

## Case\* #2: Purchasing an Essay

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**Allegation:** The Academic Advising Office received anonymous information claiming that a student had purchased several essays for at least three different courses. Purchasing essays for submission to a course violates section 5.15.1 of the University Calendar, which states: “Cheating on examinations, assignments, reports, or other work used to evaluate student performance. Cheating includes copying from another student’s work or allowing one’s own work to be copied, submitting another person’s work as one’s own, fabrication of data, consultation with an unauthorized person during an examination, or use of unauthorized aids.”

**Background:** Academic Advising received an email from someone who is apparently a ghostwriter claiming to have written several essays/assignments for a UOIT student. This person sent:

- The extensive email correspondence between the student and the ghostwriter;
- Copies of 4 assignments; and,
- Directions regarding the assignments sent by the student that were copied from syllabi and other course material.

There were no real names or course numbers attached to any of the correspondence or documents, but through investigation, three courses and the student were identified. The student is (or was) enrolled in all three courses. In one course, the instructor had allowed the student to do an alternative assignment which only s/he was doing; this is how the student was identified.

*The Situation:*

- Two of the courses were currently underway and the student had not yet submitted the assignments;
- One course was completed, but neither the instructor nor TAs had kept electronic records of the assignment submitted by the student and the copy we received did not have the student’s name on it;
- The student’s Hotmail account was cc’d on the original email sent to Academic Advising by the ghost writer; not surprisingly, the student did not come forward.

There were approximately 30 pages of emails between the ghostwriter and the student, plus the files containing the essays written by the ghostwriter. It is clear from the correspondence between the student and ghostwriter that this was not the first time the student had commissioned an essay, but the student had never been caught before (at least, there was no record in the Registrar’s Office or Advising office).

*Preliminary Investigation and Discussions:* Given the complexity of the situation, the chair of the Faculty Academic Integrity Committee consulted with the Dean and with the Associate Provost, Academic and IT. It was decided to wait until the after the current courses were finished before contacting the suspected student. At the end of the term, the instructors confirmed that the student did not submit any of the assignments provided by the ghostwriter. Because of the serious nature of the offence, a subcommittee of the Academic Integrity Committee met informally with the student to discuss the allegation.

*Informal Meeting with Student:* The subcommittee explained the allegation to the student who claimed not to know anything about a ghostwriter and that s/he had never purchased an essay for a course.

**The Decision and Rationale:** The subcommittee decided that, since there was a lack of concrete evidence that directly and specifically connected the student to the submitted information, a formal hearing would not be pursued.

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