



Academic integrity in Transnational Education

Target audience: Course Coordinators, Academic Integrity Decision Makers (AIDMs), teaching staff, Administrative Staff, transnational partner representatives.

Key issue being addressed: Exploring issues that might impact on the implementation of a university's academic integrity policy in transnational contexts.

Purpose of the case: To assist staff to understand their own and their colleagues' responsibility regarding academic integrity policy implementation in transnational contexts.

Materials and preparation needed to answer case:

- Copy of university academic integrity policy, and procedures.
- Background information on transnational relationships at the respective university.
- Copy of respective university's assessment and moderation policy.
- Accompanying PowerPoint based on 1-2 hour workshop

The case

Abstract

An overworked, under- resourced sessional lecturer who teaches in multiple offshore environments is accused by her Australian Course Coordinator of allowing plagiarism to go unchecked in her students' assignments. She is unsupported by her Head of School and feels compelled to seek advice from her Union regarding how she should proceed.

Background

Sally¹ has been a sessional staff member on rolling contracts for over 10 years at an Australian university. Her job consists of teaching core business courses to large classes at an offshore partner institution in nearby Asian countries. She has no research or administrative responsibilities, and conducts no local teaching. All teaching materials are provided by the Australian lecturers who insist that Sally does not deviate from the lecture notes or Powerpoint presentations. This is to ensure absolute consistency between the domestic and offshore offerings of the courses. Sally has an offshore counterpart who teaches all the tutorials during the study period, following Sally's one week lecturing visit at the beginning. The transnational partner is also provided with all teaching materials, assessments and mark sheets, and has no latitude to make any amendments. Sally is required to moderate a sample of marked assignments for each assessment task and provide a written report to the Head of School at the end of the study period regarding any discrepancies or concerns. Sally teaches eight such courses over seven study periods during the calendar year. Because of her extensive offshore experience, it is not unusual for the Head of School to ask Sally to take a new course with very little notice.

¹ All characters in the case are pseudonyms

Concerns about plagiarism

Over the many years that Sally has been teaching in transnational contexts, there have been times when she has been concerned about potential plagiarism in students' assignments. In the past she has forwarded such concerns to the Australian Course Coordinator. She is sometimes informed about the outcome of an academic integrity investigation, and other times she hears on the grapevine how these cases have been dealt with. Often, she hands the case over and hears nothing. She has become highly skeptical that the university's academic integrity policy is being implemented appropriately or consistently. Recently, her hectic teaching and travel schedule have meant that she barely has time to moderate assignments, let alone keep an eye out for plagiarism. She finds less and less plagiarism, although complains bitterly of a 'drop in standards'.

The incident

Sally is asked, with just one week's notice, to 'deliver' a new course at the University's Malaysian partner. Although unfamiliar with the material, Sally is persuaded that she will be doing both the Australian Course Coordinator and the faculty a huge favour as there simply is no-one else available to help out at such short notice. Sally prepares to the best of her ability, reading most of the course materials on the overnight plane to Malaysia. She meets the local tutor briefly but has no further liaison with him during the rest of the visit or during the study period. Sally meets all of her administrative deadlines for the course and submits her final report to the Head of School stating that there had been no concerns with the assignments. She then heads offshore again to 'deliver' one of her usual courses.

When Sally returns she is asked to meet with the Head of School to discuss extensive plagiarism in the new course. The Head of School says that he is disappointed with Sally's 'lack of professionalism' and cannot understand why Sally was not able to immediately identify the numerous instances of plagiarism and collusion by a large minority of students in the course. He asks why Sally did not check all assignments through the text-matching program available for use by all lecturers, and will not accept Sally's explanation that time constraints prevented her from doing so. Following the meeting, Sally feels angry that her professionalism has been called into question and decides to refuse any future offshore assignments.

Questions for discussion

1. What is your university's policy on assessment and moderation in transnational contexts?
 - a. What are the responsibilities of the various stakeholders (local course coordinator, sessional lecturer, offshore lecturer, Head of School) to ensure integrity in student assessment?
2. What support is given to sessional staff in either transnational or local contexts to make use of resources such as text-matching software to ensure integrity in student assessment?
3. What specific support and training is provided to students in transnational settings to understand the requirements of the Australian university's academic integrity policy?

4. If relevant, discuss your own experience of teaching in transnational settings, and any concerns you had in relation to academic integrity. How were your concerns addressed?
5. Brainstorm other academic integrity issues relevant to transnational education at your university.

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