



# Collusion versus collaboration

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**Target audience:** Lecturers assessing student tasks

**Key issue being addressed:** Difficulty of making a decision about assessing and dealing with work which is potentially the result of collusion.

**Purpose of the case:** To assist lecturers to work through their own policy and reflect on teaching and learning practices to address a seemingly simple case.

**Materials and preparation needed to answer case:**

- Remind participants to find and access appropriate policy and academic integrity resources at own institution prior to coming to session.
- Copy of university academic integrity policy, and procedures.
- Definition of collusion/collaboration
- Separate PowerPoint for facilitator based on 1 or 2 hour session.
- Barrett, R. & Cox, A. L. (2005). 'At least they're learning something': the hazy line between collaboration and collusion. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30(2), 107 – 122. doi: 10.1080/0260293042000264226
- Borg , E. (2009). Local plagiarisms, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. 34(4), 415 – 426. doi:10.1080/02602930802075115

## The case

### *Abstract*

*Two international students with English as an additional language submit work which is very similar in structure and ideas, but using their own words. Their lecturer is concerned that this may constitute collusion.*

Tina<sup>1</sup> and Muriel are two international business students in their second semester of study at an Australian university. Both students have been regularly attending classes in this core communication skills subject. The intended learning outcomes for this subject include writing an academic essay with appropriate acknowledgement and evidence of independent thinking.

While their English is not perfect, Tina and Muriel seem to be able to communicate effectively and they contribute to small group discussions. Muriel is more confident and will ask questions and comment in whole class discussions. Tina actually says little, but seems to be engaged in class activities. Both students have completed an English academic preparation course at the university language centre.

The lecturer is now marking the first writing tasks. She has not seen her students' writing before. The students have completed some online quizzes which will contribute to a final

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<sup>1</sup> All characters in the case are pseudonyms

grade. The lecturer noted that some of the students, including Tina and Muriel, took less than a minute to do each quiz - she had estimated that the quizzes would each take up to an hour to complete. Now that she is reading the essays she is aware that Tina and Muriel's essays are uncomfortably similar in ideas and structure. She calls the students in to talk about this.

In the meeting, Muriel says that they did prepare their essays together, but she is adamant that they wrote them up separately. The lecturer points out that the structure of the essay is the same, with each paragraph in the body focused on the same argument, and each supported with the same examples from the same sources. Muriel points out that there are no text matches. The lecturer acknowledges this, and also notes that there are many more language errors in Tina's essay.

The lecturer explains to the students that they could be accused of collusion. She decides to give the students the same mark for essay structure, ideas, evidence and referencing. Both students lose marks for independent thinking and Tina loses marks for the quality of her English language. The lecturer is uneasy about this case: she feels that the students were not really naïve, so perhaps she was too lenient. On the other hand, she wonders about her teaching and what she could have done better to have ensured that this situation had not arisen.

### Questions for discussion

1. How would you explain the difference between collusion and collaboration?
2. Based on your own university's policy, did the lecturer make the correct decision?
3. What does your policy say about collusion and collaboration?
4. What would you take into account if you were deciding how to deal with this situation?
5. Do you have any advice for this lecturer with regard to her concerns about her teaching?
6. How could your university support lecturers to develop teaching practices and assessments which ensure an actual measure of what students can do.
7. Do you have any suggestions for how your university could support lecturers to make decisions in cases like this one?

### Definition of collusion:

"Unauthorised collaboration on assessable work with another person or persons".

(*Academic Integrity Policy 2011*, La Trobe University,  
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/learning/integrity-collusion.html> )

"Presentation by a student of an assignment as his or her own which is in fact the result in whole or in part of unauthorised collaboration with another person or persons."

(*Academic honesty and plagiarism*, University of Melbourne,  
<http://academichonesty.unimelb.edu.au/plagiarism.html> )

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