Varying institutional procedures for dealing with student academic misconduct: A short comparative analysis

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Establishing and maintaining academic integrity has always been a focal point amongst all higher education organisations. Different institutions use a variety of measures to deter, detect, and discipline student as well as staff misconducts. As for under/post-graduates, the emphasis is now mainly on plagiarism and the use of ghost writing. Since these types of behaviours have become a serious challenge to academia, a holistic approach is necessary. Therefore, many institutions have rightfully established (or improved their own) institutional policies, procedures and proactive strategies. The latter include educational workshops/ training, honour codes to deter plagiarism and disciplinary processes to punish the offenses (Kibler, 1993; Cole and McCabe, 1996).

The institutional policies, in theory, should provide fair, and appropriate responses that are consistent and transparent in detection and/or handling of suspected plagiaristic activities. Since "plagiarism", in practice, comprises of a spectrum of different dishonest behaviours including collusion, ghost writing, unattributed copying, submission of another student's work etc., robust institutional policies are important. In fact, these policies are vital in delivering a clear message to the student (and staff) about institutional perspective on plagiarism. As Cole and Conklin (1996) pointed out *"students learn from institutions' responses to academic dishonesty and from institutions' expectations about students"*. Also, due process policy responses are equally important to deter plagiarism (Academic Integrity Project, 2013). Several authors have studied about the effectiveness of institutional policies, and compared different policies (Martin, 2014; Glendinning, 2014; Foltýnek and Glendinning, 2015; Macdonald and Carroll, 2006; Hua and Sun, 2017; Rodafinos, 2018). In 2013, a large scale EU funded project, impact of policies for plagiarism in higher education across Europe (IPPHAE) have reported the strategies, including policies and procedures employed or implemented by different institutions in 27 EU countries. The study is now being extended to other countries. Apart from IPPHAE, there are only a few studies designed to compare the efficacy of measures/procedures amongst different institutions.

In fact, no attempts were made to compare the procedures for academic misconduct enquiries handling a potential plagiarism/academic misconduct amongst different institutions. This workshop would attempt compare the procedures of seven different institutions to understand the robustness of these processes. The aim of this workshop is to show the participants, the importance of pro-activeness and practical awareness to establish institutional procedures for handling potential plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty. Initially a simple Google® search

was employed to randomly select publicly available institutional policies of seven different international universities. The selection include universities from America, EU, EU/UK, Australia and Asia to provide a geographical representations. The names of the institutions are anonymised, as the aim of this study (and related workshop) is to compare and contrast the due processes of academic misconduct enquiries in different institutions.

Dishonouring any institutions and their due processes is beyond the scope of this study. These procedure were summarised in the form of flow charts for easy comparison.

Interestingly, the comparison of summary flow charts has shown a wide range of due processes. In fact, each institution has its own unique procedures for academic enquiry, involving different members of staff including academics, registry, special officers (such as academic integrity or misconduct officers) etc. The prescribed panels that handle these offences, in three (out of seven) institutions were comprised of academics; and in some cases the academics who were involved in detecting/supporting the claim for plagiarism. It is not clear, how this setting would be fair or would maintain confidentiality/anonymity. Others use a special panels of members of non-academics or academic support officers, who are specially trained to handle these offenses in accordance to their institutional policies. By this way, these institutions make sure the panel considering the accusation (whether it is plagiarism or not) is not involved in the assessment of work, At least one university used academics from a different discipline to handle these issues. Another institution selected members on ad-hoc basis.

As for definition of severity of the offences, it was found to be varied amongst these institutions. Some have clearly defined different types of academic misconduct/plagiarism with pre-defined *"tariffs"*. For example, using Carroll & Seymour's (2006) simple classification, some universities have categorised plagiarism as (a) poor academic practice, (b) academic misbehaviour, and (c) academic misconduct and prescribed appropriate punishments for each of these categories. At least one institutional policy provided further explanation on defining the *"severity"* of these offenses.

Its policy considered each occurrence of plagiaristic behaviour in two measurable characteristics namely, "intention" - the student's intention to deceive the marker (on a scale of 0 to 10); and "extent" - the amount of plagiarism (expressed as a % of the submission). It further explains, how to combine these two variables under different permutations. By comparing varying levels of "intention" and "extent", the policy tries to link different plagiaristic behaviour with probable penalties. On the other hand, other institutional policies are not explicit on defining different types of plagiaristic behaviours and linking them with tariffs. Most institutions in this study have measures in place to maintain a clear record keeping that would help in investigating repeat offences.

In summary, this initial comparison of policies highlighting due processes in a small sample of seven different institutions, has highlighted the approaches to investigate plagiarism or

academic misconduct is varied. Some institutional policies have established clearly defined processes, others have vague and ambiguous due processes. This workshop will present, discuss, and try to conclude the important elements within institutional investigation processes. The investigation process of different institutions will be summarised as flow charts and the participants will work in different group to "investigate" each flow charts study the advantages and disadvantages of these processes which would lead to a panel discussion on the important considerations for producing due processes for academic misconduct investigations.

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