

## **Ethics Committee Past Cases and Resolutions**

### Concerning the sharing of test information from an M2 to an M1

The student was concerned that a fellow M1 was receiving an unfair advantage on an upcoming exam because her M2 friend told her a few specific questions that stumped everyone on their exam the previous year. “Then he proceeded to literally highlight important concepts on her notes pages - concepts that apparently appeared frequently throughout the exam.”

The committee identified two potential issues from this submission: 1) providing exam information to someone who has not taken it and 2) disproportionate access to information from upperclass students. While the committee agrees that issue 1) is unacceptable when the information relates to the exact same exam (ie. a student took an exam late and asked a fellow student for hints/tips/etc), it is unclear if sharing exam information between years results in the same ethical distaste. First, as a student, I expect that professors change exam questions each year. Clearly, the overall concepts/themes will remain the same and thus, outside help from either the professor or previous students would be of little additional benefit as long as questions are modified yearly.

Issue 2) is undoubtedly unfair, but not necessarily unethical. Throughout our training, there are many instances in which we experience disproportionate access to information: time spent at GPP, time spent in PDS small group, etc. Although some M1s may be friends with M2s affording easier access, all M1s have equal access to M2s through participation in interest groups, house events, and the Big Sib program. Therefore, no action is required in response to issue 2)

In conclusion, the committee feels it is important for student to self-police when they seek information from fellow students regarding an exam. As long as professors modify questions yearly, we do not think that information sharing between years provides students with an unfair advantage. In addition, the unequal access to upperclass students that results from previous friendships does not constitute an unfair advantage than demands action to correct due to general nature of unequal access to information through our training.

### Concerning Infectious Disease Policy

The student was concerned about his and his classmates’ exposure to infection in the lecture setting, in the form of both mild infectious disease and more serious infections like TB, referencing specific recent instances where he felt he and his classmates were put in danger. He also asked, if there were a confirmed case of TB or another serious infection, whether the class be somehow notified for safety purposes, or what measures might realistically be taken.

The ethics committee feels that the concerns about infectious disease could be best addressed by administration, perhaps by encouraging sick students to stay home and get well whenever possible, reminding students they may utilize the recorded lecture captures to stay on top of material while they cannot attend class bodily, and reminding students of the policy for medical exemption from required activities.

In the vein of more serious infections that could put the rest of student population at risk, the Committee feels it

may be appropriate to clarify the medical school's infection control policy in cases of infectious disease contraction.

\*"It is my impression that this anonymous post (and I would suggest you accept confidential, but not anonymous posts) was due to rumors and the student could have approached our office with concerns." –Dean McBride

#### Concerning feedback about different courses (which does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee)

As a committee, we are more concerned with the nature of these comments coming to our inbox rather than being directed through the normal channel of the OASIS based course feedback forms. It was brought to our attention that, unlike with other courses, students may have directed the complaints to us because they had concerns of anonymity and conflict of interest with your roles as course instructor and in course review/development. Again while not judging the magnitude of the concern, we do suggest this be addressed with the class in the future. We have also brought this concern to the attention of the EPC representatives.

#### Concerning a complaint directed at students allowed in the side room during testing

I checked with our testing administrator and found out that a student was feeling light headed and asked if they could get a snack out of their backpack. The administrator agreed and watched the student from the door. As a policy we do not allow students in that side room once the exam has started. Of course, there can be extenuating circumstances and those we take on a case by case basis. Please assure students that these situations are always monitored closely. It is fine balance between providing the best environment for all students while meeting emergent needs of individual students.

#### Concerning the "doctors' notes" issue

The Student Ethics Committee has received concerns from students regarding the "doctors' notes" situation that took place at the state capitol on February 19th. We understand that this is a sensitive issue and that confidentiality has to be upheld. However, the issue has been fairly public which has been concerning to students. Is it possible to allay students' concerns by assuring the student body that the issue is being handled appropriately by the hospital and medical school administrations?

\*Dean McBride or Dean Golden sent out a message to the student body addressing this.

#### Concerning test-day seating assignment policy

The complaint expressed concern about another M2 student purposely coming late to every exam to ensure that they will get to choose their seat in the back of the classroom. This intentional tardiness is viewed by the student to be distracting and unfair.

The Student Ethics Committee has discussed this feedback and decided to pass it on to the administration. We think that the nature of this student's actions are not in agreement with the purpose of the seating policy to give everyone the same chance of sitting in any seat during exams.

\*From Dr. Hilman: I agree with Dean McBride that this student should first address their concern with the tardy student ("self-regulation," as Dean McBride calls it). As a professional, there will be many times in a person's

career when they will need to speak directly to a colleague about a concern. Given that this issue does not involve life or limb, this may be one of the more benign times to hone their skill at speaking up when they disagree.

With that said, when I instituted the late arrival policy I was cognizant that this very issue may arise. My solution was to have repeat offenders explain to Dean McBride their habitual tardiness. I will alert the testing staff to watch for repeat offenders; their names will be forwarded to Dean McBride.

Concerning the "Black Bag Ball" incident - please see the loads of e-mails on the Gmail account.

\*From Dean McBride: It is difficult to respond email and to an anonymous message, so I would recommend that the person who write this to speak individually with one of us. It is important to reiterate what I said in my message to students: we are investigating this situation as quickly as we can; we must follow the process, policies and procedures of the school and university; and everyone in the investigation has a right to due process. The investigation and actions will take a while due to process and other work and issues we have to deal with as well.

Secondly we take these matters seriously and do not support or condone any of these activities. Your point about hearing about the outcomes is well taken, but we have obligations to protect individuals harmed in the process and they requested this as well. We intend to make it clear to students the consequences of their actions and we need the student body to help prevent these activities from happening - we are all part of the solutions. We are not going to do "public shaming". That is not an appropriate response or part of process. Two students have already communicated with everyone about their role and are facing the consequences of their actions. Related to impeachment that is the role of student organizations and part of their process. I urge you to work appropriately with your student organizations and several are working on this.

Finally, there will be consequences. This is the responsibility of committees charged to do this. However people should have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and be educated about professional behavior.

Concerning the 15-minute period before exams

"I have a question concerning the ethics behind using the 15 minutes allotted before an exam begins, when one is sitting in the testing room waiting for the start time, to write down notes etc. on scratch paper to use during an exam. Aside from the fact that this gives some students an advantage of having more time on the exam (as they can glance down at notes written before the start time), this also enables students to use information on the test that might be constructed by input from other students. For example, if I wanted to write out the entire brachial plexus before the next exam and I forgot a couple nerves or wanted to ask someone to look over my drawing to make sure it was correct, I could then continue to use this "cheat sheet" on the exam itself. (I could even have a friend write out the entire thing for me before the test and use that too!) Essentially, it seems equivalent to bringing notes, which can be constructed with other people's help, into the exam room. There is also the point that this would never be allowed when taking the boards and since our testing environment is supposed to be modeled around that experience, this in itself makes the behavior seem wrong."

\*Recommendations to Dean McBride:

1. Clarify the talking and note-taking/sharing policy for the exam preparation period, and standardize across both classes.
2. Make this policy clear in an e-mail to students before the final exam periods of the spring 2010 semester, and add it to the PowerPoint slide that proctors display in the exam room as a reminder.
3. State the policy explicitly in the student handbook rather than referring the reader to the NBME standards. If UW aims to adhere to the NBME test conditions closely, talking and sharing of notes during the exam preparation period should be prohibited, unless this period is not actually considered part of the exam. Either way, we do think the policy needs to be explicit.

### Concerning Senior Partners Knowledge of Individual Students

This semester, several M1 students expressed concern that their senior partners in the SSP program seemed to know personal information about them that should not have been given to them by the PDS office. We learned that in one case, a senior partner had Googled their student and found an obituary for an immediate family member, and then inappropriately brought up this information during the interview. We think this likely represents an uncommon situation but given the concern expressed by this and other students, we think it is worth addressing.

After discussion, the Committee moved to recommend that, prior to the first SSPP visit, students should be reminded that their senior partners will be receiving their names in advance and warned that their senior partners, like anyone, can search online for personal information. Students should be aware of what information comes up when a web search is performed on their name. It is our hope that in this way students will be better prepared for their first SSPP visit, as well as their future professional career.

\*I have had a couple of students talk to me as well about being surprised their senior partner knew their name and hometown, etc. I reminded them that at the beginning of the semester students filled out a form (see attached) asking for information that was then passed on to the seniors to help facilitate conversation...give them something to talk about, etc. The students I spoke to had forgotten they filled out that form. Based on the concerns you've raised and the ones that came directly to our office we're going to change a few things:

1. We'll change the form so it's clearer that this information is for their senior partners and that students should only provide information they are comfortable having someone else know/bring up in conversation.
2. Prior to the first home visit, we'll remind students via email and at the large group lecture where we talk more about the program, that the seniors received an information sheet with student name/picture/background info (from form) so they aren't surprised if a senior partner mentions something specific (like hometown).
3. We'll take your recommendation and remind students (certainly prior to first visit, and perhaps mid-semester as well) that many of the senior partners are computer savvy and may pull up their student's name in a Google search, etc.
4. We're going to change the course book material a bit to more clearly delineate these points...perhaps in the

SSPP section we can put in example pages of the information form, the student assignment sheet that went to the seniors, etc. so everything is transparent. – Elizabeth Tuschen

Concerning individuals forging signatures of classmates at small group

\*The concern was for Epidemiology small groups, and was passed directly on to Dr. Remington.

\*\*\*Please see the account for other issues that were brought up but whose outcomes were not listed.