

# THE PERSONAL LENS IN ACADEMIC EVALUATION: A CRITIQUE OF EDUCATOR BIAS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Employing a case study, this paper takes a critical perspective toward concerns over plagiarism policies in institutions of higher education, demonstrating how these policies are potentially subject to misinterpretation, disproportionate enforcement, and administrative inefficacy. In the investigated case, a student was suspected of having plagiarized work for a corporate governance course, which was punishable by academic sanctions based on vague institutional guidelines, leaving room for subjective interpretation by faculty. The paper identifies four central issues: 1) the guidelines for plagiarism lack precision, which promotes heterogeneous policing of the rules; 2) procedural fairness is absent in the management of the cases, as personal prejudices affect judgments; 3) responsibility and definition of the boundaries of institutional bodies has broken down and induces a great delay and confusion; and 4) students undergoing investigations are left with psychological and emotional damages. The case highlights the urgent need for clarity, consistency and transparency in plagiarism policies, independent review processes, and improved communications pathways between departments and support systems for students accused of plagiarism. "Plagiarism policies must be rational, proportional and, above all, fair," said the study, calling for "an urgent need for overhaul" of how academic institutions punish students over plagiarism. In conclusion, the paper highlights the need for promoting a fair and transparent academic environment that upholds academic integrity while also considering the well-being, and professional growth of students.

**Keywords:** Plagiarism policies, academic integrity, procedural fairness, institutional coordination, transparency, student support, academic consequences, higher education.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Plagiarism lies at the heart of academic integrity, an easy line to draw between academic principles and unethical conduct. Yet the reality of plagiarism is a nuanced and often controversial subject, particularly when the lines of plagiarism are not clearly drawn (Attinello, et al., 2006). This paper aims to discuss the complex nature of plagiarism in the context of academic assessment, through the lens of a personal anecdote of a corporate governance assignment that was accused of being plagiarized. Researcher will also explore potential bias on the part of the educator and how certain academic guidelines can be subject to interpretation to lay emphasis on procedural fairness when dealing with accusations of plagiarism. The paper will also investigate these dynamics' influence on a student's academic and professional life, as well as the role academic institutions and staff plays in maintaining fair and transparent policies.

## **DEFINING PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism, defined, continues to evolve with changing technology, access to information and evolving academic expectations, as the effort to present someone else's work or ideas as your own has taken new forms. The term is used in various ways and can refer to acts as egregious as cutting-and-pasting from sources without attribution and as subtle as paraphrasing without citation. However, the definitions of plagiarism can vary from institution to institution, discipline to discipline, and even educator to educator. This variability is often attributed as a reason for confusion and miscommunication between students who unknowingly commit acts that are later labeled as plagiarism. One reason for the rising complexity in the plagiarism debate is that there is no other common understanding or application of the guidelines around plagiarism (Boudett, & Cohen, 2009).

The effects of plagiarism in higher education can be dire. According to them, students caught plagiarizing can receive academic penalties as severe as failing grades or expulsion that may have long-term implications for their academic and professional careers. This renders cheating to be not only a part of academic ethics but also a critical issue that has an inappropriate impact on life of a student as wellbeing, career opportunities, and popularity (Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2009).

## **CASE STUDY: ALLEGATIONS IN THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ASSIGNMENT BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

The case study used in the paper is a personal one: I have been accused for plagiarism in my class of corporate governance. The task at hand involved analyzing a case study related to corporate governance, connecting theoretical concepts with real-world applications. After I submitted it, I was told by the professor that parts of my paper were plagiarized, or referenced without citation.

Many research studies investigated that the allegation, having painstakingly sourced all materials and cited them properly. But as the claim unfolded, the interpretation of plagiarism became subjective and the academic staff disagreed to what extent the citation guidelines were applied strictly. The course guidelines lacked expressly prescribing expectations with regard to citation, especially, paraphrasing or summation. There is much confusion about what constitutes plagiarism, a problem that is common in plagiarism cases. Students are forced to grasp unclear academic rules with insufficient help (Garet, & Delany, 1988).

## **COMMITTEE DYNAMICS AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS REVEALED UNEVEN RESPONSES AMONG THE ACADEMIC STAFF**

A significant difference in responses by the academic staff showed the lack of involvement, accountability, and institutional oversight in the investigation process into the plagiarism allegation. The discrepancies fall into two broad categories: the committee's inactivity and the inflated level of personal responsibility taken by one of the professors, alongside the administrative upheaval that hampered the review process. Put together, these factors made for a very uneven field, with dire consequences for the student concerned (Danielson, 2009).

## **COMMITTEE INACTION AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

Although the larger academic committee, which was purported to oversee the academic integrity process, had largely muted and uninvolved in the plagiarism accusation, one professor took the case personally. This deceit, a preternaturally young academic who had previously been awarded a distinguished French presidential prize for his research corpus, was elected as the review's most authoritative agent. Personalizing his investigation further, he subjected the student's work to thorough examination on his own (Goe, et al., 2009).

The committee's failure to intervene can be considered problematic, because academic committees generally wouldn't hesitate to ensure that allegations of academic misconduct fall within consistent guidelines. Evidence presented by Kauffman (2010) suggests that weak decision making through committees may still result in biased outcomes when the decisions are made independently. Here the professor's scrutiny into personal matters was broad and indiscriminate, and it was based on no guidance or oversight from the committee, which had a deep impact on the result. However, his academic, analytical approach felt toxic — wholly lacking objectivity. The lack of a collaborative or collective review process may also have implications for the assessment that hit the student hard, with dire consequences including the failure of the assignment.

Davies indicates that biased judgments become more likely when individual educators take personal responsibility for academic investigations without adequate institutional support. While the professor's own role in this instance may be well-intentioned, it has created an issue nonetheless as his significant sway over the course of the investigation made it such that it would be impossible for the student to receive an impartial review (Korthagen, & Kessels, 2009).

## **ADMINISTRATIVE TURBULENCE AND ACTING LEADERSHIP**

Adding to the already fraught decisions surrounding the case was administrative turbulence within the department that complicated the investigative process. During this time, the director of the department -- responsible for ensuring procedural fairness in academic evaluations -- suffered a heart attack, creating an interim leadership vacuum. With the director absent, that very same professor who had been investigating the case taken over as acting department head. This change in leadership added an additional layer of instability and confusion, as it positioned the professor with even more power in evaluating the student's work (Ingersoll, & Merrill, 2010).

And as a new acting director, the professor was responsible for evaluating the student's thesis — a paper still work in progress that would not be formally evaluated in another subject. The professor's dual role as the individual reviewing the plagiarism allegation and as acting head of the department made his decision weigh even more heavily. His belief that the thesis plagiarized beyond the threshold for the assignment resulted in the failure of the assignment. Because this choice occurred without the benefit of a more formal review, it was questioned whether the evaluation was fair. As noted by Bakhurst (2011), concentrating all authority in a single person — particularly one who is personally involved in a given case — can threaten the integrity of the decision-making process (McNamara, & O'Hara, 2010).

The professor's actions are also a reminder of the complexities of institutional responsibility during periods of leadership change. Leadership transitions, especially in crisis points, can upset institutional processes and create the condensation of power into the hands of a few, Brown and O'Connell (2008) emphasize. This train of thought can result in decision-making that does not necessarily comply with institutional policy or favorably positions the institution for all students. In this instance, the professor's dual role participating in the thesis review as well as serving in the interim capacity of acting director created a crushing conflict of interest that tainted the fairness of the review process (Harlen, 2010).

The handling of the case itself was also less than ideal, through the early years of my work there was little, if any, formalized process for dealing with allegations of plagiarism. According to Davies (2010), students can become victims of arbitrary or prejudicial assessments when there is a lack of a clear decision-analysis framework in place, particularly through times of administrative turmoil. The absence of proper oversight and the non-existence of an established process for dealing with academic misconduct meant that the fate of our student hinged substantially on the judgment of a singular professor, who in turn, may have been motivated by individual bias and the stresses of walking into an acting leadership position (Tyack, 1974).

The plagiarism-allegation investigation was the product of piecemeal individual decision-making, administrative chaos and the inaction of the wider academic committee. The professor's exhaustive work on the student's product, combined with his extraordinary assumption of leadership duties in the department, resulted in what can only be described as a highly personal and potentially biased review process. The Joint Committee on Accountability now calls for this type of process and remains a voice for transparency and objectivity, particularly during poor leadership cycles. The case underscores the importance of clear guidelines, institutional support, and a clear process for dealing with academic misconduct in a fair manner and protecting students' academic rights. Not doing so can have dire repercussions for students, and raise issues of neutrality and fairness in the academic evaluation process (Vescio, et al., 2008).

## **APPEAL AND INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION**

After the punishment for the plagiarism charge was deemed an unfavorable ruling, the student made the victimizing mistake of the streaming process and attempted to appeal the verdict. However, the institutional response — or lack of it — brought to light a number of major problems with the university's administrative coordination, transparency and compliance with its own policies.

## **THE STUDENT'S APPEAL AND THE DIRECTOR'S INACTION**

The student then quickly appealed the decision and asked to meet with the department director once the latter returned to work from medical leave. Nevertheless, despite the legal appeal and a petition for reversal, no corrective action was taken. The lack of a meaningful response from the director and the governing body revealed systemic failures in the university's processes for addressing student complaints and appeals. The Kauffman (2010) study found that a fair academic grievance system was necessary to ensure equitable treatment, as well as to protect the integrity of decision-making by institutional actors. In this absence of follow-up, the director's disregard for acting on the student's well-founded concerns reflected poorly upon the institution's commitment to ensuring fairness in the academic evaluation process. The fact that the university and the academic board were not independent of the varsity's judicial board, which had to be transparent and accountable in cases involving punishment of students that could affect their academic or professional careers was also pointed out (Gough, 2007).

## **WITHHOLDING THE THESIS DOCUMENT**

To add to the controversy, the student had asked the university chancellor for a copy of his thesis, which is a right protected by university policy. But the document was kept secret for more than six months, depriving the student of the chance to review feedback and of the information necessary to understand the particular reason for his or her failure. University policy grants students access to academic records and evaluation materials to ensure that students can make informed decisions regarding appeals or.” In addition, this prolonged withholding of the thesis document was not only against the institutional regulations; it also left the student feeling in the dark, without being able to understand the reasoning behind the decision fully. I was especially moving because of the emotional and academic distress created by not having our academic status clear. In such situations, retention of academic credentials or delaying access to records, as noted (Brown and O'Connell, 2008), is a form of administrative negligence that goes against the principle of transparency in higher education. It's important to remain transparent and grant timely access to any records, as this fosters trust in the institution among students (Gough, 2007).

## **MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN DEPARTMENTAL ACTIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL REGULATIONS**

This is where the story takes an even more convoluted turn, as the student, who had been passed by the course supervisor themselves, was asked to pay extra fees to retake the course separately. The student had already demonstrated their high competency level via the supervisor's approval but was still forced to shell out for the cost — an additional bureaucratic burden that further highlighted the disparity between departmental behaviors and university-level policies. The demand for extra fees, notwithstanding the student previously having passed the course, indicated that the response by the department to the matter was not aligned with the university's broader academic and student support frameworks. Such misalignment leads to questions about the steadiness of academic policies at the institutional level and the function of departmental autonomy regarding individual cases. Intra-institutional policy inconsistencies can cause confusion, inefficiencies, and arbitrary treatment of students (Kim-Prieto, 2010) and are particularly challenging for students who must navigate a patchwork of sometimes conflicting academic rules (Gough, 2007).

## **THE DEPARTURE OF THE PROFESSOR AND ITS LONG-LASTING IMPACT**

In fact, the professor who administered the draconian assessment ended up leaving the university, but the student was left with a permanent blemish on his academic transcript. The professional consequences of his behavior perhaps had to work their way back through the system to the student's academic transcript and, subsequently, the student's future academic and professional doors — and may have done so because it happened to a professor (who is generally thought to at least know better) and not a first-year adjunct in a fully funded one-time-only seminar. In the words of Bakhurst (2011), the fate of a student can be determined by a single professor's decision, with little consideration for the long-term implications of the student's academic future; in terms such as academic performance in competitive enrollment fields, two aspiring students with similar academic records can shape the essential, faculty reputation for graduate admissions or workplace opportunities. In fact, the professor's method left a mark in the student's file. Negative impact, once on a student's academic record, will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to remove regardless of whether the decision was ultimately considered as unjust or an act of unfairness (Callahan, 1962).

There are many institutional failures in this case, including inadequate response to student appeals and arguments, failure to appropriately withhold academic documents, failure to ensure that what was done in the department was in accordance with university policies, and the long term impact of biased or unfair evaluations. The failure of academic staff to communicate with one another or to coordinate responses with the departmental leadership or administrative bodies only deepened the student's sense of distress and uncertainty. The disregard for the established policies and failure to provide equitable examination and appeals consideration raises questions about the validity of the academic architecture of the institution. No, a rigorous investigation needs to be conducted to, first and foremost, ensure that the aforementioned issues are avoided in future, and that higher education institutions are held accountable and transparent ensuring credibility, fairness and also to probe for similar incidents if any and the administrative practices in the future (Callahan, 1962).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PLAGIARISM POLICIES**

The situation discussed here raises significant issues surrounding plagiarism policies in higher education and illustrates how these institutional policies reveal the fallacies of how schools approach academic integrity. The issues are related to definitional boundaries; questions about procedural fairness; lack of institutional coordination and transparency — all resulting in an unfairly long process to the student involved (Blasé, & Kirby, 2009).

### **AMBIGUITY IN DEFINITIONAL BOUNDARIES**

But one of the biggest issues presented in the case is the ambiguity surrounding what constitutes plagiarism and how it is enforced. Although proper citation practices are generally considered protective against any charges of plagiarism, the failure to provide clear, universally understood guidelines for the student body within the institution created the condition under which a student's actions were open to interpretation. Thus, guidelines and policies related to citation were not specific enough to clarify what information actually bore sufficiency to be copied using paraphrasing, summarizing or referencing, etc. It is also important to note that such ambiguity in the definition of plagiarism can lead to disproportionate consequences in cases that could have occurred from honest mistakes on the part of the student (Weick, 1976).

Ambiguities in plagiarism policies are not unique, and certainly not rare, and this problem is found in many higher education institutions. Brown and O'Connell (2008) advise that inconsistent or vague policies lead to confusion because different interpretations are possible for what is considered plagiarism. The tension between these two interpretations ultimately resulted in an unfair evaluation process for the student caught in the middle. When definitions of plagiarism are not specific and include a wide range of violations, institutions are left to punish behavior that may or may not justify the penalties applied; this inability to respond appropriately amplifies the crisis of academic integrity.

## PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS

A further critical point is the lack of procedural fairness in the handling of plagiarism allegations. The review was conducted by a professor chosen for the task in a somewhat arbitrary manner, and the process of review was deeply personal, raising questions about how consistent and objective it was. Academic integrity is important, but equally so is the need for plagiarism policies to be applied fairly and consistently. The professor took on the sole investigation and evaluation of the student's work, which contributed to a highly individualized process that was not overseen by the committee or other academic entities. Blind as in not seeing the whole picture (as in the university cases) especially when you have a professor who is using his personal judgment to decide on the case I mean it may lead to be selective the way you are dealing with a case. And it might be in favour of or against the student since what is good could harm students chance over the course of the case (Atkinson, et al., 2009).

Due process is, as Kauffman (2010) states, a basic feature of academic integrity policies. Without a standardized procedure for reviewing plagiarism allegations in this case, this student was not subject to the same fairness that a clean, transparent process could have provided. The lack of checks and balances, in the form of a formal committee review or institutional oversight, meant that the professor's subjective judgment trumped the student's right to a fair hearing. So, by raising concerns about a serious concern, potential plagiarism, they also raised concerns about the academic integrity of the evaluation process itself resulting in a failure of the procedural fairness in the handling of such allegations that jeopardized these students academic standing (McNamara, & O'Hara, 2010).

## INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION AND TRANSPARENCY

The student in question only added to the challenges due to the inability of various administrative bodies to communicate and coordinate with each other. The absence of a clear and consistent response from the university's various administrative bodies — the committee, the acting director and the chancellor — resulted in protracted delays and confusion at several points along the investigation process. The student's thesis was never returned in a timely manner nor was the proper documentation for appeal provided, which only compounded the emotional and academic strain of the incident due to the uncertainty created by having an incomplete thesis (Korthagen, & Kessels, 2009).

The most important factors, according to them, were institutional coordination and transparency to make sure that the plagiarism policy is enforced consistently and fairly. The failure of the university to coordinate its response across the relevant departments, particularly given the director's temporary absence and the professor's overlapping roles, added to that lack of clarity surrounding the case. Abstract: "Fragmented" or "disjointed" communication among institutional bodies remains a perennial hallmark of bureaucratic systems, leaving students vulnerable to inefficiency that may compromise their academic experience and fairness. This not only ran against university policy and decrees but also reflected poorly on transparency and timeliness, two critical measures to uphold student trust in the institution (Walberg, 2011).

Overall, the issues in this case exemplify the critical deficits present in the particular plagiarism policies within higher education institutions, mainly concerning the explicitness of definitions, the justness of procedural processes, and the interplay of administrative facets. We must tackle these matters to prevent pupils from being unfairly accused and ensuring that plagiarism policies are implemented in a way that is both consistent and transparent. Without a commitment to clear, equitable and efficient treatment of plagiarism cases, institutions risk undermining their own academic integrity and harming students' educational experiences and future careers (Vescio, et al., 2008).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC CAREERS

As the article points out, the consequences of heavy handed or capricious application of plagiarism rules can be dire, well beyond the confines of the classroom and have a lasting impact on a student's academic and professional future. The case in question highlights the severe consequences of draconian or inconsistent plagiarism policies as well as the long-term effects of administration failure and personal bias on a student's academic and professional trajectory (Gough, 2007).

## ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL SETBACKS

The complainant here experienced considerable academic harm primarily because of the severe consequences of the plagiarism allegation. Even though the actual course supervisor had marked the assignment as a pass, it took very little for another random individual to have a complaint and plagiarism decided on the fail mark which marred the students' academic record for life. These types of setbacks can be long-lasting, especially for students who want to find a place in competitive fields where academic performance and reputation are instrumental for career advancement. As Kim-Prieto (2010) notes, a student's academic trajectory can be irreparably altered by a blemished academic record due to a charge



of plagiarism (whether later contested or resolved), making one senior year a self-fulfilling prophecy when it comes to graduate programs, internships and job opportunities. In real life, the lack of recognition of the supervisor passing the student and the use of the plagiarism charge resulted in the unjust tarnishing of the student's academic results that would have impacted the student's academic / professional career (Cizek, & Bunch, 2010).

Moreover, in view of the fact that the student had passed the course with their supervisor at first, the necessity for the student to pay excessive fees by way of reattempting the same course depicts an institutional process that has gaping holes in case handling processes. This placing of additional financial burdens, independent of how well the student performs in the course, is another instance of how institutions empower themselves, and fail to create a fair outcome for students. Such academic setbacks can demotivate students, making them question the justice of academic institutions that finally undermines their faith in the academic system (Boudett, & Cohen, 2009).

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT**

The second major concern centers on the psychological and emotional impact on the student. The personal nature of the scrutiny involved in the plagiarism investigation and the inertia within the administrative response to the incident caused significant distress for the student. The department's failure to act in a timely manner, along with the incessant waiting game of not knowing the student's academic record status, led to an overwhelming sense of despair. This is no surprise as research done by Bakhurst (2011) showed that the allegations made on students regarding academic dishonesty can be followed up by extreme anxiety, stress, and a considerable loss of self-esteem which can ultimately affect their well-being and their performance in academic terms. In spite of the attendance and cloud of crush we went to, one of the causes of emotional suffering that hindered the student for more than the year for a longer period, was the absence of an effective vehicle in the system of grievance redressed.

The university's very failure to provide timely and transparent communication about the plagiarism charge was only adding to the student's distress. In this case, it has been documented that students suffer from increased stress and confusion when, for example, their universities do not address academic issues properly and in a timely manner (Kauffman 2010). Worse, though, the student explained, this situation not only diverted their academic attention but also caused serious issues with their mental health, and it is something universities need to consider seriously in order to protect students' well-being. Plagiarism can have serious consequences, so it's important that such allegations are handled quickly and transparently to minimize the emotional impact on students as they are already facing significant academic pressures.

## **ROLE OF PERSONAL BIAS AND INSTITUTIONAL POLITICS**

It also illustrates how personal prejudice and institutional politics enter into academic evaluations, and at times eclipse the expectations of objective assessment mechanisms. These actions and the professor's own deep-seated investment in re-evaluating the case lead to questions about how individuals might play a role in coloring or transforming the evidence that leads their field. Academic decisions affected by personal views, or similarly biased reasoning, can compromise the integrity of the entire academic system, treating students unfairly (Davies, 2010). In this instance, the professor's choices, compounded by their temporary role as acting director, had direct consequences on the student's standing in the academy that ultimately affected their career.

This situation highlights the fact that personal bias and power dynamics in academic institutions can at times take precedence over institutional guidelines and objective evaluation protocols. Given the professor's two-fold role in the evaluation—reviewing the thesis while occupying a temporary interim leadership within the department—this dual role likely resulted in a lopsided and biased evaluation process, thereby bringing further attention to the hurdles posed by institutional politics in academia. For Bakhurst (2011) such cases emphasize the importance of standing to rationalize there should be more transparency between colleges and other actors where colleges fulfill institutional powers through any means necessary and the real impact lies beyond objectivity.

In this example, the professor's behavior, coupled with a breakdown in communication and coordination within the institution, led to a situation in which the student's academic career was unfairly burdened by elements of their experience that had little connection to their actual academic performance. If allowed to stand, the consequences could have lasting effects on this student's record, potentially impacting future opportunities, signaling the need for institutional reforms that prioritize fairness, transparency and the protection of students' rights.

The repercussions of this case underscore the potential risks of the arbitrary or overly harsh enforcement of plagiarism policies, and the long-term impact that institutional failures, individual prejudices, and power relations can have on a student's education and career. In order to provide fairness and due process academic institutions require clear, consistent and transparent approach to plagiarism policies and procedures. This will help ministries mitigate the

negative impact on students' academic records and emotional wellbeing, and ultimately ensure that students' academic performance is reviewed equitably, based on their actual achievements, rather than on arbitrary decisions or personal biases (Atkinson, et al., 2009).

## CONCLUSIONS

While there are a growing number of permutations and varying definitions of what constitutes plagiarism (which generally defines the act of presenting others' work as one's own without appropriate credit), there is still some consensus around what exactly it is in academic circles. In spite of the fact that the desire to maintain academic integrity is important in the first place, this case study demonstrates how the application of such policies can also be a nebulous and subjective thing. The results of all that can be quite serious, as we saw in this case as rules about plagiarism were enforced unevenly and misinterpreted.

And when those policies are applied subjective, obviously, the potential for injustice is amplified. In this case, the absence of crisp, widely-circulated citation and plagiarism guidelines, coupled with a professor's subjective assessment of the findings and their role in the investigation contributed to a finding that was misaligned with the true nature and severity of the student's actions. Without more general oversight, such a customized attention, if also very widely scrutinized, can raise questions about the fairness of such decisions and the inconsistencies that inhere in leaving also sensitive decisions to be made uniquely rather than following institutional guidelines (Kauffman, 2010). The erosion of procedural fairness laid bare the dangers of letting subjective decisions take precedence over more objective, transparent ones.

Beyond that, the case exposes the way that exercise of personal agendas and institutional failings can create it happening that all pernicious penalties with lifelong consequences are truly being brought to bear on students. Due to this professor's misconduct and the failure of authorities to appropriately address the situation, the student faced a major setback both in their education and emotional state. These decisions which were motivated by the absence of institutional coordination and communication ultimately left the student with an undeserved blemish on their academic record, which could have far-reaching consequences for their academic and professional future (Brown & O'Connell, 2008).

The situation underscores the importance of being they are due process in not only ensuring that fidelity to plagiarism policies is enforced across institutions but also the procedures to deal with violations are handled with transparency, fairness, and due process. Institutions need to understand the role of individual bias and of institutional failure to intervene when it comes to the suffering experienced by students. In order not to inflict undue damage on students' academic careers, universities should implement clear, equitable policies and guarantee that all decisions are made according to defined and impartial standards. The academic community upholding one of its foundational principles without infringing on the rights of those who may be unfairly targeted is a necessity and an attainable goal only through a dedicated commitment to fairness and transparency by its institutions to protect its students from disproportionate punishment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Following up on the problems exposed by this case and to avoid the reoccurrence of similar situations in the future, they must be proposed some measures to be adopted by the institutions of higher education. These recommendations would help ensure that plagiarism policies and investigations are transparent, fair, and understandable, and safeguard students' academic careers.

## CLEAR GUIDELINES AND CONSISTENT APPLICATION

The most important recommendations are establishing clear, unequivocal plagiarism guidelines with definitions, boundaries for acceptable uses of paraphrasing, and proportionate actions based on the offence. Universities should then make sure that all academic staff is trained to apply these policies in an equitable and transparent manner, such as professors and departmental administrators. Inconsistently enforcing plagiarism rules can cause unequal distribution of penalties, as occurred in the case presented in this instance, where difference in interpretations led to disproportionate punishment. The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Florida recognizes this need, stating that well-designed, universal expectations can aid in avoiding confusion and ensuring general standards of conduct are upheld (Brown & O'Connell, 2008). Also, this would give students and staff a reference point with which they can understand and deal with issues concerning academic integrity, which helps to create an even playing field.

## TRANSPARENT REVIEW PROCESSES

Researcher allowed all our models to be freely download and have some fine tuning available in side by side manner to avoid any possibilities of bias towards free tier models in screen shots or etc. However, with an independent review

board integrated with faculty members from various departments or even external academic experts, cleansing the system and protecting the integrity of the evaluation process is paramount. It would be tasked with hearing the evidence regarding allegations of plagiarism, with the aim of making its determination based on measurable standard of evidence and providing students with a fair hearing process. This can avoid now and then when individual biases / private agendas can affect the result (refer the example mentioned now). As Kauffman (2010) notes, more independent review of cases can give students confidence that their case will be fairly reviewed, improving trust in the academic community and students.

## IMPROVED COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

The process of addressing allegations of plagiarism requires clear communication and coordination between academic departments, committees, and administrative bodies. In the case discussed here, poor communication between the committee and both this temporary department head and the chancellor led to delays and confusion and left the student in limbo for a long time. By implementing an open and clear written communication system, universities will be able to better notify students about the status of their case, and when the necessary documents are available. At the same time, better communication can prevent departments from applying academic policies in a disjointed way, and ensure that all stakeholders are reading from the same hymn sheet, reducing the likelihood of administrative errors or failures of the system. Institutions could establish centralized systems allowing students to see the status of their case and the information students need.

## SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR STUDENTS

Lastly, organizations must understand the psychological and emotional cost of plagiarism investigation on the students. In case, the stress and anxiety of those students accused of plagiarizing can take a serious toll on their performance and their overall health. Universities should have robust systems in place to help students through this difficult process. This can encompass counseling services, academic advisors, and dedicated personnel to navigate the investigation and appeals process with students. Brown and O'Connell (2008) cite the potential for these types of systems to alleviate some of the psychological toll of such experiences, not to mention better guarantee that students continue to be able to focus on their education while the investigation is underway. These support systems would provide students to be able to voice concerns or seek clarification, thereby preventing feelings of isolation and uncertainty.

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