

Professor Contributes to Student's Plagiarism

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Issue

An adjunct professor discovers that a student submitted a plagiarized paper because it is a replica of a former student's paper that he sold to "plagiarizeme.com," an on-line paper mill (Corvo, n.d.).

Relevant Facts

- The university's student honor code is signed by all students (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1999).
- The professor earns a low salary and submitted students' papers to the website to earn extra money, despite his department's discouragement of outside work.
- The student plagiarizes in other classes, but professors have not reported her because they fear retaliation by other faculty (Schneider, 1999, January).
- The students whose papers were sold did not give the professor permission to sale their papers.

CLAIMANTS

- University: The university hires professors with the understanding that they will abide by the ethical codes of their institution, particularly because of the privileged access that faculty have to students (Ethical Guidelines, 2000). Furthermore, the university reveres its Honor Code [Duties of Fidelity and Non-Injury] (Bivens, 2000).
- Student who submitted paper: This student took a risk by purchasing her paper on-line, including the knowledge that her professor would discover the plagiarism through methods such as submitting the paper to a website that reviews papers for plagiarism. Whether the student should be held accountable by *this* professor casts doubt on justice and the principle of the 'Golden Rule.'
- Students and alumni: The professor has an implied contract with the students and alumni of the university to uphold the academic integrity of the institution. His actions could be considered injurious to the value of their education, degrees, and the university's Honor Code [Duties of Fidelity and Non-Injury] (Bivens, 2000).
- Other professors: Other adjunct professors may justify the professor's actions based on their shared opinions about the low wages they earn and the university's outside work prohibition (Ethic of Critique) (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Professors may also abhor the idea that this professor exploited former students' work and academic freedom for personal gain [Ethics of Justice and Care] (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).
- Students whose papers were sold: These students may consider the professor's actions as exploitive and egocentric [Duty of Non-Injury] (Bivens).

OPTIONS AND FAVORED OPINIONS

Five alternative courses of action exist for this professor (claimants' favored opinions are in parentheses):

1. Report the student's plagiarism based on his knowledge that the student copied a paper of one of his former students, and not reveal that he knew that the student purchased the paper (Hauptman, 2003).
2. Report the student and resign from the university without explanation.
3. Report the student, resign from the university, and reveal to the university that he sold students' papers.
4. Resign from the university without explanation and not report the student.
5. Act like nothing happened.

BEST AND WORST CASE SCENARIOS, HARM ANALYSIS

Reporting the plagiarism but not the sale of the papers; Resignation (Options A & B)

The best case scenario allows for the student to be held accountable. By resigning, the professor eliminates the harm to the university, other students, professors, and the students whose papers were sold. The worst case scenario would not allow the professor to disclose his actions, thus protecting him from discipline, allowing him a clean employment record.

Report plagiarism, resign, and explain (Option C)

The best case scenario allows both the student and professor to be held accountable for their actions and the professor will not be withholding the truth of his actions. The worst case scenario involves the university in a negative public relations situation with the public, faculty, other students, and alumni.

Resign from the university without explanation and not report the student (Option D)

The best case scenario allows the professor to hold himself accountable. The worst-case scenario does not hold the student accountable and the professor will not be held accountable by the university or his peers.

Act like nothing happened (Option E)

The best case scenario eliminates the harm to both the professor and the student. The worst-case scenario increases the harm to the other claimants inasmuch that the professor may continue to sell former students' papers, resulting in a weakening of the university's honor code.

RULES

According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2002) *Statement on Professional Ethics*, professors have a responsibility to demonstrate their respect for students as individuals, adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors, uphold the scholarly and ethical standards of their discipline, foster honest academic conduct, avoid exploiting students, and protect their academic freedom.

ETHICAL THEORIES

Consequential

Egoism is individualist consequentialism according to which consequences for the individual matter most (Wikipedia, 2003). Options A and E, which most favor the professor, are the egoistic ethical approach. Mill's utilitarianism approach is based on "greatest good for the larger whole" (Wikipedia, 2002). Options B and C minimize harm to the university, students, professors, and alumni, and are the most utilitarian approaches (Wikipedia, 2002).

Non-Consequential

The AAUP Statement on Professional Ethics (2002) has Kantian influences in its assertion of the rights of the students not to be exploited and that their academic freedom be protected (Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, 2003). Using the Ethic of Care (Ethical Guidelines, 2000), the professor must consider who will be helped and hurt by his decision.

DECISION AND DEFENSE

The professor should report the student's plagiarism, resign from the university and reveal to the university that he sold students' papers. The student's decision to purchase and plagiarize the paper existed regardless whether or not the

professor sold the papers. She should be held accountable through the university's honor code. The professor should resign out of his duty to his students and profession, but he should also be truthful to the university about his actions and face the consequences from his present and former students, peers, and supervisors.

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