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Anti-LGBT2Q+ University Values: Should an Innovative Experiential Exercise be Cancelled?

Dr. Pramita Balakrishnan was a strong advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). She was one of Canada's most renowned professors in management communications, with over 25 years of teaching experience at the post-secondary level in engineering and business schools across Canada. Over the past three years, more than 500 students had completed a virtual, cross-cultural, experiential exercise as part of Balakrishnan's management communications course at the Goodstein School of Business, a top-ranked business school in Canada.

In the exercise, students from different schools were placed in teams and worked collaboratively to produce and present a communications plan to address a real-world business problem, as they strengthened their skills in case analysis and presentation, cross-cultural communications, and virtual team communications. Balakrishnan was about to run the exercise again with her students this year in just a few hours, partnering with a colleague, Dr. Matthew Adamson, who had just begun working at Mission University, a small private Christian school in the United States.

As Balakrishnan excitedly delivered the exercise details to her class, several students quickly expressed discomfort in working with students at Mission University because, they said, that school enabled anti-LGBT2Q+ⁱ behavior. Unbeknownst to Balakrishnan, the Mission University administration required students to sign a values statement that prohibited "sexually impure relationships" such as homosexual activities. In fact, in accordance with the university's values, the school had rescinded an offer of admission to a student because the student was living with a romantic partner of the same sex. Upon learning this, more of Balakrishnan's students at the Goodstein School of Business expressed discomfort about participating with anyone associated with Mission University, while other students wanted to go ahead with the exercise. Balakrishnan wondered how to respond to both groups.

Balakrishnan was a strong supporter of grassroots activism and giving voice to values, but she also believed that, in the business world, one does not always have the choice with whom one works, and one

i Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, queer, plus allies.

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