

Case* #15: Misrepresentation

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Allegation: A student was granted an extension on a paper worth 30% after falsely notifying his instructor that a family member had passed away. The student then submitted a forged death certificate to her instructor who required the student to submit the documentation to the Academic Advising Office (which is the central location for receiving all documentation for extensions, etc.). The Academic Advising Office determined that the certificate was a forgery and refused to accept the document for the purpose of an assignment extension. The instructor and the Advising office believed this was a case of misrepresentation according to the university's Academic Calendar section 5.16.1: "Misrepresentation of facts, whether written or oral, which may have an effect on academic evaluation. This includes making fraudulent health claims, obtaining medical or other certificates under false pretences, or altering certificates for the purpose of misrepresentation."

Background: The student is a third-year student in a third-year course and this is the first time she has been accused of academic misconduct. The instructor submitted a Report on Academic Misconduct to the Faculty's Academic Integrity Committee. The Academic Advising office provided evidence that the dates and the surname on the certificate had been changed and that the same certificate without the changes had been used previously by another student.

The Academic Integrity Committee met with the student and gave the student the opportunity to explain the situation. Although the student insisted that the certificate was authentic, she was unable to provide any further evidence of the death.

Decision: The Academic Integrity Committee determined that the student had altered the death certificate and, therefore, had committed academic misconduct. Because of the purposeful and planned nature of the offence, the committee determined that the student should receive a zero for the assignment.

Rationale: In order to commit this serious offence, the student had to plan ahead and work to create a falsified document. The Committee believed that the student did not understand the seriousness of the offence and did not admit to any wrong-doing in spite of the clear evidence. In order to emphasize the serious nature of the offence, the Committee believed that a strong sanction was necessary. The student was reminded that any subsequent offences would result in a more severe penalty.

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