Case Study Project on Academic Integrity

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Hongyi Zhang

George Mason University

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**1.Introduction**

This paper is a case study on academic integrity and aims to analyze a particular violation of Mason’s Honor Code. It happened to two graduate students study in George Mason University.

Matthew is a graduate student at George Mason University in Art Graphic Design. He was excited to attend art exhibitions and visit galleries during the semester because this would help him build his portfolio and prepares him to apply for an internship. However, the submission of his final project for AVT 611 was suspected a foul play due to the similarities data elements with another student Natalie. Therefore, he and Natalie both received an “incomplete”. The professor of ACT 611reported both students to the Office of Academic Integrity. Matthew panicked because he needed the transcript for his summer internship.

According to this case study, I will talk about the overview of the academic integrity with a brief introduction of Honor Code, then provide the definition of stealing. Furthermore, this paper given an analysis and evaluation of why Matthew and Natalie were suspected of violating the Mason Honor Code and how to prevent this situation from happening in my future study.

**2.Overview of the Academic Integrity**

Donald L. McCabe is considered to be the “founding father” of research on academic integrity (<http://obits.nj.com/obituaries/starledger/obituary.aspx?pid=181490279>). Academic integrity can be defined in different ways and one widely acceptable definition comes from the international center for academic integrity ([HumberHealthSciences](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCG-LVWZU2K1GjkcXdBaEUg), 2014, Academic Integrity, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DycmxNbrRlk>). According to the ICAI, there are five fundamental values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (ICAI, update in 2014, <http://www.academicintegrity.org/icai/resources-2.php>). Academic integrity is important for everyone to reflect people’s moral characters. As a student, it is a real academic achievement to maintain academic integrity through the whole learning process. Therefore, as a higher education institution, academic integrity is particularly important for George Mason University.

**2.1 Academic Integrity in George Mason**

At George Mason University, Academic Integrity is demonstrated in work community, the classroom and research. Students maintain this commitment to high academic standards through Mason’s Honor Code. ( <https://oai.gmu.edu/>) According to the Mason Honor Code, academic integrity can be separated into four parts: cheating, stealing, plagiarizing and lying. In this case study I mainly discussed about “stealing”.

**2.2 Definition of Stealing**

According to the Mason Honor Code, the definition of stealing is “stealing from an academic perspective deals with obtaining and/or providing unauthorized access to educational materials”( <https://oai.gmu.edu/>). For examples, taking picture of the academic materials or using another person’s idea in one’s assignment without permission. Therefore, the case I mentioned before that occurred between Matthew and Natalie is “stealing” which is a violation of academic integrity according to the Mason Honor Code, I will elaborate on this violation in the next section.

**3. Case Study of Matthew and Natalie**

In this section, I will highlight the reason why Matthew and Natalie were suspected of violating of the academic integrity, the possible sanctions and resolutions, and focus on what can be done to avoid this situation through the analysis and evaluation of this case. There will be three parts of this section from three different perspectives.

**3.1 From perspective of Matthew**

Matthew attended a design exhibition hosted at Mason to collect data for his visual storytelling project. He worked very hard, spent a lot of time on this project in the open studio. However, he left his work unattended when he took breaks. Regardless of the academic integrity, this behavior is inherently unsafe because he studied in an open studio. Everyone in this space may steal his property includes ideas and materials of the project. Because Matthew submitted his assignment with similar design elements of Natalie’s project, he was suspect to violate the academic integrity. Although he provided citations, it is unclear if Matthew violated the rules of the Mason Honor Code due to the similarities of the design elements or due to later submission time.

According to the Mason Honor Code, “students have three resolutions options: a prehearing resolution, a full review, or a sanction only case review (<https://oai.gmu.edu/>). For Matthew, I recommend that he chooses the second resolution because he accused Natalie of stealing his work. A full review is a resolution option when students indicates that they are not in violation of the Honor Coed and want the Honor Committee to review their case to give a reasonable sanctions (<https://oai.gmu.edu/>). If Matthew really accomplished his assignment as the case said, he worked hard on his project, he didn’t use Natalie’s materials. He also didn’t give his own data and idea to others. Most importantly, Matthew cited resources he used in his project. After the investigation of the Honor Committee, the possible sanction of Matthew that he would not be punished because he didn’t violate the Honor Code in my view.

**3.2 From perspective of Natalie**

Natalie used design elements in her project that are similar to Matthew’s. Both students said they only have saw each other in the open studio but didn’t collaborate with one another. This means they insisted that they finished their projects individually. The case study mentioned that Natalie submitted her final project without any citations. Although she submitted the project before Matthew, I still have reason to doubt whether she finish her assignment all by herself or not. As we all know, when we work on a paper or project, all the research we do needs citation to provide credential and give respect to the original authors. This is also one of the requirements of the Mason Honor Code in the “plagiarism” part.

For Natalie, there is not much information about her in the case and i don’t know the how she worked with her homework. Therefore, the next steps of the investigation of the Honor Committee would be the possible sanctions of receiving an “F” in this course because for now according to the information provided by the case, Natalie most likely stole Matthew's idea when they both studied in the open studio.

**3.3 From perspective from me**

Like Matthew and Natalia, as a graduate student in George Mason University, it’s my duty to obey the Mason Honor Code. After analyzing what happened to Matthew and Natalie, I have some suggestions for students to complete the assignment while satisfying the standards of academic integrity. First and foremost, students must work on assignments individually. They can discuss with others but do not directly use any materials from others. And then we can use writcheck (<http://en.writecheck.com/>) or other tools to help us check our assignment and improve them before submitting them. Actually there are many resources available on campus to help students if they are suspect of violating the Mason Honor Code. They can talk with professors and provide evidence or write a statement to prove that they finished the assignment by themselves. Anyway, ensuring academic integrity is the basic responsibility of students and professors but is also an important part of our moral character. We need to unconditionally abide by the Mason Honor Code as a part of Mason community.

**4. Conclusion**

This paper talked about academic integrity and the Mason honor Code through a case study. I discussed the definition of the academic integrity and especially the definition of stealing which is one of the components of the Mason Honor Code. Using the specific case of Matthew and Natalie, I analyzed the case from three aspects and gave some suggestions about how to avoid these situations which will help students and also remind ourselves to obey the Mason Honor Code in future studies.

**Reference**

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