

CAI Case Study: The Case of the Cheating Hart

Joshua Hart is a first semester sophomore at Woebegotten College in Lake Woebegone, Minnesota. He is the first member of his immediate family to attend college and as such carries a great burden of expectations for success from his family. He is currently enrolled in the Exercise and Sports Science (ESS) program of the College. Dr. Keeler has assigned a semester project in which students are to compile a model program for personal fitness training for themselves. Dr. Keeler has explained verbally and also included in his syllabus a good deal of information about the College Honor Policy and the importance of honesty in all assignments. He indicates that students are to complete this assignment on their own with no resort to third parties other than reference materials.

Joshua is very interested in fitness training and hopes one day to become a personal trainer and open his own business. For now, he trains a few fellow students and one or two faculty members for a small charge. To enhance his own skills and to obtain needed skills in physical training, Joshua has purchased a CD-ROM program entitled "The Personal Trainer for You" by Arnold Atlas. The CD carries copyright information.

In completing the assignment for Dr. Keeler, Joshua has used a variety of text sources, his own experience and information from the CD-ROM. He has printed off various tables and charts from the CD and made clean copies to include along with his narrative and other materials. As he turns in the paper, he feels sure he has completed not only a good paper but a useful "game plan" for his future as a physical trainer. He eagerly anticipates the return of the paper with a good grade and even hopes for an "A." This is his first course in the program and he wants to make a very good impression.

Dr. Keeler, too, has anticipated Joshua's paper. In class Joshua has not spoken out as often as other students but seems a serious student and appears likely to become a very successful ESS major. As he begins to grade Joshua's paper, he is at first highly impressed. As he reads on, however, he becomes aware that the language and concepts Joshua has used seem highly developed for a student of his experience. Several paragraphs, in particular, seem almost too good to be true but none of this material is cited in Joshua's references, which include several books and periodical articles. With some concern, Dr. Keeler begins to consider the possibility that some of the work in this paper may not be Joshua's own. He turns to the internet and a search engine often used by ESS majors.

Almost immediately, Dr. Keeler turns up several sources that seem likely targets for a student completing the assignment. When he opens the first source, he immediately finds selections of research dealing with physical training that appear to be identical with Joshua's. He also learns that this particular program is offered in a full version on a CD-ROM and includes model programs for physical training.

Anger turns to frustration and then to sadness as Dr. Keeler recognizes he will have to request an Honor Policy conference with Joshua. He sends an e-mail to Joshua asking that he schedule an appointment the next day.

When Joshua meets with Dr. Keeler the next day, he is immediately confronted with material from the web-site that appears similar to his paper. Dr. Keeler points out specific passages and paragraphs that are identical to Joshua's paper. He then asks for an explanation. Joshua becomes defensive and indicates that the paper is entirely his own work. He acknowledges that he used material from the CD-ROM program but doesn't view this as plagiarism. Dr. Keeler is baffled as Joshua continues to explain that he purchased the CD-ROM for his own use, is in fact using the physical training program in question himself and in working with several of his clients. It is his view that ownership of the CD-ROM constitutes possession of all the material included. He believes that the information is therefore his to use, especially in light of the fact that the disputed material portrays his own personal physical training program. Concluding this argument, he refuses to accept any responsibility for plagiarism.

Following further futile arguments, Dr. Keeler tells Joshua he will be referred to the Honor Policy hearing process for this violation; the decision of that process will determine his responsibility. Angry, Joshua storms out of the office.

The hearing has now been convened by the chair of the Honor Policy Hearing Panel. The information above and Joshua's initial defense have been presented. As a member of the hearing panel, you are charged with determining Joshua's responsibility or non-responsibility for the offense of plagiarism.

Discussion

1. What questions concerning this allegation and Joshua's defense do you have?
2. What decision should the panel, in your opinion, reach?
3. If Joshua is found "responsible," what, if any, sanctions should be imposed?
4. If Joshua is found "not responsible," what arguments do you find most compelling?