

# Academic Misconduct at the University of Manitoba

Each year the University Disciplinary Committee compiles a report of the various academic and non-academic offenses of U of M students. The incidents contained within the report are investigated and reported according to the guidelines of the Student Discipline [Policy](#) and [Procedures](#)

The following summaries are of actual cases although some of the details and identifying characteristics of the students have been altered to ensure the student's identity is protected.

## Students caught plagiarizing at the U of M

Each year a number of students are investigated for plagiarism in various forms and degrees. There are often many similarities from one case to the next so the following is a summary of a few individual plagiarism cases found within the annual University Disciplinary Committee report.

### Karen

Karen is a University One student completing her writing requirement before she transfers to her faculty of choice for the upcoming year. She is a good student but she has unfortunately taken on more than she probably should have for the term. In spite of her best effort she is feeling the pressure to keep up with everything and still earn the good the grades she wants.

The course with the writing requirement means that emphasis is placed on writing papers as part of the course credit and she has a paper due at the end of the week. She finds writing to be very time consuming and unfortunately, with so many other courses needing her time she did not start it as early as she should have given the requirements of the paper. As the due date looms Karen finds that she is running out of time. She is working with very little sleep and after so many late nights she starts to get careless with her references, especially those she finds on the Internet. She finishes the paper just hours before it is due. She prints off the final copy and rushes to school to hand it in. She did not proof read it or check her references before she submitted it.

A couple of days later Karen is given a letter in class by her professor that states her paper is being investigated for plagiarism and she should meet with the department head. Karen arranges a meeting and goes home to review her paper and her references.

### *Where did Karen go wrong?*

Upon carefully reading her own paper Karen finds some passages in her essay that were not referenced in the body of her paper and others that were not listed on her "Works Cited" page. At the meeting with the department head she confirmed that there were more than five unreferenced phrases in her essay that the professor recognized from popular Internet sites. Karen explained that she was pressed for time when she wrote the paper and admitted to her referencing mistakes. She acknowledged that her professor had reviewed the importance of academic integrity during class and that there was a statement on her course syllabus. She brought in the materials used for the essay and showed the department head the sections that were plagiarized. Karen took full responsibility for the plagiarism and declared that she would be more careful in the future.

While the department head stated that she felt Karen did not intend to plagiarise parts of her paper, she still thought that some form of disciplinary action was appropriate. The paper did contain plagiarisms and could therefore not be graded. The department head was aware that the professor did discuss plagiarism in the class which was a clear caution for students to pay attention to referencing and proper documentation of sources. Further, since the assignment was given a month in advance she believed that all students had sufficient time to complete the essay with due attention. As such, she assigned the paper an F grade. She could have also given

Karen an F grade for the entire course, but she did take into consideration that Karen was honest and sincere throughout the meeting, that she was a first year student and that she worked hard in the class to properly reference in her other assignments. The department head felt that the F on the final paper would be a sufficient disciplinary action but still permitted Karen to finish the course with a passing grade. Karen did successfully finish the course, but with a grade of C+ instead of the A she was working toward.

## Chris

Chris is a Science student completing an elective with a lab component. One of the lab assignments asked students to investigate the nomenclature of a particular species being studied in the course and to summarize of their findings following a very specific format provided in the lab manual. Chris turned to the course text book and the Internet and found all the information he needed to finish his summary with ease. He took the information and collapsed it into his summary, carefully formatting it so it looked similar to the example in the lab manual and handed it in by the due date.

Chris received a letter from the department head indicating that they should meet to discuss an allegation of plagiarism in the lab assignment. Chris was very upset since he believed he followed the instructions and met the expectations for the assignment. However, during the meeting with the department head it became clear to Chris that he did not properly reference any of his sources, although he did list them the last page of his lab titled "References".

### *Where did Chris go wrong?*

Chris copied sentences right out of the text book and cut and pasted sections directly from the internet without putting quotation marks around the information or otherwise indicating that he did not write many of the sentences contained in his report. Further, in places where he attempted to paraphrase the information, he did so very poorly, whereby the sentences were reordered rather than rewritten in his own words. He also did not provide an in-text citation for his paraphrases either.

The department head carefully listened to Chris as he explained how he interpreted the objective of the assignment. He explained that he gave greater attention to duplicating the format in the lab manual to ensure he was researching all of the important aspects of developing a nomenclature in the first place then on the actual rewriting of facts that were already known and published. Chris explained that since he listed the sources on the last page of his report he was sure that the professor would know that he was not taking credit for the information in his assignment – especially since so much information taken directly from the text book. The department head learned that Chris had never done a lab before that required any referencing, nor had Chris completed any course with a writing component so that his experience with referencing was quite limited. Nevertheless, the department head expressed concern that Chris had taken so much information directly word for word without placing it in quotation marks which, a even with limited knowledge of writing, a university level student should know was improper. The student received no marks for the assignment and the student had to apologize to the instructor.

## Jason

Jason is a student working toward an Arts degree. He was required to write several papers for one of his classes but struggled with writing in general and with several aspects of referencing his sources. On previous occasions his professor had pointed out problems with Jason's referencing and spent some time explaining the importance of good referencing in university. The professor offered to meet with Jason as he progressed with his papers but he did not attend to the professor's office hours. Jason just didn't seem to "get it", and he submitted yet another written assignment with referencing errors in it that the professor could not overlook and still be fair to the others in the class.

### *Where did Jason go wrong?*

Most notably, Jason did not heed the warnings that his papers contained plagiarism. Further, he did not take reasonable steps to overcome the plagiarism before submitting another assignment for evaluation.

Jason was asked to attend a meeting with the professor and the department head. Jason was given a chance to explain his ongoing difficulties with writing and referencing. Jason understood that his case was made worse by the fact that the professor had attempted to help him with his referencing, including referrals to the Learning Assistance Centre but that he did not follow through. Jason received an F on the paper and a final grade of F for the course. He was also strongly encouraged to visit the Learning Assistance Centre and purchase a reputable style guide help him with his future courses.

### **The case of the fabricated course descriptions**

John is an international student who, in his homeland, had previously taken several university level courses. He applied to the University of Manitoba for a September start, following all of the regular admission procedures for international students. He supplied his application form and official copies of transcripts from his university as required and all of his documents were received by the U of M by the admission deadline.

As part of every application process, courses taken at other Universities are reviewed for transfer of credit. The office that conducts this review was unable to determine the suitability of John's courses for U of M equivalency so the admissions office staff suggested that he acquire more detailed information about the courses from his home institution. John attempted to get this information, but quickly found there were many obstacles in his way, especially now that he was in Canada. He was unable to get copies of the course outlines from previous years or written descriptions of the courses due to government changes and bureaucratic difficulties within the University and his country as well.

John spoke again with the staff in the office and they suggested that he reconstruct, to the best of his ability, an overview of the work he had done at the previous institution. John followed this advice, but unfortunately what John finally submitted for course credit evaluation constituted admissions fraud.

John started this process by searching on the internet for course descriptions from other universities that seemed quite similar to those that he took back home. Finding several that sounded close to his own courses he then cut and pasted parts of the descriptions from these universities (that he did not attend) fashioning them into an official-looking document and submitted the document as proof of the content of the courses that he completed.

### *Where did John go wrong?*

John went wrong in how he acquired and represented the information. It was expected that John would provide, based upon his own experience in the actual courses, an overview of the material covered and a description of the text books used. This record should also have been submitted as an unofficial and personal account of the courses currently under review. Because John submitted the document as if it were an official document, it was seen as an attempt to commit academic fraud.

Fortunately for John, the ensuing investigation found that John's intention was to not be dishonest, but to be thorough in ensuring that the information he submitted was as accurate as was possible. He was able to establish with the disciplinary authority the fact that he very carefully reviewed the descriptions he submitted and felt that the ones he got from the internet most closely resembled his own courses. Still, the incident did not go without disciplinary consequences. John did not receive any transfer credit for the courses and there was a notation placed on his academic record to document the offense. Further, John learned a valuable lesson about representing information in an authentic fashion. Had he properly referenced the information as taken from

another university's website, and indicated that the information being submitted was his own 'unofficial' compilation he would not have overstepped the line into admissions fraud.

## Case of the forged CPR Certificate

Shauna needed to provide a current CPR certificate in order to register according the requirements of the teaching unit. However, her registration time was fast approaching and she did not think she would be able to get the updated certificate before she had to register. Shauna was facing some negative personal and financial circumstances that were obstacles to taking the refresher course. She decided to submit her current certificate and just change to expiry date. She convinced herself that this was okay since she did have plans to take the refresher course before classes started regardless of how difficult it would be to do so; she would then just bring in the revised certificate for her file – no harm done.

Upon the submission of the amended certificate the advisor noted the change on the document and notified the faculty administration. The matter was investigated as an incident of Shauna having forged a document.

### *Where did Shauna go wrong?*

Shauna's error was in assuming that changing the expiry date on the document was a minor thing that could be repaired by resubmitting an authentic certificate after the fact. The act of altering and submitting a tampered document was dishonest in that it was done with the intention to deceive or mislead the faculty into thinking that she had the requisite CPR designation in order to register for classes.

The investigation that proceeded uncovered some very critical mitigating factors that helped Shauna explain that her behaviour and showed that her judgement was affected by her personal and financial difficulties. Still, the faculty administrators were concerned by the behaviour and wanted to ensure that Shauna would be in a position to make better decisions in the future even if facing personal challenges. The faculty suspended Shauna for a term and supported her decision to pursue counselling for her personal and financial hardships. Further, they requested that she reflect on her own ethical standards as well as those of the profession to which she would belong upon graduation. She was required to write a paper discussing what she learned about integrity and ethics before she could resume her studies at the U of M.