

### Case #13: Angela Tsu

*I can't think about physics right now, Angela told herself as she prepared to go home for her winter break. I can't tell my family what happened. They all want me to succeed, to go on to medical school like I planned. I can't tell them about the 'F' I got on that exam. I can't tell them about barely passing the course.*

Angela, a first-semester sophomore, had tried to do well in introductory physics. She thought she understood the material. She worked through all the examples. Her grades on homework assignments were excellent.

But, when Angela sat down in front of her first exam, her mind went blank. She felt a familiar fluttery sensation in her ribcage. *I know this*, she told herself. *It's not hard*. She spent half of the test staring at the paper and trying to breathe slowly.

With her first "F" in hand, Angela went to the physics tutoring center. Jim, a friendly graduate student, agreed to assist Angela with her assignments and to help her study for the next exam.

When Angela described her anxiety to Jim, he suggested that she approach her professor.

Angela accepted Jim's offer. They went together to talk with her professor, Daniel Carter, during office hours.

When Jim explained the situation, Carter seemed amenable to the change. "Sure, we can give Jim's idea a try," he said. "You can have extra time to work on the next exam, and we'll see how that goes."

At the next exam, Angela felt none of the tension she had experienced before. She was allowed to work in a separate room and to take as much time as she needed to complete the test.

"Excellent job," Carter said to Angela when he handed her back her paper. The other students were filing out of the classroom, joking and talking with each other. "You probably won't need extra time on the next exam. You earned a 100%."

Angela looked uncomfortable. "But I do need time, Professor Carter," she said.

"You have to understand, Angela," Carter replied, "There are other students in this class who could earn an A+, given extra time, and I don't want to put them at a disadvantage." He smiled at her. "Consider it a compliment."

As Angela walked into the classroom for the final exam, she told herself that everything would be all right. She was prepared. She would not get anxious.

The exam began with a complicated question about a space shuttle that left Angela completely confused. She felt her heartbeat accelerating and rushed through the rest of the questions, pausing occasionally to chew on her pencil. *If I fail, I fail*, she thought.

Her final grade in the course was a C-.