

Issues in the protection of academic standards:

Assuring quality assurance in assessment

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Abstract

Teaching and learning are at the heart of the academic enterprise which is higher education. Students attend universities and other institutions of higher learning in order to learn and to earn qualifications; these institutions provide learning opportunities for students and assess the progress the learners have made towards standard goals. Assuring the integrity of the assessment process is thus a key issue for all institutions of higher learning. Particularly challenging for quality assurance in assessment are access to modern technologies and the diverse nature of the internationalised student body in a globalised world where people move readily from one country to another, both as students and learners, and as graduates. Globalisation of this kind also poses challenges to the integrity of assessment processes and the need to be able to verify the quality of the degrees graduates hold. This paper considers the importance of academic integrity and discusses the changing nature of the challenges faced by universities. It provides illustrations of some of the problems faced by those, such as University Proctors, who are charged with dealing with issues of dishonest academic practice. It then presents a case study from a New Zealand university of setting up a quality system to deal with the integrity of assessment practice and examples of dealing with other issues of dishonest academic practice. While they need to be applied with judgement and flexibility, at best, quality assurance measures not only discourage bad practice but also highlight to staff and students the importance of individual thought and work to the academic enterprise.

Introduction

Around the world universities and other institutions of higher learning are facing challenges in terms of assuring the integrity of their qualifications. This is not because universities, polytechnics and colleges do not care about matters of quality assessment. Rather it is because the expansion of the sector and a new technological environment have meant that these institutions cannot take for granted that the measures they used in the past to protect their degrees from being gained through fraudulent practice are still sufficient. Promoting integrity in a globalised and diversified academy is a complex task, which requires a variety of approaches in order to be successful.

This paper first presents the concept of academic integrity and the three major reasons for the current challenges which institutions face: demographic factors, internationalisation and the impact of new technologies. It then considers the problem of Dishonest Academic Practice, outlining the setting up of a quality system to deal with the integrity of assessment practice before providing further examples of the handling of academic dishonesty. The example presented is drawn from experience in a New Zealand university in order to illustrate the responses developed there to maintain academic standards in assessment in the face of considerable challenges. While Lincoln University in Canterbury, New Zealand, situated in the Pacific, may seem far away from Universities in Europe, in the modern world we share the need to find solutions to similar problems, including those of assuring that our degrees and other qualifications are honestly earned. New Zealand, as a Western country comparatively recent in terms of European settlement, has not infrequently been a pioneer in social and even educational areas.¹ Lincoln University has had to face earlier than most Western universities the challenges of a widening domestic intake, internationalisation and the new technologies. This paper draws on my experiences as University Proctor, a position that has its origins in responsibility for disciplinary matters but which also carries within it the opportunity to encourage honest academic practice.

¹Because New Zealand is a comparatively new country in terms of settlement, it appears it is easier to introduce change and for 'pioneering' in social and educational areas to take place. My PhD thesis (Kuiper, 2001) researches the early take-up of full-time tertiary study by adults seeking occupational change.

Issues of academic integrity

Issues of academic integrity centre on the importance of individual thought and work to the academic enterprise. Education involves the acquisition of skills and knowledge which is essentially the result of individual enterprise. Co-operative forms of learning are often very successful but the assessment on which the awarding of qualifications is, of necessity, focused on whether an individual can demonstrate their mastery of their area of study. Degrees are awarded to individuals, not groups, and, in awarding its degree to a student, a university is certifying that such a student is worthy to receive the institution's imprimatur and be recognised as a graduate of that institution. Especially at a higher level, the award of a degree signifies that the recipient is capable of independent thought and research, and at doctoral level, of the creation of new knowledge.

The recognition of the value of university qualifications is dependent on shared agreement between governments and providers of education and those who seek the qualifications. Individually and collectively, they are committed to a common understanding that the pursuit of knowledge is a worthwhile goal and that societies benefit from those who strive to learn and to create new knowledge. Any degree certificate that is the result of fraud, whether in the production of the parchment or in the gaining of part of its components by cheating, challenges the integrity and reputation of the issuing institution. If such cheating becomes common practice and, perhaps thereafter, common knowledge, it devalues the qualification. Protecting the integrity of qualifications against the challenges of those who want the benefits of having a qualification without having earned them is therefore a matter of the highest concern for modern institutes of higher learning.

Modern challenges

Among the factors particularly critical for quality assurance in assessment are the diverse nature of the student body and access to modern technologies. The change in the student body is of two kinds. The first is the expansion in student numbers, which has been termed 'massification' by Martin Trow (1973), as those attending higher education have moved from being an élite to including a much higher proportion of school leavers and young adults. Trow defines élite systems as those which enrol up to 15 percent of the age

group; mass systems as those enrolling between 15 and 40 per cent; and universal systems as those which enrol more than 40 per cent. Higher education is now essential for much non-routine employment.

Surveys of recent graduates in various European countries reveal that completion of higher education has become the typical entry qualification to almost all high-level occupations. In areas such as medicine, law and high-level careers in public administration, graduation has been a formal prerequisite for a long time, but in recent decades managerial and a whole range of newly professionalised careers have generally come to require the possession of a degree. (Brennan, Kogan & Teichler, 1996, p. 4)

The presence of older adults returning to, or taking up, study for the first time has accentuated the change from an élite system towards a mass system of higher education, the notable growth in the numbers of tertiary students and the change in the nature of the student body.

As entry criteria widen and the student body expands, agreement on established academic norms and assumptions can no longer be taken for granted. The varying backgrounds of the students must be taken into consideration, especially in relation to assessment.

Internationalisation has also expanded the student body in Western universities and brought into institutions a much greater diversity of students from many cultural backgrounds. One reason why Lincoln University makes an interesting case study is that approximately half its students are international students from 60–70 different countries. Some are from European countries or the United States on Study Abroad or International Exchange programmes. Others have left their home countries in search of an English-medium education. These students bring with them their cultural beliefs and practices, including attitudes to education, some of which are not congruent with those of the new host country. Some of the students come from countries where gaining entry into higher education is the major hurdle and gaining a degree requires less effort. Some come from countries which are, according to the dimensions defined by Hofstede (1984), collectivist and where students are accustomed to studying together and helping each other with assignments. The students may come with values that are in conflict with institutional values, such as those in which loyalty to one's friends overrides commitment to the institutional requirements for work to be done individually. The university's requirements in terms of referencing and acknowledgment of other's words and ideas are more difficult

for those who have grown up in cultures where respecting wisdom means one should use the words of the sage, not one's own inferior thoughts.

We cannot take for granted that, when they arrive, our students share the cultural attitudes and aspirations of the society in which they are studying. Some have not chosen themselves to enter a university and follow a course of study but arrive because their parents desire their son or daughter to gain a Western qualification and specify that this is to be in, for example, Commerce. More often than previously, with the expansion of higher education there may be instrumental, rather than intellectual, motivations for a student's enrolment.

The third set of challenges to concepts of academic integrity comes from the advances in technology which have revolutionised modern communications and the acquisition of information, if not of knowledge. The library and the lecture theatre are still at the heart of the university but when students are seeking information, especially when they are writing assignments, the Internet is regarded by many as a key source. Internet use is prevalent in the personal lives of most students; they bring their experiences with them into the world of higher education and regard the screen, rather than the page, as the first place to seek information. Students may, as they proceed, make a distinction between information and knowledge but for many, especially in their first years of higher education and if they are studying in a language that is not their home one, the 'Information Highway' is the place to seek what they need for an assignment. There are challenges in, for example, educating students to recognise the differences between the Internet encyclopaedia Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) and established databases through which refereed articles can be consulted.

A significant difference between consulting a book or World Wide Web source when writing a paper is the ease with which references can be sourced. Plagiarism is a dramatically more accessible way of completing an assignment than it was in the past when it required a possibly laborious search to find the material to quote and then copying by hand. The combination of the changes in the student body and easy access to Internet sources have led to a notable rise in plagiarism among all kinds of students.

Plagiarism, a matter of academic concern

Plagiarism has hit the headlines in the United Kingdom (Park, 2003), the United States and elsewhere (Hunt, 2002; McCabe, 2003) and has been the topic of numerous papers and seminars and conferences. It has become a matter of institutional and political, as well as academic, concern, and the subject of many media reports. The rise of plagiarism has created problems of definition and understanding that do not occur with cheating.

Cheating is a concept that is understood in the general community and can be transferred from there to universities without much difficulty. Walker, drawing on Graham, Monday, O'Brien and Steffen, 1994, defines academic cheating in this way:

Cheating is regarded as encompassing behaviours such as copying from another student during an exam; using illicit notes or "cribs" during tests; arranging to receive answers by signal in a test; copying someone else's term papers or writing a term paper for another student (Walker, 1998, p. 91).

This list is easily understood, by those outside academic institutions as well as inside them, as involving unacceptable behaviours. However, plagiarism is a less easily understood concept, being primarily a matter connected with academic standards. It is a term rarely used outside academia and one that is hard to explain to non-academics. Concern about plagiarism expressed outside universities and other tertiary institutions has focused on what is happening in the institutions and how their integrity is affected, rather than about fears that, for example, the practice might spread to other areas or is a manifestation of some larger social ill. University staff struggle to define the concept for students, resorting such phrases as 'taking someone else's words or ideas and presenting them as your own' (Pickering, 2002, p.1) or, 'At its most fundamental level, student plagiarism usually takes the form of unacknowledged copying of material from a source text' (Walker, 1998, p. 89).

The first of the compelling six lessons for dealing with plagiarism, compiled by Jude Carroll of Oxford Brookes, who has developed dealing with plagiarism as an area of academic research, is that 'Definitions matter and agreeing a good one is harder than you think.' She opts for 'Passing off someone else's work as your own, intentionally or unintentionally, for your own benefit' (Carroll, 2003, p.12). While this may work as a

definition of plagiarism in universities it is hard to see it becoming a definition for a type of misdemeanour in areas outside the academic world. Although dealing with issues of intellectual property has become a distinct area of legal practice, journalists, politicians, preachers and teachers are some of those in public life who every day use the words and ideas of others without full acknowledgement. Omitting to acknowledge the work of all who contributed to any breakthrough, venture or accomplishment is an every day occurrence in most fields of human endeavour.

The less clear nature of plagiarism, in comparison with cheating, lies not only in the difficulties relating to defining it and its prevalence in other spheres of similar but acceptable practices, but also in questions of intent. Once identified, most cheating is regarded as the result of intentional acts committed by someone who is clear about the mores their actions have transgressed. Plagiarism is less clear-cut. Learning to use and reference quotations and to paraphrase and acknowledge ideas are complex tasks that can challenge ever experienced researchers and writers. Knowing when an idea is a common one that need not be referenced is a matter that even disciplinary experts may not agree on. It is often impossible to tell whether a student has deliberately copied works or phrases or ideas without proper acknowledgement or whether failure to provide appropriate acknowledgement is the result of incompetence. This uncertainty about the definition and the boundaries of plagiarism is manifest also in uncertainty about its causes and ways to combat it.

The role of the Proctor

One method of reducing the anxiety of academic staff in dealing with matters of Dishonest Academic Practice is to centralise the handling of more serious cases. Appointing one or more staff members to a position with this responsibility encourages staff to act when they have concerns, thus helping to ensure consistency of practice. As Proctor at Lincoln I have found my colleagues appreciative of having someone to refer cases to and to seek advice from when they are unsure how to proceed and whether a case is minor or major.

Academic staff who feel that they are on their own in dealing with plagiarism and other forms of dishonest academic behaviour are much less likely to spend time on what can be

the onerous task of identifying and dealing with such matters, than those who know there is a required process and a support system. Having academic staff designated as responsible for Dishonest Academic Practice also provides one or more contact people to whom staff can direct enquiries to and with whom they can discuss cases. This acts as an additional quality assurance measure.

In the past in British universities matters of both academic and non-academic concern were referred to the Proctor, the university disciplinarian. In New Zealand universities the Proctor is still that of the person responsible for discipline and enforcing university rules. Regulations in the Calendars of New Zealand Universities illustrate that Proctors have responsibilities for dealing with breaches of discipline, investigating in all kinds of cases, both academic and non-academic, and pronouncing judgment in minor ones.

While a serious breach of discipline must be reported to the Disciplinary Committee the Proctor may deal with a minor breach, including imposing, for example,

any of the following penalties: a reprimand, a direction that the student apologise, a fine not exceeding \$150, a requirement that the student make restitution in respect of property stolen, lost or damaged, or of costs incurred by the University through unauthorised activities, and unpaid University community service not exceeding sixteen hours in duration. (University of Canterbury Calendar, 2006, p.599).

The Lincoln Proctor, like proctors and other disciplinary authorities in universities, in recent years has been faced with greatly increased workload as a result of the comparatively sudden onset of plagiarism as a major issue in Australia and New Zealand. Now, as one of two University Proctors, my workload primarily involves dealing with various forms of academic dishonesty, particularly those relating to internal assessment.

A student who earns a Lincoln undergraduate degree has studied twenty-four subjects over four years and, for each of those twelve-week semester-long subjects, has submitted several written assignments and sat a final examination. The workload is intensive, and visiting students from European Universities have testified that the pressure of continuous assessment exceeds that which they experience in their home universities.

Most plagiarism is referred to Proctors by teaching staff but in some matters, such as cheating in examinations, no discretion is exercised in determining whether the matter should be referred to the Proctors. Plagiarism is more difficult to deal with because it may involve questions of detection, of proof and motivation and there is a need for staff to be educated as to the importance of being vigilant.

A case study of institutional commitment

Students seeking quality assured degrees cannot be assumed to have a necessary interest in assuring that they themselves gain their degree honestly. On the other hand, it can be assumed that many students have a strong interest in maintaining the academic integrity of the courses and degrees upon which they are embarked. There is evidence for this at Lincoln University from anonymous e-mails and other tip-offs from students to the Proctor noting incidents of dishonest academic practice. In fact, all students, whether or not they personally value academic integrity, depend on it as a core value for degrees from the university where they study, just as honest citizens and counterfeiters depend on the integrity of a currency. That being the case there must be a clear institutional commitment to academic integrity since without it there can be no basis for policy and practice.

When the wave of plagiarism has affected institutions of higher education in recent years academic staff have usually the first to become concerned. At Lincoln University the initial recognition of the need for a new look at dealing with plagiarism came from the teaching staff. At a seminar,² which was planned to increase staff understanding of the issues and to share strategies, there was a recognition for the need for more than discussion and a call for the university to review its policies and procedures.

While many of the concerns voiced by staff related to copying, the disciplinary areas of the staff and students affected the nature of those concerns. Those who set tests were concerned about cheating in tests and laboratories. Those who set written assignments had noted failures to reference and sections of essays that had been downloaded from Internet sources. Some lecturing staff were considering opting for tests rather than the

²This was organised by Teaching and Learning Services, which provides educational support for students and for teaching staff at Lincoln University.

more varied, and pedagogically more desirable, range of assessment they had used previously. Others had already made this switch. Teaching staff who were preparing students for degree study,³ had become skilled in detecting and dealing with plagiarism with expertise greater than most of their colleagues. University procedures existed (Lincoln University 2006 Calendar, p.49-50) but had been designed for times when breaches were infrequent and all infringements assumed to be of a serious nature. In theory all cases were reported to first to an academic head⁴ and then, if appropriate, to the Proctor, but in practice there was considerable variation in what happened.

The new situation was recognised as being much more complex and as requiring a variety of responses. In particular the rapid growth in the numbers of international students was seen as a challenge to established ways of working. In common with their counterparts elsewhere, lecturers were uncertain about whether the increase in plagiarism was a result of clashes between different teaching and learning styles and whether targeted education could reduce the incidence. Teaching staff wanted support in their fight against plagiarism and some certainty that the efforts they were making in combating offending practices were worthwhile. At this stage definitions of plagiarism and the whole notion of what constitutes plagiarism were regarded as being relevant but not critical. The obvious next step was for discussion that might lead to a co-ordinated approach. While the Proctors needed to be involved in the process and its development, plagiarism was seen as needing to be handled differently from other disciplinary matters.

Developing a new system

The recognition of the need for a new university wide response to the situation led to the establishment of a committee with representatives from different parts of the campus, including those with a particular interest in the issues. It was essential to involve academic staff with teaching and administrative responsibilities and student representatives.⁵ The wide representation and experience of the committee members

³ Many of the students in this area, Foundation Studies, came from other countries to prepare themselves for degree study in an English-speaking environment.

⁴ At Lincoln University Divisional Directors are managers who also hold responsibility for academic matters in their division of the University.

⁵ At Lincoln University these were: a staff member from Foundation Studies, a teacher librarian, a Learning Skills tutor, the Proctor and Deputy Proctor, the Education Officer of the Students' Association and, as the convenor, the

proved invaluable. Each time an issue was raised someone could comment from their experience with a student or raise the complexities inherent in tackling a problem on the basis of having tackled the problem before.

The first stage of the committee's work was getting agreement on the task it was charged with and its orientation to the task. Early discussion elicited agreement with, and commitment to, the primary principle in dealing with plagiarism being educational. The development of the new process reflected the beliefs of the committee and the commitment of its members to fairness and equity in dealing with students. While a distinction was made between less serious and more serious offending, at this time both were regarded as instances of Dishonest Academic Practice.

The thrust of the Working Party's approach was to treat Dishonest Academic Practice holistically. The aim was to create a university environment in which both staff and students recognised such practice as antithetical to academic endeavours; there was acknowledgement that Dishonest Academic Practice cases could result from learning difficulties; serious, repeat, offenders would face strong sanctions.

The essential tasks were developing flow charts to identify problem areas in current regulations and to 'chart' a proposed alternative procedure for in-term assessment; discussion of the education issues generated by concerns about Dishonest Academic Practice; and the review of Regulations relating to Dishonest Academic Practice and breaches of instruction, involving suggestions for clarifying the role of the Proctor and improving the speed of resolution.

The central discussion about whether plagiarism is the result of inadvertent behaviour on the part of students, or of deliberate dishonesty, was constantly revisited while the committee deliberated during the development of policies and procedures. As elsewhere, this discussion was frequently focused on whether international students were disadvantaged by Western academic practices that might clash with Asian cultural imperatives and practices that valued verbatim reporting of the words of the wise and

Chair of the Academic Administration Committee. The positions mentioned here are unlikely to be directly reflected in the organisational charts of institutions elsewhere. They are mentioned here to illustrate the range of those who may usefully contribute to a process such as that described.

reversed. Indecision about motivations behind plagiarism has left many academics uncertain how to deal with the problem. Progress was made in this case because all members of the committee were clear that learning to reference and use quotations appropriately was a matter all students needed to learn. They recognised these as academic skills that needed to be taught and which took time to acquire.

It was agreed that for any student a minor case of inappropriate copying in assignments needed to be treated as an educational issue. Instead of using the term *plagiarism*, the term *inappropriate copying in assignments* was chosen so that the emotive connotations of *plagiarism* were defused. The boundaries of *inappropriate copying* are not firm but the term allowed for agreement that such transgressions of academic practice as failing to reference a quotation could be treated appropriately and in a different manner from major transgressions. This was an improvement on the existing regulations dealing with plagiarism which, having been drawn up at an earlier time, had allowed for little discretion in dealing with plagiarism, whether minimal or blatant.

The term, *plagiarism*, was also abandoned for more serious breaches of honest academic practice and replaced by the term *dishonest academic practice*. This was used to cover offences which could be termed cheating, such as copying in a term test or a final examination either from another student or from material not permitted in the examination room and also repeat offending and plagiarism in a dissertation or thesis. The decision to abandon the term *plagiarism* and make a clear distinction between *inappropriate copying in assignments* and more serious *matters of dishonest academic practice* was a major breakthrough in terms of making progress.

Inappropriate copying in assignments is, therefore, now treated as a matter for education and warning, while matters of *dishonest academic practice*, which are essentially incidences of academic cheating, are handled as potentially serious breaches from the first notification.

Problems and procedures

Among the unifying factors that united the working party was a determination to reach the best possible solutions for the students and the university, in other words commitment to fair treatment and educational goals and a concern for appropriate process. Finding the

best possible solutions led the committee along some interesting by ways, such as that when those who represented the students and those worked most closely with international students were found to be advocating more 'waving of a big stick' than those with more general responsibilities. The apparent incongruity here resulted from the student advocates wanting the students to be given very clear signs about what was not acceptable in the Lincoln University context and what the resulting penalties would be. There was also much discussion about might be expected from international students, who come to Lincoln University mainly from Asia, and the amount of latitude that should be allowed them. Continuing discussion led to renewed emphasis on education for all students so that while differences remained among members' views about the significance of culture as a contributing factor to students copying inappropriately, the adoption of procedures was a point of uniform agreement.

Another concern was that while the existing educational introduction worked well for undergraduates, graduates coming in from universities in other countries might not have had clear instruction in appropriate referencing procedures and practices either before they arrived or at Lincoln, a difference also noted by Sheard, Markham and Dick (2003). Plugging such gaps was therefore a matter that had to be worked through.

A proposal to set up a university wide database has facilitated the sharing of necessary knowledge within well-defined limits. Selected administrative staff have roles to play and the divisional directors still oversee the process when inappropriate copying is the issue. The Proctors have access to the database and their responsibility is more clearly focused on matters of *dishonest academic practice* (including inappropriate copying which reaches this level).

Since the report of the working party the system at Lincoln has been further developed and gone through further modification. Four levels of student behaviour in relation to assessment have been identified: Examination Offence; Serious Incident Assessment Offence; Other Assessment Offence and No Dishonest Intent. Procedures have been developed to deal with each of these.

In the case of formal examinations, any dishonest or improper academic practice is deemed to be a breach of discipline and the Discipline Regulations apply. Breaches of

regulations and offending in tests and examinations are reported directly to the University Proctor/s.

Serious incidents of dishonest or improper academic practice are deemed to be a breach of discipline and all such incidents are reported directly to a Proctor. The student is subject to the terms of the Discipline Regulations and has resort to the Appeals provisions of those Regulations. Serious incidents may include cheating in any form of assessment, fabrication of data and repeat incidents of dishonest or improper academic practice as well as the failure appear for appointments with Examiners.

Other incidents of dishonest or improper academic practice are handled by the Examiner. Examples of offences in this category include collusion in assignments and plagiarism, including unacknowledged copying of material from the web.

And, finally, as previously mentioned, where a student is ignorant of academic norms such as referencing including, where the student has innocently, or carelessly, presented another person's work as their own, without appropriate acknowledgement of the source, the appropriate response is an educational one, handled by the Examiner with no permanent record of the possible offence being recorded.

In each case there are procedures to be followed and provision made for appeals so that consistency will result from the existence of assured procedures. These procedures need to be known to all staff so extensive efforts have been made to ensure that teaching staff and students are all aware that the university considers plagiarism a very serious offence. There are notices in course outlines, staff provide information in class, assignment instructions stress the seriousness of the offence and the penalties, the topic is covered in educational forums for staff and students and publicity is given to the consequences of offending. Equally clear instruction is given on how to use source material and how to reference and different referencing styles, with the emphasis being on the importance of recognising intellectual property and acknowledging academic originality. The success of this effort is suggested in that instances of plagiarism are found much more rarely among post-graduate students who have completed their undergraduate study at Lincoln University than among those who transfer in from other universities overseas.

Detection and proof continue to be difficult matters but the purchase of plagiarism detection software *Turn-it-in* has helped with both matters. Although the software cannot guarantee the elimination of plagiarism or even the detection of every incidence, when it is used students do exhibit more care in quoting and referencing. Similarly staff are relieved of tedious *Google* searching when they suspect, from a sudden improvement in the quality of the writing or concepts, that a passage which has not been acknowledged is not a student's own. The development of software tools and the promulgation of education are helping in dealing with plagiarism.

The question of whether the offence is deliberate or a result of ignorance of academic norms is more easily dealt with when standards of originality have been clearly spelt out. Students then find it harder to claim ignorance of requirements. The same situation applies to the instances of copying or shared work on assignments that appear particularly in assignments for computing courses. Students for whom cultural imperatives to support one another have high value may claim that they did not know they could not help one another. It can take considerable effort on the part of the institution to convince such students that institutional values must take precedence over loyalty to their friends. That effort must include education and the publication of the consequences of disciplinary infringements.

Other instances of Dishonest Academic Practice

While we have made considerable progress in dealing with plagiarism, other issues remain more difficult to handle. One of these is ghost writing which has recently emerged as a challenge particularly for the teaching staff who set essays and term papers for assessment.

Ghost writing is more challenging than plagiarism because those who try it, like a student whom we will call Priscilla, are deliberate and determined. The development of websites like <www.allfreeessays.com> makes sourcing and downloading a completed essay on a variety of topics all too easy. While a *Google* search may reveal the source, the uneven nature of the writing may obscure that it was ghost written, and, even more problematically the essay may be written to order and for payment. It may not reveal any signs of plagiarism although some essays which I have discovered to be ghost written

have also failed the *Turn-it-in* test. Sometimes the writer may try too hard. Questioning the purported author is a useful technique when authorship is in doubt. When Asian student, Priscilla, handed in an essay in which there were references to Sir Galahad her response to questions as to his identity were unconvincing. Her reply that Sir Galahad was “the man who wrote about non-verbal communication”, added to the accumulating evidence that she was not the author of the work she handed in.

Another area where differing cultural practices can result in problems is that of fraudulent documentation. While submitting fraudulent documents is not acceptable anywhere, it is a more common practice in some countries than in others. There is variation in the degree to which it is unacceptable and the severity of the penalties it will incur. One case that demonstrated this was that of a student who submitted fraudulent evidence of subjects he claimed to have passed in his home country, in order to gain credit for these. Let us call him Carl. Rather than being confident, Carl appeared uncertain and unsure when he handed over the documentation. The reason for this became clear when he was interviewed. He had not wanted to falsely gain credit but he was being pressured by his parents back home, who were concerned that he was not progressing as quickly as they had hoped towards obtaining a degree. His parents obtained the altered documents in their home country and posted them to their son to submit to the university. The dutiful son was caught in the dilemma of falsely applying for credit or disobeying his parents.

Because the unusual circumstances of the case were taken into account, Carl was allowed to continue studying. When he had completed the requirements of the penalty imposed I was informed as Proctor so I could close the case but I also received an unprompted visit from Carl. He came to tell me that as a consequence of living and studying in New Zealand he had learnt new ways of viewing the world and making choices. He wanted to tell me that he had learnt about the importance not only of academic honesty but what we term integrity. Even when he returned home, he assured me, he would apply these principles to his business and everyday life.

Pornography, Internet use and gender attitudes are other areas where differences in cultural norms can cause problems. Not everything someone has been able to view on the Internet at home will be regarded as acceptable use of the university system. When I

interviewed a student I will call Jon, I perceived he was not only embarrassed by knowing that his Internet viewing habits were known but also because he was being reprimanded by a woman. Jon came from a society where women are in general more subservient than they are in New Zealand. In recent times, as the range of students coming to Lincoln has expanded, we have found more instances of students who have challenged women, especially young women, academic staff members and had difficulty in accepting them as people in authority.

Lincoln University limits students' Internet use for reasons relating to the capacity and cost of the system and monitors students use. The need for flexibility in handling such matters is shown by a recent case when a student was called for interview with the Proctor after his access had been terminated for overuse. He explained that he needed the access reconnected 'because he had an assignment due' and 'because he was addicted to the Internet'. The latter claim turned out to be true; he had turned to excessive computer use in an attempt to deal with a more serious addiction.

Conclusion

In handling matters of academic dishonesty which are of concern to a university, it is not only important to have sound systems, established with the support of those who will implement them, but also to be aware of the need for flexibility in dealing with individual cases and that of learning from experience.

There are, in sum, three elements that are critical for a successful approach to academic integrity. If we presume institutional commitment, which can be taken for granted in any reputable institution (but not in the case of mail order academies), universities require a legislative framework of policies and guidelines which are carefully constructed and flexible, and which have wide support in the institution as a whole. Second, those charged with enforcing the legislation must be given a high level of discretion since they are dealing with individual cases which are extremely varied. Justice can only be done to individuals by balancing carefully the necessity to maintain academic integrity with the contingencies of the particular case. Third, agents such as Proctors must be able to feed back into the legislative cycle, the experiences which have shown that the legislation may need emending.

There can be an uneasy tension in this approach between the desire of senior managers of contemporary institutions to set up quality control systems which aim to eliminate all risks (Power, 1994; Skelton, 2004), particularly risks that adverse publicity attendant on cases of Dishonest Academic Practice potentially brings, and the infinite variety of human motivation, ingenuity and stupidity with which a Proctor has to deal. High levels of discretion are required for the latter but are not comfortably acknowledged when the wish is control for all risks. Processes matter but, even more, the commitment to academic integrity which underlies the processes matters. It is not just a matter of ticking boxes but of individuals taking responsibility and exercising their judgement. It is crucially important to remember that quality systems are not the whole answer. They have a role to play but so too does the exercise of judgement in the context of experience. Guidelines are important but, because we are dealing with human beings, their thought and behaviour, there must be flexibility. In the role of Proctor, I have learnt the importance of systems and I have also learnt that I have to be wary of over-generalising, and of over-regulation. Over and over again I have found it necessary to exercise individual judgement. Just as in gaining knowledge, you need to rely on your own learning and trust your own judgement, so in dealing with matters of academic practice it is necessary to be flexible, not to prejudge, to acknowledge the importance of individual thought and work in the complexity of dealing with human beings.

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