life of it's own. Arianna was at the lead, and she didn't plan to back down to the campus administration. She truly felt this was the movement that would bring about real change for the campus.

Jeff Rodriguez, Program Assistant in Campus Activities

On his way to Friday afternoon staff meeting, Jeff Rodriguez, program assistant in campus activities, witnesses the first group of protesters assemble in front of Bureaucracy Hall. For days now, he has seen posts on Facebook, editorials in the campus newspaper, and discussions among his friends about the movement on campus. Jeff's initial reaction to the movement is quite complex.

On-campus is initial reaction is in support of the decisions that will benefit the university, but recounting the numerous responses on Facebook he slowly feels a turn of emotions. Jeff identifies with the concerns of the protesters, had he not graduated two years prior he too would be a strong supporter of the movement. His LVU Facebook friends have invited him to several of the events over the weekend. A few of his underclassmen, now upperclassmen, have visibly written comments on his Facebook wall commenting on his attendance and support over the matter. Jeff feels conflicted on the matter on whether or not he should attend, voice his concerns, or remain silent. At that moment he receives an aggressive collection call from Hallie Nae requesting payment. For the past few months Jeff has financially assisted his family paying bills and this has caused him to fall behind on his payments. The tone and non-understanding nature of the collection agent tips Jeff over the edge. Jeff now feels compelled to take a stance on the movement and joins several Facebook events.

After lunch Monday afternoon, Jeff arrives in front of Bureaucracy Hall. As a member of the staff he is aware the protesters permit has expired as of Friday 7 pm. Seeing more students have arrived and camped out over the weekend Jeff mingles in with the crowd. His rationale is “strength in numbers”. Jeff sticks out in his professional attire and his LVU Facebook friends quickly find him among the crowds of people. They discuss the details of the other events later that week and urge Jeff to use his position at the university to advocate on their behalf.

Jeff thought his support of “Occupy LVU” would be sufficient to his Facebook friends and his own desires but now he is being pressured to advocate for the students because of his unique position-alumni turned staff member. Jeff has had limited interactions with the Dean of Students and feels intimidated by her presence. He musters up the courage to contact the Dean but is deeply concerned she will not support him or the movement.

Analysis of Case

Please respond to the Case Study from one of three points of view: 1) the dean of students, 2) the vice president for external relations, or 3) the program assistant in campus activities. In your analysis address the role of free speech on campus. From the point of view chosen, articulate a response or intervention that university administrators should enact to both protect student’s rights as well as the learning environment.

Build a response to the case based on appropriate literature and understanding of student’s right to free speech on campus. Consider these guidelines in your analysis while keeping in mind the rights of students who feel victimized by the BOT actions.

(a) What is the initial problem? Who is responsible for this problem?
(b) What are the important issues (student development, free speech rights, campus administration, and others) to be considered?
(c) Who should be involved in addressing the case?
(d) What are the unique factors of the chosen point of view (dean of students, vice president of external relations, OR program assistant in campus activities) as the team develops a response to Occupy LVU? Be sure to connect the unique factors of your point of view to the proposed solution.
(e) What are the possible solutions to the case?
(f) What budgetary considerations, if any, are there for your solution?
(g) What is your recommendation for addressing the case? What issues may arise as a result of implementing the intervention/community action?
(h) How will the task force be able to measure the effectiveness of the proposed intervention/community action?

These questions are for your consideration only. You do not have to include answers to each in your analysis.

Among other things, strong case analyses should:

(a) acknowledge a full response to the chosen point of view in relationship to the acts of protest, but also creatively address the needs of the whole community,
(b) address the issue in a creative and innovative way that pushes analysis to a new level, and
(c) avoid common practices or status quo responses to student's right to free speech on campus.