

Editorial

Academic Fraud (and the Attitude of Stakeholders)

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INTRODUCTION

The statement "... contextualizing the current trend of increasing academic fraud and corrupt practices in quality assurance and accreditation processes ..." that appears in the abstract of Jacques and Muriel [1] article is highly suggestive of how immense the problem of academic fraud is and how the problem is made worst by the actions of some stakeholders.

In this (short) editorial we define academic fraud as any form of academic dishonesty or misconduct that is involved in an academic exercise/activity [2]; and we recognize teachers, professors/faculty members, and all those involved in academic decision making (especially the principal officers of universities, the controllers of examinations, etc) as the stakeholders. We proceed and identify the various types of academic fraud ranging from plagiarism to bribery. Then, we carefully site some brief instances where stakeholders had failed in their duties. And we peripherally present the challenges/problems resulting from academic fraud. We (finally) resound some advice to ears of the stakeholders. Many further readings are suggested and scholarly articles are widely cited in this editorial, but still we do recommend that more quantitative research be done on

this topic and we encourage researchers to make available recent and highly relevant information on this topic.

TYPES OF ACADEMIC FRAUD

Scholars have carefully classified the highly diversified academic fraud into some eight types, namely: Fabrication, Cheating, Deception, Plagiarism, Impersonation, Bribery, Sabotage, and Professorial misconduct. We briefly define each of them below, and we encourage readers who are interested in further information regarding these to refer to more comprehensive texts available through the cited references [2-8].

Fabrication

Fabrication encompasses falsification/counterfeiting of academic material, information (such as data, references, etc) or activity (such as exercise, assignment, etc).

Cheating

Cheating is any form of taking or providing any kind of academic assistance in any formal academic activity as

against the laid down rules governing the concerned academic activity. As the definition portrays, cheating can vary considerably, and the term essentially covers both the act of giving and the act of obtaining academic assistance in a formal academic activity as against the laid down rules governing such academic activity. It is heartbreaking (otherwise, interesting) to know that many stakeholders are often found to be repeatedly guilty of this particular type of academic fraud.

Deception

Deception should be clearly contrasted to Fabrication. For example, while fabrication might involve cooking up data, deception ranges from lying about an inability or misconduct to providing falsified excuses to cover up negligence in academic duties.

Plagiarism

In the recent times (as against in the antiquity) plagiarism is often seen as a very severe academic fraud and a moral offence [9]; and it has been defined by Nelson [10] as “the use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work.” Recently, plagiarism often take the form of (the very easy) “copying” of others work(s) or statements from electronic materials (especially from the internet and eBooks) and using then as/in ones own work (without the necessary, correct, and due acknowledgement of the source). Many students, professors, and many others professionals in various fields are fond of this fraud.

Impersonation

Impersonation is an academic fraud in which a person other than whom the academic testing activity (such as examination, assignment, presentation, etc) is meant for appears for the academic testing activity and presents him/herself as the “actual right” person such that the whole (or sometimes, part of the) academic activity is undertaken by the impersonator on behalf of the “actual right” person.

Bribery

This is also a common academic fraud. It involves the payment of some material things or services (to the person or authority in charge of some academic decision) for the sake of unduly obtaining certain academic rewards/excellence (e.g. passing a test), when actually such academic reward is supposed to be earned only by

due academic effort. Cash payment and sexual harassment have often been found to be associated with this academic fraud.

Sabotage

This involves intentionally taking active actions to prevent others from completing their academic activity. It is very common in situations where graded success in academic activities are used in ranking students in way(s) that such ranks are very important and the ranks are used as predictors of some future successes – and thus used in decision making. Very common examples are seen in situations where a student disrupts other students' practical works; and where a student prevents other students their deserved and desired access to academic (e.g. examination preparation) resources, etc.

Professorial Misconduct

It is safe to say that professorial misconduct encompasses all forms of academic fraud from the “superior authority” (say, from a professor, examiner, etc) towards student(s). This academic fraud often has bias as a central part and may involve so high degrees of bribe and sexual harassment. Also, it is often characterized by students' mark/performance inflation.

SOME BRIEF INSTANCES WHERE STAKEHOLDERS HAD FAILED IN THEIR DUTIES

Even though many people have strongly associated academic frauds with students, it is worthy of note that the part played by some stakeholders in the various notorious kinds of academic frauds should not be neglected: in fact such ugly actions should be remarked and publicized.

Truly, there are many notable instances where the decision makers and heads in many academic units have actively participated in some forms of academic fraud or the other.

Recalling the incidence at the notable University of Manitoba where there have being some lingering crises concerning the conditions on which a PhD student had been said to have fulfilled the requirement for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree when actually there appear to be stronger evidences against this potentially claim. In fact, reliable sources did claim that the student had failed the compulsory PhD examination twice; and that he was just supposed to be withdrawn from the doctorate program [11-13]. Careful consideration of the

situation suggests how stakeholders can actively or passively initiate, support, and/or cover (some forms) of academic insincerity/fraud.

Another instance is the case of severe plagiarism that a notable Indian Professor [14] and his (former) PhD student are accused of. It is documented that this teacher (who at that time was a Professor and formerly was the director of distance education at Bangalore University (BU), Karnataka State, India) allowed his PhD student to submit a word-for-word copy of the his (i.e. the professor's) own PhD thesis as a novel work by the student and thus allowed the student to be awarded the highest possible degree – PhD [15, 16].

These cited examples are highly incredible, and it is very sad to know that these (cited) instances are merely a tip of the iceberg; and that many similar and worst cases exist and reoccur, with just only a very few are being detected and far fewer are getting documented.

Bribery also makes the ugly incidences uglier. Quite a number of teachers, supervisors, examiners, etc have been found guilty of academic fraud and bribery. One could imagine how worst it is to know that some of those whose only job is upholding academic standards and making the students go the right way do just the opposite. A number of such cases have been reported in many qualifying examination in many parts of the world (for example, in Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination in Nigeria, and in West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination in many West African Countries).

PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY ACADEMIC FRAUD (A PERIPHERAL APPROACH)

Frankly, academic fraud presents the entire humankind with enormous problems, and it is just impossible to overemphasize the possible problems that could result from academic fraud. For the sake of simplicity, one may categorize the problems resulting from academic fraud into two main types: immediate problems, and long-term problems.

The immediate problems range from making examinations results (and other forms of academic judgments) insensitive, unspecific, unreliable, and/or invalid. These lead to making wrong decisions and committing unacceptable (type I as well as type II) errors. Here, one ends up classifying a “wrong person” under the “right category”, and a “right person” under the “wrong category”, thereby putting a round peg in a

square hole since the evidences (e.g. the examination results) on which important decisions are based do not correctly show/indicate who the cap fits. These misclassifications invariably yield the long-term problems associated with academic fraud.

Since academic fraud causes misclassification and the putting of less qualified people in vital positions, the whole population ends up taken unreasonable risks, since important decisions (that would affect the whole population) would now be in the hands of those with unqualified minds. This is in addition to the fact that they spoil the labour market, and make everything go just in the direct opposite of good. The worst long-term results occur when the products of academic fraud (the “wrong graduates”) end up in the academic sector, and they become the new stakeholders, and they produce more products of academic fraud (“wrong graduates”), and the cycle goes on and on and on.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that academic fraud has a lot of havoc and has no good whatsoever, and that the parts played by the stakeholders are significant. We emphasize that the worst problem from academic fraud is its ability to form a vicious cycle (which is both self sustaining and incremental). And finally we charge the stakeholders and call their attentive attentions to these menaces and encourage them to strike out all forms of academic fraud because this is their responsibility – otherwise academics (as well as the virtues in our world at large) would become less valuable day-in-day-out.

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