



Plagiarism

Pamela is a renowned expert at a major research university. Her department is large and includes several sub-disciplines. It attracts a diverse array of graduate students, including many from outside the country.

Pamela has a PhD student, Alex, who plans to return to their home country after receiving their PhD. Because their home country's official language is not English, Alex is not concerned at their poor ability to write in English. At Pamela's urging, Alex signed up for an English as an Additional Language (EAL) program on campus to improve their comfort and skill with writing and speaking in English.

Pamela was particularly concerned about Alex's writing because they would have to take a comprehensive examination prior to beginning their dissertation research. Their department's comprehensive exam includes a requirement to write a review article on a topic outside of the student's area of interest. Alex submits a review paper for the comprehensive exam. Their review had a title which sounded familiar to Pamela and the English was far better than Alex's usual writing.

Pamela asked Alex if they had used any published review articles in preparation of their own review article, because there were none cited. Alex replied that they had, and Pamela instructed them to revise the paper with the appropriate citations. Alex circulated a revised paper, including citations, to the review committee. The title of Alex's paper, however, still bothered Pamela. She did a simple online search, and quickly found another paper with the same title.

Alex barely passed their comprehensive exam; while awaiting the results of the exam, Pamela compared Alex's paper with the one she had found with the same title and found that more than half of Alex's paper had been copied *verbatim*. Pamela reported her finding to Alex's Supervisory Committee. A debate ensued as to whether to handle the plagiarism finding within the department, or whether to submit it as an allegation of breach under the university's scholarly integrity policy.

Questions for consideration

1. How should the supervisory committee respond to Alex's alleged plagiarism?
2. What recommendations could the Department make – regardless of how the case is handled – about additional training opportunities for graduate students?
3. What would an appropriate form of recourse be for Alex, following the Department's handling of the matter?

Adapted from The Office of Research Integrity [RCR Casebook](#).

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We thank our colleagues at UBC and beyond who provided perspectives and feedback that greatly improved the relevance of these case studies to members of our research community. Their contribution and support are central to our efforts to promote education on, and raise awareness of, the importance of the responsible conduct of research.

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1. How should the supervisory committee respond to Alex's alleged plagiarism?

The supervisory committee should first clarify what process exists within the department to respond to Alex's alleged plagiarism.

The review paper was submitted in part fulfillment of Alex's degree requirement and was not intended for publication. In this case, the alleged plagiarism would be considered by the [President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline](#) at UBC rather than through an investigation under the [Scholarly Integrity Policy](#).

2. What recommendations could the Department make – regardless of how the case is handled – about additional training opportunities for graduate students?

Some possibilities include:

- orientation to clarify departmental expectations and student responsibilities for all incoming domestic and international students,
- encourage graduate students to access relevant resources,
- make available multiple responsible conduct of research education opportunities throughout their graduate training.

3. What would an appropriate form of recourse be for Alex, following the Department's handling of the matter?

Some options may be:

- Formal responsible conduct of research education
- Additional training in writing and communication
- Withhold their advancement to candidacy until they complete another review for the comprehensive exam

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