



European Network  
for Academic  
Integrity

# Extreme prejudice: A flawed scale would result in flawed measurement

Real-life example o2-b-16-en



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# Target audiences



- Academics
- Course leaders
- Plagiarism prevention officers



- Post-graduate students
- Demonstrators
- Associate Lecturers

# Ethan, an enthusiastic young lecturer

- Ethan obtained a lecturer post in a famous university.
- As a young lecturer with enthusiasm to promote academic integrity, he was determined to provoke severe punishments for plagiarism.
- He was fascinated about using text matching software as detection tools.



*\*Important Foot Note: due to his past experience, he hated overly friendly female students.*

# Ethan's Induction

- During his initial induction week, Ethan was asked to follow a session on “maintaining academic integrity using institutional policy”
- Although Ethan thought this was going to be another boring workshop, he attended the session
- There he was told only to use the recommended software by the university; and not entirely trust the percentage matches
- He disagreed with this statement and argued “***without percentage matches, we cannot prove plagiarism***” and said to himself “***I am going to ignore this rubbish advice anyway***”



# Paper work! Paper work! And more paper work!

- He then received several emails from the academic regulations department (ARD) asking him to attend another workshop on how to use the text matching software.
- He sent a furious email back to ARD, stating *“I know all about these text matching software; please do not waste my time”*.
- He again received a document to confirm his claim about his familiarity of text matching software used by his institution.
- The document itself was 10 pages long detailing the academic regulations, best practice and possible breach of contracts.
- He was annoyed by this but signed the document and sent it back but expressed his dissatisfaction about this bureaucracy to all his office mates.



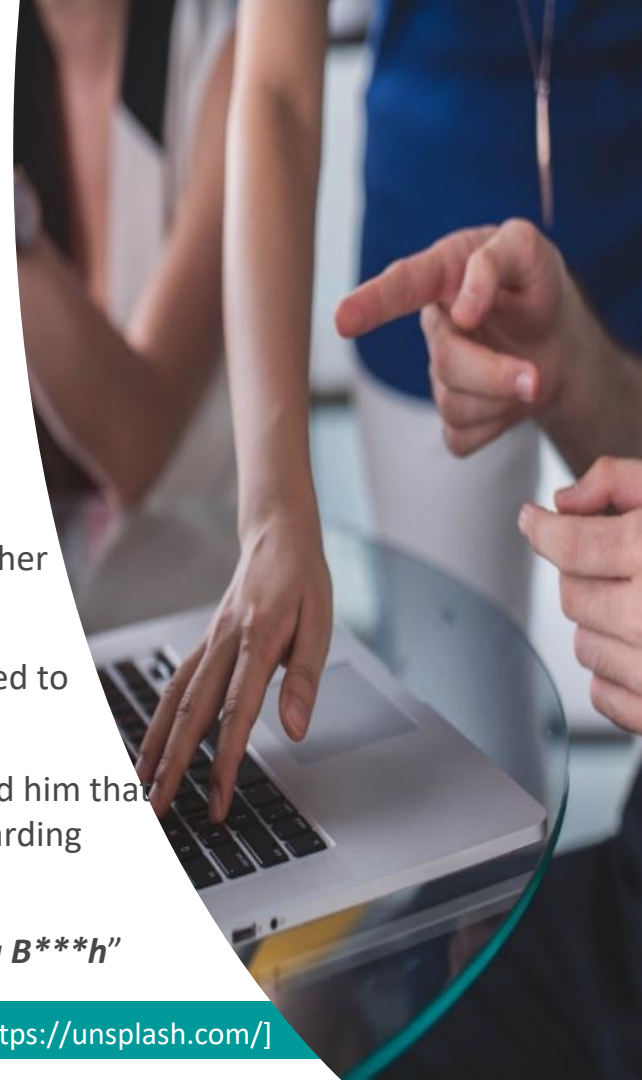
# Ethan's encounter with Elisha!

- Elisha, though been nick-named as “flirt queen” was an enthusiastic student.
- Right from the beginning Ethan hated her “outgoing” personality.
- He started finding faults with her behavior which often turns out to be false accusations.
- In the end, Elisha complained as Ethan has been harassing her and provided evidences.
- As the result of this proven allegation, the AID was forced to give Ethan a final verbal warning!



# Elisha's assignment became Ethan's nightmare!

- Ethan has found that there were over 65% matches in Elisha's assignment by his university's software.
- **"Gotch'a B\*\*\*h"** shouted Ethan in his shared office!; and explained his mates about Elisha's case.
- Then he thought *"it would be better for me to have evidences from other text matching software"*
- He was astonished (or even puzzled) to note the matching percentages from other software were 7%, 28% and 89% respectively.
- Yet, Ethan collated all the evidences, wrote the case against Elisha and submitted to AID.
- Ethan has not heard anything from AID for three weeks but his office-mates told him that they have been *"interviewed"* by the AID asking about Ethan's *"behaviour"* regarding Elisha's alleged plagiarism.
- One of his colleagues said that she told about Ethan's comment about **"Gotch'a B\*\*\*h"**



# Ethan – Preparing for Elisha’s alleged plagiarism to AID

- Ethan was disturbed to hear his office mates stories about AID carrying out investigation about his behaviour instead of looking into Elisha alleged plagiarism.
- He further checked his accusation but this time started to read Elisha’s assignment.
- While reading he realised Elisha has used properly referenced quotes. In fact her entire essay was made of properly cited quotes!
- Ethan said to himself *“well obviously she has copied sentences word-for word and therefore she has plagiarised anyway!”*
- Then his office mates told him *“writing quotes that are properly referenced cannot be plagiarism!”*; for which he replied *“Well, it is plagiarism in my dictionary!”*





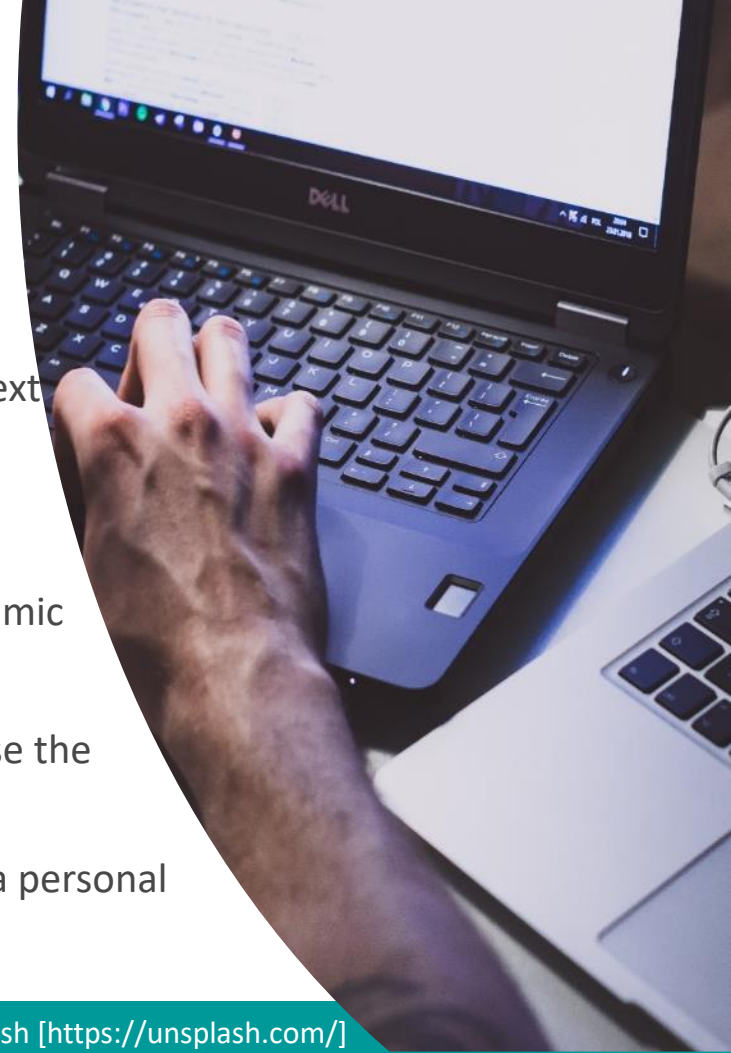
# Elisha's investigation turned out to be Ethan's internal enquiry

- Ethan was “summoned” to attend a meeting with AID but when he went there he had noticed the presence of Human Resources (HR) personal.
- He was informed by the HR that the meeting is not about Elisha's academic conduct. Instead it was a formal disciplinary investigation about Ethan's “*unprofessional behaviour*”.
- Hence he was allowed to have a union representative to see the procedures are followed according to the university disciplinary protocol.
- He was alleged of unfairly targeting a good student and attempting to defame her course submission.
- He was told essays written as quotes may not have fulfilled the expected learning outcomes, and therefore not worthy of grading. However, this cannot be considered as plagiarism as the quotes were properly cited and acknowledged.



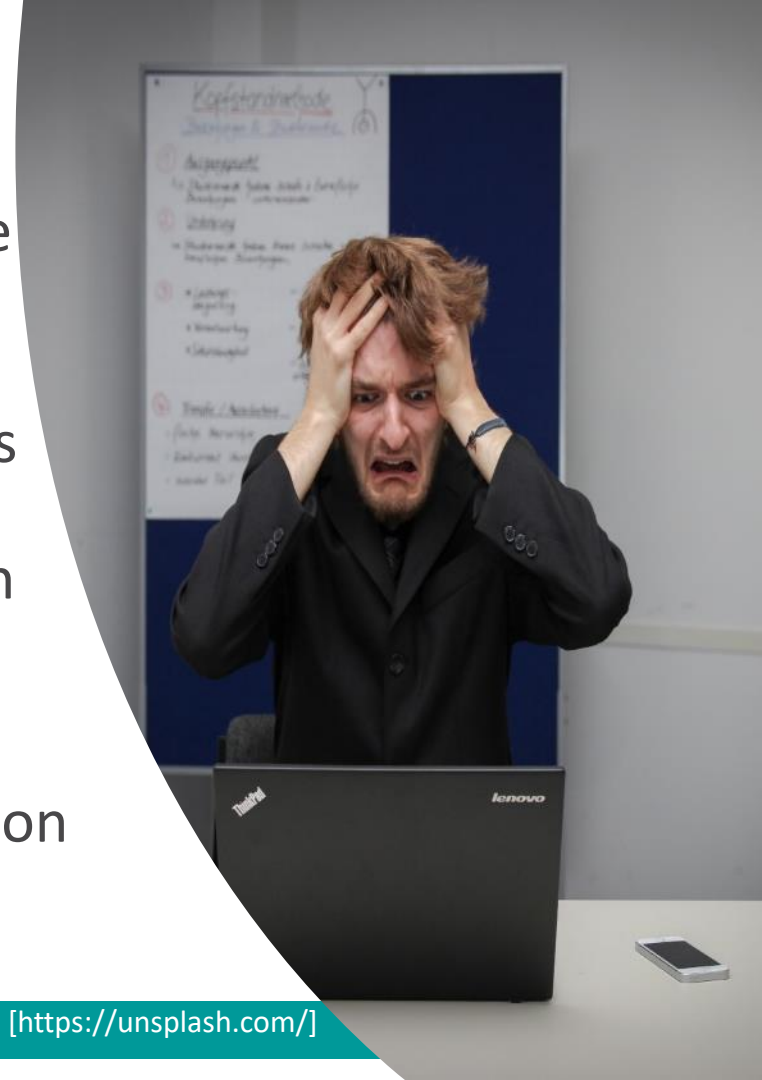
# Evidences against Ethan

- The AID presented evidences showing that Ethan has not followed due processes at all.
- Their accusations were:
  - Not attending a compulsory workshop on how to use the text matching software in the first place.
  - Falsely claiming understanding due process for plagiarism detection.
  - Not properly checking the percentage matches using academic wisdom.
  - Using unauthorised text matching software to falsely accuse the “victim”.
  - Not maintaining the high academic standards and having a personal vendetta against a student.



# Defenceless Ethan!

- In addition, the statements from his office mates were also shared with the HR.
- Although Ethan admitted “carelessness” is the main cause for this, he was unable to defend himself as he clearly was in breach of a contract (which he signed without reading).
- He was told that he would be on suspension until the verdict.

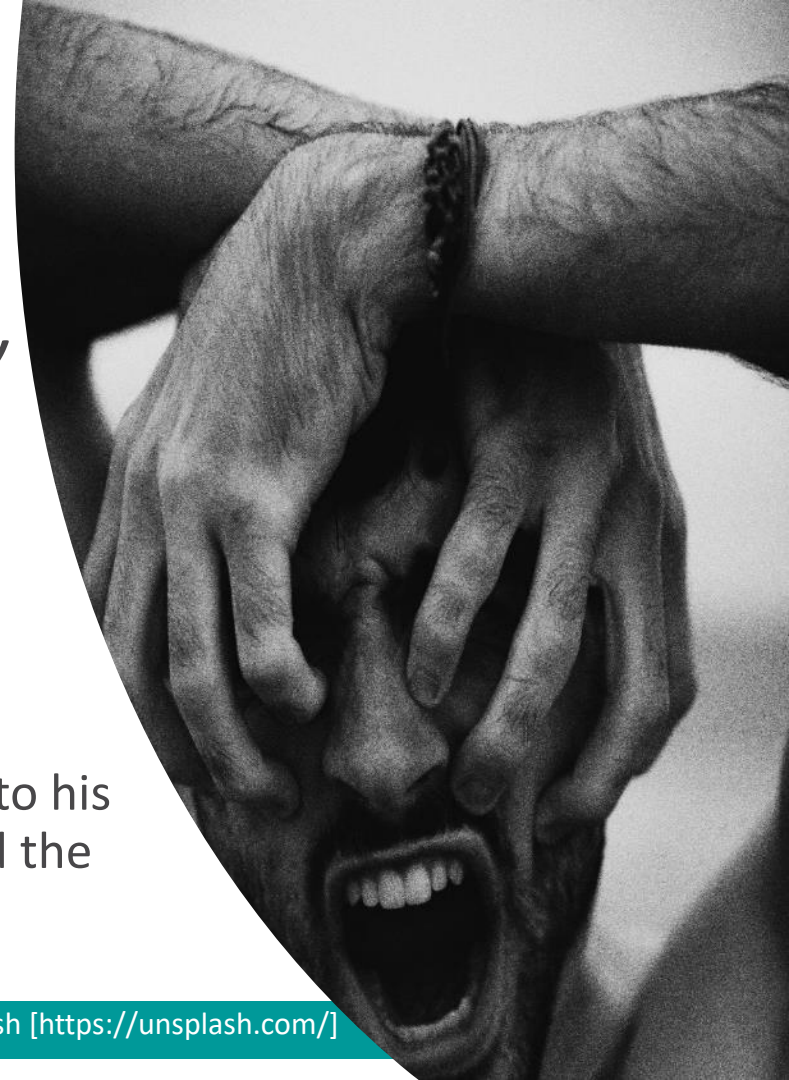


# The verdict!

- After three weeks Ethan received a letter of termination which stated:

***“Considering the fact that you are already given a final verbal warning about your behaviour towards this particular female student, and the facts presented against you during the formal enquiry you are hereby issued a termination notice. You would have a month to clear your desk!”***

- Although he appealed against this decision, due to his previous warning, the appeals committee upheld the university’s decision.



# Ethan's current status

- Since his reputation as an academic is tarnished by this incidence, Ethan was unable to get any jobs.
- He is now jobless and homeless, regretting his actions.
- You might bump into him in the streets of his city begging!



# The Lesson for all of us!

- Academic judgement is important in determining misconducts
- DO NOT assume that we know everything about plagiarism detection
- DO NOT over rely on text matching software and their percentages. They are just an indication or guidelines, not a definite proof
- DO NOT stereotype students according to their behaviour



# Discussion

- Do you think Ethan's behavior is acceptable?
- What do you think about the influence of Ethan's "attitude" towards plagiarism culture amongst students?
- Does Ethan's dismissal justifiable, if not whom do you think should be punished?
- What could have been done at the university level to prevent the problem which was mainly created by Ethan's misconception of internal policies?
- What may be the cause of this problem?



# Message of the story

It is important to:

- Understand the institutional policies before taking drastic actions against plagiarism.
- Understand the limitations of text matching software.
- Have an open and neutral mindset for deciding the case for plagiarism.
- Avoid any prejudice against any students based on their colour, gender identity or their natural behaviour.





# Anchor to the real case

This story is partly based on the real life experience of two academics in UK.

One academic has quitted his job after being accused of unfair treatment of a female student

The other academic experienced the inconsistencies and reliability issues relating to different text matching software.



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*\*Ps: Note the scenario did not happen in author's own institution*

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