



Learning advisors and confidentiality

Target audience: Learning advisors, learning developers, supervisors

Key issue being addressed: Role of learning advisors in supporting research students

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.
- Statement about the role of the student learning support unit and their role in working with students

The case

Abstract

A learning advisor is concerned that a postgraduate student she has been working with has submitted a plagiarized research proposal.

Harriet¹ is a learning advisor who works in the student learning support unit. She sees students from across the university in individual consultations. Sometimes these students are referred to by their tutors or lecturers, and sometimes they make bookings on their own initiative, bringing with them a copy of their latest assignment and requesting advice on how to improve their writing or meet a particular assignment's marking criteria.

This year, Harriet sees one particular postgraduate student fairly frequently in individual consultations. He is in his first year of his PhD and when he first turned up at the student support unit, he was very confused about academic writing expectations. Over the year his writing, referencing and critical analysis has gradually improved, but like many first international students, he is still struggling with academic writing and was very concerned about meeting a departmental deadline for a formal thesis proposal of 10,000 words. During the consultations Harriet works with the student to improve his English grammar, while also helping him to refine and articulate his thesis' research questions and navigate through a literature review.

Frequently, the student brings in drafts of the thesis proposal. This includes poorly written material with inadequate referencing and uneven writing, some of which has clearly been copied directly from the source. A lot of the discussion in the consultations focuses on how to incorporate references and paraphrase source material.

¹ All characters in the case are pseudonyms

At a meeting toward the end of the year, just before his first year thesis proposal submission, the student appears with an almost immaculate thesis proposal which includes research questions that are similar but somewhat different to those discussed in earlier consultations. Harriet is convinced that this student has not produced this document on his own. She is told that he has already submitted it to the department.

Questions for discussion:

1. What would you do at this point if you were Harriet?
2. Would you:
 - a. Contact the supervisor/department and advise them that you suspect the student has plagiarised?
 - b. Consider that the individual consultation is confidential, so don't contact the supervisor/department, but strongly advise the student to withdraw this document and resubmit work of their own?
 - c. Something else?

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