

Case* # 3: Plagiarism

Written by Alyson E. King, Ph.D.

Allegation: Student submitted an assignment that had a high match rate with published sources (as indicated by a Turnitin.com originality report). The instructor felt that this constituted plagiarism. According to section 5.15.1 of the university's Academic Calendar, this is defined as:

“5. Plagiarism, which is the act of presenting the ideas, words, or other intellectual property of another as one's own, including images, designs, processes, computer software, digital, audio and video files, Internet resources and other works without appropriate attribution or credit. The use of other people's work must be properly acknowledged and referenced in all written material.”

Background: The student is in 4th year taking a fourth year course. It is a first offence. The assignment is worth 50% of the total grade for the course. The Turnitin originality report showed a match rate of 33%. The paper includes citations and references, but does not always include quotation marks around the phrases showing as matches in the Turnitin report. The student met with the Academic Integrity sub-committee to present his/her explanation.

Decision: The committee decided that the sanction would be a warning letter and that the instructor should grade the assignment with a maximum grade deduction of 20%.

Rationale: Given that it is the student's first offence and the relatively minor nature of the offence, it seemed fair to not impose a penalty that would result in the student failing the course. At the same time, because the student should understand paraphrasing by 4th year, a sanction was needed. With the weighting of the assignment at 50%, the imposition of a failing grade for the assignment would result in failing the course which seemed too severe a punishment for incorrectly quoting and paraphrasing in an essay.

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