

Case* #16: Fabrication of references

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Allegation: Student A was accused of fabricating references for an assignment in which a minimum number of references were required. The course instructor found that the information used in the essay did not correspond with the sources cited. The instructor believed this constituted plagiarism according to the university's Academic Calendar section 5.16.1: "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: This is a second-year student in a second-year course who has not previously been accused of academic dishonesty. The course instructor found that the references listed did not accurately reflect what was written in the essay. Because this assignment is worth 20%, it is a Lesser Academic Offence and the instructor can deal with the offence personally. The course instructor contacted the student using UOIT email and Blackboard messages to request a meeting about the alleged offence. At the meeting, the instructor asked the student what he could say about the alleged offence. The student claimed that he may have mixed up some references while rushing to complete the assignment and may have included citations that should have been removed after editing the assignment. The instructor asked the student to provide evidence in the way of notes to demonstrate that he had read the sources; the student was unable to produce any notes, stating that he wrote the essay while simply reading the articles and books he used.

Decision: The instructor determined that while the student was sincere in his apology and may have accidentally committed plagiarism, it was still a case of plagiarism. The instructor decided that a sanction of a formal warning and a requirement to rewrite and resubmit the essay was appropriate.

Rationale: Because this is a first time offence, is probably a case of accidental plagiarism, and the student was sincere in his apology, the instructor decided that the student needed to better understand the nature of academic misconduct. The sanction of rewriting and resubmitting the essay was intended to teach the student to be diligent in taking careful notes during the research process and in correctly and accurately citing and referencing all his research. 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.