Mid-Term Case Study Project on Academic Integrity

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Academic integrity plays an important role in our academic life. According to Kirk (1996), “this includes values such as avoidance of cheating or plagiarism; maintenance of academic standards; honesty and rigor in research and academic publishing” (Kirk, 1996) Due to culture difference, sometimes foreign students will have misunderstanding about the honor code. Especially, the definitions of cheating, plagiarism, stealing and lying. In order to increase the knowledge of honor code at George Mason University, I will analyze a violation of the honor code by using the knowledge that I gained about the meaning of academic integrity. In the following section, I will provide a detailed description of the situation of a particular case. Secondly, I will analyze the case according to GMU’s honor code. And thirdly, I will provide some advices I learned from the completion of this assignment. The objective of this study is to provide a detailed analysis about a case of academic honor. And I hope after this study, I can have a deeper understanding of honor code.

# Case Description

Derrick is a graduate student at George Mason University in the MBA program. In one assignment he used a classmate, Pamela, interview notes. The professor recognized what Derrick did and chose to refer this case to the Office of Academic Integrity.

## Description of People1

In this part, I will give the detailed information about these students who were involved in this case. I believe this information will help readers to better understand the situation of the case.

### Derrick.

Derrick is studying at George Mason University for an MBA. He participated in the class MBA678. He was having a busy time schedule during the semester. He was enrolled in 3 courses, worked a part time job, and participated in a campus student organization on campus. He is a good student. His GPA is 3.5 and his plan is to run his own business in the future. He told the professor he used interview notes from a classmate. But he insists that he did his own work.

### Pamela

Pamela is a friend of Derrick. She also participated in the class MBA678. She offers to help Derrick by giving him a copy of the notes from her interviews with the managers of the business. When meeting with the professor, she said “I did my own investigation, interview, and write up of the final project.” But, she didn’t mention that she gave a copy of her interview notes to Derrick.

## The information about this assignment

This assignment comes from program MBA678 Business Strategy. It requires students to investigate a local business, which includes gathering data from interviews with mangers. Then, students use analysis tools to determine strength, weaknesses, and recommendations for the business. According to the instructions, it is an independent analysis assignment. It doesn’t allow students to collaborate with other students.

# Case analysis

In this part, I will analyze this particular case and answer the question as to why these students might have violated standards of academic integrity. Then, I will point out the steps that will likely happen next regarding a referral to the Honor Committee with the Office of Academic Integrity. Lastly, I will highlight the possible outcome of the case should be.

## The Violation of Honor Code

The activity of these students should belong to cheating. The definition of cheating in GMU’s honor code is “encompasses the unauthorized use of, access to, or provision of academic work in an attempt to misrepresent a student’s actual efforts.  This includes submitting another individual’s work for a grade, soliciting solutions/assignments from online websites, unauthorized collaboration, or failing to adhere to requirements (verbal and written) established by the professor of the course.” (oai.gmu.edu).

## Why they violate this honor code

Firstly, the assignment stipulates that this is an individual assignment and students should not collaborate with others. Secondly, Derrick used Pamela’s interviews notes and didn’t do separate interviews. And the professor finds the similarities between Derrick and Pamela’s recommendations for the business. Thirdly, according the honor code, “cheating includes but not limited to use of unauthorized assistance.” (oai.gmu.edu) As I described above, Derrick and Pamela violated the cheating aspect of the Honor Code’s regulation.

## The next step of Office of Academic integrity

According the honor code, Derrick and Pamela needs to schedule a prehearing meeting with a staff member in the Office of Academic integrity. “Failure to schedule or keep a meeting will result in a hold being placed on the student’s account and the case being forwarded to the Honor Committee for review. Students and referring parties will receive decision notices via their Mason email account” (oai.gmu.edu)

After that, students will have three resolution options.

### Prehearing Resolution

“In the meeting, the student is presented with all information submitted by referring party. The student can choose to accept responsibility and faculty recommended sanction. If they make this decision, they couldn’t appeal the outcome.” (oai.gmu.edu)

### Full Case Review

If they believe they didn’t violate the honor code students may choose this option. They can appeal the finding of responsibility. Faculty cannot appeal resolution in this case but can refile a case.

### Sanctions Only Case Review

“A Sanctions Only Review takes place when a student accepts responsibility for the honor code violation but requests an amended sanction.” (oai.gmu.edu)

“Students need to show there are other elements that influenced the incident. There are two types of Sanctions Only reviews-an in person hearing and an expedited review.” (oai.gmu.edu).

#### In personal Hearing

“An in-person hearing is a resolution whereby the student appears with the professor and any witnesses or advisors before the Honor Committee.” (oai.gmu.edu) All in-person hearing are video records. It will become party of student’s record, unless the student be proved is innocent. In this process, the first 20 minutes will belong to referring party to present their case and referred students can ask questions. And the last 20 minutes will give students to present their case, and referring party also allowed to ask questions. They the referring party will provide the decision. “But In-person hearings only open to students whose cases meeting following criteria:

* The incident reported is **only** supported by eyewitness testimony
* The referring party recommends a sanction of program dismissal (removal from an academic program but not from the institution)
* The referring party recommends a sanction of suspension from Mason
* The referring party recommends a sanction of permanent dismissal (formerly known as expulsion from mason)” (oai.gmu.edu)

#### Expedited Review

“An expedited review is a resolution option where neither the student nor the professor appear in person before the Honor Committee.” (oai.gmu.edu) Student needs to submits some relative material in 7 days. These committee will review these materials and then they will decide whether they agree the sanction.

## The possible outcome

Due to this is the first time they violate the academic integrity. And all of them are good students. Besides, they shared the part of their assignment, but not all assignment. Therefore, they wouldn’t achieve very heavy punishment. But they indeed violate the academic integrity. In my opinion, the possible sanctions are assignment rewrite, grade reduction on assignment, zero for the assignment, grade reduction of the course, and attend academic integrity seminar. All of these punishments will make sure they wouldn’t make the same mistake. They work hard and spend much efforts on this assignment. Hence, I don’t think heavy punishment like program dismissal is appropriate.

# Conclusion

From this case, we can learn that unauthorized collaboration is unacceptable for completing the assignment. This is a kind of Cheating. And the most significant thing is whatever how many people collaborate with others and whatever who borrowed whose working achievement, all of them would be punished. Therefor, taking care of your working achievement and don’t share them with others.

Next time they meet this situation, I think students can interview the same business manager together. In this way, student don’t need to make single appointment. So, they can save time. And they can take their own interview notes instead of sharing interview notes. This couldn’t belong to collaboration. That’s why it is satisfying the standards of academic integrity.

This research provides a detailed analysis of a case about academic integrity. I hope through this study, we can gain the recognition of academic integrity and prevent something similar happen again.

References

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