

# Penn State Smeal College of Business

## MBA Program Academic Integrity Disclosure Notices

### Cases from Spring 2011

#### **Case 1**

A student did not hand in a discussion paper as required at the end of a class period; the student told the professor that they had already done it prior to the class discussion, that they had simply forgotten to send it, and that they would send it as soon as possible. Later that day the professor realized that they still did not have the student's paper and emailed the student to ask for it. Later that evening the student finally submitted the paper. The professor believed that the student had done the paper following the class discussion, which violated the course rules. When questioned, the student admitted that they had not done the paper until after the class and that they had lied about it being done. The student received a failing grade in the course and, as a result, did not graduate in May.

#### Key Learning:

The student should have admitted to the professor that the paper was not written on time; at worst, the penalty would have been a failing grade on that assignment. The student compounded his error by lying about whether the paper was done. The truth always works better.

#### **Case 2**

A professor became concerned that students were collaborating on the online quizzes in their course. A student had also reported his concern over the issue. Five students were identified as possibly collaborating. Four of them admitted that they had gotten together to discuss the quiz questions and answers before submitting their quizzes. The four students had their grades lowered to "C" in the course. The fifth student was not part of the collaboration and was absolved of any wrongdoing.

#### Key Learning:

The students' conduct clearly violated the rules of the course; they realized that they should not have been discussing the quiz answers but rationalized it on the basis of the time savings and the increase in learning for all of them. Despite these rationalizations, their behavior still violated the Honor Code. The MBA community may have to increase its efforts to educate students on what constitutes an Honor Code violation.

#### **Case 3**

A student had submitted a paper to a dropbox at the required time; the professor also required students to hand in a paper copy at the next class period several days later. The student made several minor corrections on the copy that was handed in several days later. The student admitted making the changes, but had thought that such minor corrections did not violate the professor's policies. The Review Board found that the changes did, however, violate the policies of the professor. The Review Board lowered the grade on the assignment one full letter grade.

#### Key Learning:

The offense here was minor because the changes to the submitted paper were small in number and minor in nature. Still, the Review Board felt that the student should have known that even

minor changes were improper and violated the Honor Code. Although the violation was not intentional, students must learn to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

#### **Case 4**

A student had submitted a paper late because a teammate had offered some minor editing help on it; the paper was supposed to be an individual effort. When the student revealed to the professor the reason for the tardy submission, the student offered to submit either the revised version or the original one. The professor ended up accepting the revised version and assessed a late penalty for the submission. The professor then referred the matter to a Review Board. The Review Board decided not to assess any further penalty both because the differences between unedited and edited versions were minor and because the professor had accepted the revised version. The Review Board did not assess a penalty on the teammate who had offered to help edit the student's paper, but did admonish the student to take better care in the future with respect to offers to help on graded assignments.

#### **Key Learning:**

The fault here comes from not thinking clearly about offers to help and about accepting those offers. The offense was minor, but students need to realize that an "individual" assignment means that it should be solely one's own effort, without help from anyone else.

#### **Case 5**

Two separate issues were raised concerning the behavior of a student in two different classes. Both issues related to plagiarism and proper citation of material. The first issue revolved around the extent to which slides contributed for a team presentation were the student's own work and whether they had been properly cited. During preparation for the presentation, the team decided that some slides had been copied from internet sources that were not cited; they deleted all slides from the presentation that they thought were improper; however, several slides were missed and did end up in the presentation and were discovered at the time of the presentation. The student's teammates brought the issue to the professor in the course because they believed their teammate had not simply inadvertently failed to cite the proper sources but instead had meant to pass the work off as the student's own.

The second issue was brought to the AI officer by a professor who believed that the student had plagiarized the original articles in her summaries of those articles. The student's two papers contained numerous instances of whole sentences that were copied from the original articles. The student said that they understood "summarize the article" to mean that it was permissible to copy the author's words without using quotes.

For the first issue, the Review Board wrestled with whether some of the improper citations had been inadvertent. Although concluding that at least some of them were, they also felt that several others were not simply careless errors. For the second issue, the Review Board felt that the student should have known that it was improper to simply copy an author's words in a paper designed to be a summary.

The Review Board concluded that the appropriate sanctions were failing grades in both courses.

#### **Key Learning:**

The student belatedly realized two things. First, you must take care to properly cite material you are using. Second, it is never permissible to use someone else's work without making it clear that the work is indeed someone else's.