

Case* #1: Copying an Essay

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Allegation: Alice copied passages from Boyd's final essay assignment. The act violated article 5.15.1 of the University Calendar, which stipulates: "Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to: Plagiarism, which is the act of presenting the ideas, words, or other intellectual property of another as one's own. The use of other people's work must be properly acknowledged and referenced in all written material". The assignment was worth 40% of Alice's final grade.

Background: According to the Report on Academic Misconduct, the course instructor who made the allegation found unmistakable overlap between two essay assignments. The two assignments shared multiple identical or near-identical passages throughout, as well as three idiosyncratic errors related to legal interpretation. The course instructor consulted two colleagues and called a meeting with the two students. At this meeting, after the course instructor explained there were significant commonalities between the papers, Alice immediately admitted to having copied materials Boyd had shared in the spirit of support. Alice took full responsibility for the offence, claiming it happened due to difficulties with writing and synthesis.

Hearing: Alice brought a representative from Academic Advising to the hearing for moral support. Alice admitted to having plagiarized, and explained that s/he had been given a 3-week extension on the assignment and had sought help from a friend who was also in the course. Said friend, Boyd, had sent Alice his assignment, but Alice stressed that this was not done with the knowledge that it would be plagiarized. Alice admitted she understood what she was doing at the time to be plagiarism. Alice indicated that at the time of writing the assignment she had personal problems that caused significant distress. She demonstrated remorse as well as an earnest interest in taking responsibility and carrying out corrective measures, including appointments with the course instructor (which were already underway by the time of the hearing) and the Academic Success Centre (the first of which was scheduled for the week following the hearing).

Decision: The Committee decided the penalty would be a warning letter reminding Alice that the offence committed was unacceptable, and that a more severe penalty would be imposed in the event she commit future acts of academic misconduct. The Committee further required that Alice resubmit the essay assignment for grading, and strongly recommended that Alice seek support from the Academic Success Centre for the assignment and more generally to prevent future acts of academic misconduct.

Reasoning: Alice was issued a warning because the student had not committed prior acts of academic misconduct, and it is customary that penalties are proportional, with more severe penalties imposed in cases of repeated offences. While the violation committed was deliberate and arguably more serious than cases where students fail to attribute citations to their research, the Committee had confidence that Alice was taking steps to prevent future possible violations of

academic integrity and was further persuaded by the course instructor's recommendations specified in the Report on Academic Misconduct.

The course instructor made the request in the Report on Academic Misconduct that Alice be required to meet with the Academic Success Centre weekly for at minimum two months. The course instructor made this request because s/he believed Alice's poor writing skills were a key contributing factor in this case. In the report, the course instructor explained that Alice was involuntarily removed from the public education system between grades 8 and 11, and stressed that Alice had a strong sense of moral responsibility. The course instructor requested that, in the event that the Committee decided to require a resubmission of the paper and imposed a grade penalty, the penalty be no greater than 10% of the total course grade, so that Alice had a chance of passing the course.

The Committee highly recommended that Alice avail him/herself of institutional services and supports rather than formally requiring that Alice do so because the student already demonstrated a willingness to carry out the tasks recommended. Further, conditional resubmission of a course assignment is not an enumerated penalty listed under article 5.15.3 in the University Calendar. Conditions may be possible should the Committee decide to impose disciplinary probation, but disciplinary probation tends to be imposed in cases of repeated offences, and only seems necessary in cases where a student has not demonstrated a willingness to change the habits that resulted in academic misconduct.

* Case studies are based on examples of common problems with academic misconduct. All names and identifying information have been removed.