



Privacy in the filing cabinet

Target audience: Policy and Governance Units, Subject Coordinators, Teachers, Administrative Staff

Key issue being addressed: How to incorporate ethical principles into everyday faculty information access practices

Purpose of the case: To assist staff 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.
- Jackson, J, Fleming, K, Kamvoumias & Varnham, S 2009, *Student Grievances and Discipline Matters Project: Good Practice Guide for Handling Complaints and Appeals in Australian Universities – Good Practice Guide* (ALTC Funded Project), Southern Cross University, Lismore.

The case

Abstract

A new staff member challenges the accepted practice at the university that staff members are freely permitted to consult 'the book' which contains details of students who have breached academic integrity policy.

In the Faculty of an Australian university the register of academic misconduct matters is maintained in a locked filing cabinet in the office of a senior administrative staff member. Each case is also recorded in a bound numbered book which is also kept in the locked filing cabinet.

It has been custom and practice for academic staff to consult 'the book' if they have a suspicion about plagiarism, collusion or copying by students enrolled in subjects offered by the faculty. If they find that there have been previous instances where the academic practice of a particular student has been called into question they are more likely to spend time acting on their initial suspicion and, as a result, to more thoroughly investigate the matter they are concerned about.

This practice of open access of the register of student academic misconduct matters has been unquestioned for several years. A new member of staff hears of the practice and is aghast. They have a number of concerns and seek consensus from their colleagues in the faculty about changing the practice.

There is resistance and a claim that student knowledge of the existence of 'The Book' acts as a strong deterrent to student academic misconduct, particularly in relation to plagiarism

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 academic misconduct?
4. How does the 'custom and practice' of your university align with the policy?
1. What mechanisms does your university have in place to provide assurance that its undertakings in relation to privacy and confidentiality are maintained?
2. What advice might you offer the new staff member who seeks to have the custom and practice of this particular faculty change?

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