

Ethical Situations

Disclaimer: Some of these situations were adapted from case studies created at the Center for the Study of Ethics at Utah Valley State College, some are based on experience, and some are pure fantasy. Enough details have been changed so there are no legal or ethical quandaries. None of these experiences bear any resemblance to situations that actually happened to the panelists, so stop trying to figure it out. The gossip you heard isn't true.

Situation A

Near the end of the fall semester, a student completing his second semester with you comes to your office hours. He asks you if you can complete a recommendation letter for graduate school for him. Although this student has received reasonably good grades from you (in the B range), you know that he is a weak student who has required a lot of nurturing for minimal academic success.

Situation A:

Rec Letter for Weak Student

- A. Say “no” without explanation.
- B. Say “no” with explanation.
- C. Offer to do it, but explain that your letter will not be strong.
- D. Say “yes” and write a weak letter.
- E. Say “yes” and write the strongest possible letter without outright lying.
- F. Say “yes” and lie by writing a strong letter.

Situation B

The week after spring break, a student you do not know comes to your office hours obviously upset. She says that she just discovered that someone in her dorm, a student you taught in the fall semester, had copied her paper (written for the same course but a different professor) and turned it in to you. She has her paper, dated from the previous spring, as well as the paper you graded. They appear identical except for formatting and minor corrections. Both papers received the grade of A.

Situation B: Copied Paper

- A. Do nothing and tell the student you are going to do nothing.
- B. Imply to the student you will begin an investigation, but do nothing.
- C. Begin investigation by contacting the unknown student's professor.
- D. Begin investigating by contacting your previous student.
- E. Lodge a formal complaint to the integrity council.

Situation B: Part II

After a little investigation, you find that the student in your class is the accusing student's ex-boyfriend. He claims that he actually wrote an even earlier paper, whose research she had adapted to make her version of the paper. Then, she willingly allowed him to further "refine" the paper for your course.

Situation B: Copied Paper II

- A. Do nothing and tell the students you are going to do nothing.
- B. Imply to the students you will continue the investigation, but do nothing.
- C. Continue investigating to find out more details.
- D. Lodge a formal complaint to the integrity council.

Situation C

A student comes to you and tells you that he is worried about another student in your class. He believes that he is hurting himself intentionally. You have noticed that the student seems sad and distracted, but his attendance and academic performance is normal.

Situation C: Sad Student

- A. Do nothing.
- B. Contact the sad-seeming student and ask him if he is all right, but do not reveal that another student told you anything.
- C. Contact the sad-seeming student and tell him what the other student said, ask him if he needs help.
- D. Contact the counseling center and ask them about the student.
- E. Contact the Dean of Students office and ask them about the student.
- F. Contact the student's academic advisor and see what that person knows.

Situation D

Just before finals, a student comes to you and tells you that she needs a B in your class to maintain her scholarship. You tell the student that she must do well on the final, and that there is still plenty of time for studying. When you grade the final, she does not do well enough to earn a B, but she is close.

Situation D: Scholarship Student

- A. Give the student the lower grade even though they lose the scholarship.
- B. Contact the student and suggest that there is extra work that the student could do to improve the grade.
- C. Bump up the student's grade.

Situation D: Part II

Just before you turn in the grades, you run into the student. She thanks you for a good class. She knows she didn't do too well on the final. You find out that she is a single mother working full time, returning to school to finish a degree started a decade earlier and try and get a better job. Her son was sick during finals week and she had to work overtime during the holiday retail season and so she just didn't have time to study.

Situation D: Scholarship Student Part II

- A. Give the student the lower grade even though they lose the scholarship.
- B. Contact the student and suggest that there is extra work that the student could do to improve the grade.
- C. Bump up the student's grade.

Situation E:

You attend a conference and one of the speakers gives you an article that is perfect for the class you are teaching in the fall. You pass it out to your seminar as a reading assignment. The next class, one of your student points out the note at the end of the article: “Preprint. Not for distribution. Copyright reserved.”

Situation E:

- A. Lie to students and say you had permission.
- B. Admit mistake to students but do nothing further.
- C. Admit to mistake to students and try to collect all the articles.
- D. Contact author of article.
- E. Advise administration of your mistake.
- F. Do some combination of choices B, C, and D.
- G. Look into copyright law and see if this is one of those gray areas.

Situation F:

One of your department's majors comes to your office hours. He tells you that another professor in your department, your friend and colleague, came on to him sexually after class. He offers to tell you the details.

Situation F: Part I

A. Stop.

B. Go.

Situation F: Part IIA

You do not hear the details.

- A. Do nothing.
- B. Ask your colleague about the student without telling them about the accusation.
- C. Ask your colleague about the student after telling them about the accusation.
- D. Tell the department chair.
- E. Call the Dean of Students.
- F. Tell the Dean of your school.
- G. Call the newspaper.
- H. Call the police.

Situation F: Part IIB

You do hear the details.

- A. Do nothing.
- B. Ask your colleague about the student without telling them about the accusation.
- C. Ask your colleague about the student after telling them about the accusation.
- D. Tell the department chair.
- E. Call the Dean of Students.
- F. Tell the Dean of your school.
- G. Call the newspaper.
- H. Call the police.