



Investigation and confidentiality

Target audience: Academic integrity decision makers

Key issue being addressed: How to support academic integrity decision makers to deal with ethical and professional issues

Purpose of the case: To assist academic integrity decision makers to work through their own policy to respond appropriately to an inappropriate staff request

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.
- Lizzio, A, Wilson, K & Hadaway, V 2007, 'University students' perceptions of a fair learning environment: a social justice perspective', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 32, no. 2, April 2007, pp. 195–213.
- Houston, MB & Bettencourt, LA 2009, 'But that's not fair! An exploratory study of student perceptions of instructor fairness', *Journal of Marketing Education*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 84-96.

The case

Abstract

Julie is a junior academic on a fixed term contract. She takes on the role of Academic Integrity Decision Maker (AIDM) but feels pressure to release confidential information about students who have breached the academic integrity policy to senior staff members. She seeks advice from the Chair of the Faculty Investigation Committee.

In an Australian university, a recently appointment academic has been asked to undertake the role of Academic Integrity Decision Maker. This is a role that would normally be carried out by the Head of School or the Associate Head of School, but the size of the school (over 1000 students enrolled across three campuses and with some transnational teaching as well) contributes to the workload of all staff. Few staff willingly take on this role because they know that it is time consuming and that it requires wisdom and fortitude. Julie Smith¹ is happy to take on this role as part of her academic governance. She was an undergraduate student of the school eight years earlier and so she knows how important it is that allegations of breaches of academic integrity are appropriately investigated.

Her role is to receive referrals of allegations of breaches of academic integrity from subject coordinators who have undertaken a preliminary investigation and consider if there is evidence of a breach and that the breach is not of the category that the subject coordinator themselves can deal with. Julie also acts as an advisor to less experienced subject

¹ All characters in the case are pseudonyms

coordinators who seek information on the university's academic misconduct policy and procedures. The most frequent type of allegation is that of plagiarism. Sometimes the allegations concern collusion or copying from another student.

Julie is employed as a Level B Lecturer. She is undertaking doctoral studies in the same academic unit where she is employed. She does not yet have a continuing position and will be required to apply for her role within two years of commencing this full time position. Towards the end of one academic year Julie finds that she is dealing with a number of academic integrity cases relating to students enrolled in the 100-level subjects of a three year degree. Most of these cases relate to plagiarism and poor academic practice in relation to the paraphrasing, citing and referencing of sources. The course coordinator requests a list of the names of those students enrolled in the degree program who have been found guilty of plagiarism. When Julie asks the coordinator why they want this information the response is, 'So that I can keep an eye on these students for the rest of the course and be alert for any future allegations'.

Julie knows that the 'Faculty Register' of academic misconduct cases is confidential and can only be accessed by the Dean or the Chair of the Faculty Investigation Committee. This would explain why the course coordinator needs to ask Julie for information rather than asking for access to the Faculty Register.

Julie declines to provide the information that the course coordinator requests. She considers that she has to maintain the integrity of the process and the requirement that the investigation process remains confidential. However, she does have some misgivings because she does not have a continuing position and she knows that the course coordinator is a continuing Senior Lecturer. She is concerned about how her decision would be interpreted by others (especially the Head of School whose recommendation she will be seeking when she applies for tenure).

She decides to seek the advice of the Chair of the Faculty Investigation Committee.

Questions for discussion

1. What does your university policy say about privacy and confidentiality in relation to the investigation of allegations of breaches of academic integrity?
2. What does your university policy say about privacy and confidentiality in relation to the finding of investigations of allegations of breaches of academic integrity?
3. According to the policy of your university who is permitted access to information about allegations/investigations/findings in relation to student academic misconduct?
4. How does the 'custom and practice' of your university align with the intent of the relevant policies?
5. How would you determine if particular circumstances warrant deviation from usual practice?
6. Does your university have mechanisms for staff (particularly those with critical types of delegated authority) to seek confidential advice when faced with difficult decisions such as this one? What are these and how do staff find out about them?

7. Based on your own university's policy, do think that the correct decision was made in this case?
8. Do you have any suggestions for how your university's policy could be improved to better support the academic integrity decision maker?
9. Is there any conflict of interest here? Should Julie be an academic integrity officer while she is a higher degree research student in the same academic unit?

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