



Group work: Assessment at stake?

Target audience: Students, tutors, lecturers and academic integrity decision makers

Key issues being addressed:

- Responsibility for academic integrity
- Poor scholarship or academic misconduct
- Task expectations and group assessment

Purpose of the case: To build awareness of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, in supporting academic integrity and dealing with misconduct in the context of group work.

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.
- Separate PowerPoint for facilitator based on 1 or 2 hour session.

The case

Abstract

Five students struggle to work together on a group assignment.

Four of the students are concerned that the fifth student has plagiarized her part of the assignment and so rewrite her section.

The Subject Coordinator is called in to adjudicate.

Five students in their first semester at university are working on a group assignment. Trying to find time to meet in their busy schedules of university classes, paid work and family commitments has been a challenge, hence they have only had one face-to-face meeting and some email exchanges. Now close to the deadline, four of the students are worried that one student's contribution is a copy and paste. They have asked the student to rewrite her draft, explaining that they could all be penalised for plagiarism. One of the group members even offered to help her with the text, but she does not respond. Her final contribution contains chunks of unattributed copied text interspersed with sentences that don't make sense.

The four students meet with their tutor to request that they not be penalised because of the copyist's poor work. The tutor explained that, in this course, being able to work as a team was an important competency which they needed to master in order to demonstrate a required professional standard. The students are told to return to their 'working in a team guidelines' and to use these to resolve the problem. The students feel this is unfair and that the problem is insurmountable.

The group assignment is submitted, with the plagiarised section hastily rewritten by the other students. After receiving a poor mark for this section, the four students appeal to the subject coordinator who reviews the case and calls the copyist in for a chat about her copied text.

She breaks down and says that she should not be seen as a 'cheater'. She says she was excluded by the group, that they lacked integrity because they did not follow the guidelines and had not developed a proper team, and that, although some of her work had been copied it was not cheating because she had understood the texts, and had found the best answers. She acknowledged that academic writing was a struggle for her.

Questions for discussion

Students

1. What do you predict happened as a result of the meeting between the student copyist and the coordinator?
2. What does academic integrity mean to you?
3. How does your policy define academic integrity?
4. List student responsibilities to support academic integrity.
5. What does your university policy say about responsibilities for academic integrity?
6. Are the students in the group dealing with academic misconduct or poor scholarship?
7. Re-tell this case so that learning opportunities for all the students are maximised, in a context where academic integrity is fostered.
8. Would you like to know what happened following the meeting with the coordinator?

Staff

1. What should happen to the student copyist?
2. What does academic integrity mean to you?
3. How does your policy define academic integrity?
4. List staff responsibilities to support academic integrity and ensure proper assessment takes place.
5. What does your university policy say about responsibilities for academic integrity?
6. Discuss the role of the tutor and / or coordinator in this case.
7. What are the issues of assessment in group work?
9. Re-tell this case so that learning opportunities for all the students are maximised, in a context where academic integrity is fostered.
10. Would you like to know what happened following the meeting with the coordinator?

Following the meeting

The group mark was reassessed without taking into account the copyist's section. She was sent to the Academic Language and Learning Centre for advice about proper acknowledgement and was advised to have regular consultations for help with her academic writing.

The subject coordinator asked the Teaching and Learning staff to work with her on the curriculum so that assessment tasks match the learning activities. Further complaints were

received from students about the difficulties of trying to work together in a group. A peer marking system was trialed with mixed results.

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