

Workshop 5 - Scenario: Professors Hernandez and Bobson

Professor Hernandez teaches persuasive writing at a University. She requires students to write an essay defending something they actually oppose. The purpose of the exercise is to help students see that arguments that sound good aren't necessarily the same as arguments that are logical, and also to give students the experience of playing devil's advocate. Michael is a student in Professor Hernandez's class. In his essay, *"In Defense of Terrorism: Terrorism as the Only Path from Oppression to Democracy"*, Michael argued that terrorists founded all modern democratic states. He described parallels between George Washington and Osama Bin Laden. He finished the paper by advocating strongly that the government ought to provide financial and logistical support to terrorist groups active in non-democratic countries as a method for spreading democracy.

Professor Hernandez receives assignments in electronic form. She grades papers by typing comments into the file before assigning the final grade. While grading some class work, she discovered several papers by Michael's classmates that appeared to be plagiarised. After she finished grading, she uploaded the papers to *Plagiarism Preventer*, a popular Web site that checks papers for plagiarism. It also permanently stores student papers submitted to the service so that they can be used in future plagiarism checks of papers. The uploaded papers do not include Professor Hernandez's name or the student's name, only the student's University signifier (e.g. lpxmm for Michael), the module name and the year of study. Professor Bobson, who teaches at a different University, also uses *Plagiarism Preventer* to detect and prevent plagiarism. One of the student papers he submitted to the site matches Michael's paper significantly because they quoted many of the same sources. Because of the high degree of similarity *Plagiarism Preventer* provided Professor Bobson with the full text of Michael's paper. This included Professor Hernandez's comments and grade awarded (a top 1st class). Professor Hernandez's comments were all very positive: "Nice argument", "Good points", "A useful interpretation of George Washington's role in the revolution", etc.

Unlike Professor Hernandez, Professor Bobson was appalled at the content of the paper. He immediately reposted the full text of the paper (including the additional pieces of data and Professor Hernandez's comments) on his blog under the title *"Terrorist Supporters Setup Shop at Major University"*. The post generated a lot of attention on blogs, social media sites, and TV news channels. Both Michael and Professor Hernandez started to notice the media coverage and the confident and concerted effort of users on Twitter and Reddit to reveal their real identities. The University started to receive complaints from various parties including alumni and parents, a clear sign that some details about the identities had already been found out.