

# The Pressure of Being Denise

## ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT QUANDARY

Denise came from a small, rural town in central SC where her widowed father was an evangelical Christian minister. He raised her very strictly, and it was only with great reluctance that he allowed her to come to Winthrop for college. He feared the big and diverse university would corrupt her morals. As he left her on campus the day the residence halls opened, he warned her, "If I ever find out that you've been cheating or using alcohol or drugs. I'll cut you off from all financial support and never let you enter our home again."

Denise had always obeyed her father and intended to do so while at college. Her career ambition was to become a medical doctor and help people. Her first two years of classes went OK and she was making progress towards obtaining her degree in Biology and had a 3.3 cumulative GPA. While good, she realized she probably needed higher grades to get into medical school. She did stay away from drugs and alcohol, and in September of her junior year she began dating Larry, a fellow student in her organic chemistry class. By late November they were intimate. Denise had never experienced such a demanding class as organic chemistry and was barely making a C as finals approached. She had even quit her off campus job in September to devote more time to studying. However, she took advantage of a credit card solicitation and before she knew it she had over \$900 in debt and no way to pay it. She had to get a job on campus and easily found one working as a security assistant at nights in Wofford Hall. All her earnings were devoted to just paying the minimum demanded each month from her credit card bank. The anxiety caused by her academic course demands, her increasing debt level from the bank's mounting interest, and her lack of sleep from her night job began to push her towards depression as final exams approached.

As the semester was winding down, her organic chemistry professor offered all students in the class an opportunity for extra credit by writing a short research paper on "foreseeable breakthroughs in chemistry the next decade." Denise thought this would be the opportunity she needed to get a B in the class. However, she found out as the semester began to wind down, there was just too much going on and she couldn't find the time to devote to the research paper.

Two nights before the paper was due while Denise was working as a Security Assistant, Susan, a co-worker at the security desk, suggested she check out right there and then a great web site called FREE-ESSAY.COM. Denise did so and found a paper with the same title in little more than five minutes. Pressed for time and wanting to avoid plagiarizing she cut the essay from the internet and pasted it into her word processor to use it only as a guideline for the format of her essay. She then went on-line to the three sources referenced in the FREE-ESSAY.COM paper and fortunately was able to read all the sources within a matter of hours directly on her desktop computer. While reading she tried to paraphrase the wording from the original essay. She also cited the original sources in her paper, but she never cited FREE-ESSAY.COM

After work that night, Denise went to bed with Larry and mentioned to him how she was able to get the paper done on-line and asked him if it seemed like plagiarism. Larry replied, "I don't think so; besides you've worked so hard you deserve this one break."

On her way to class the next day to submit the paper, Denise was chatting with Mary, the student who sits next to her in class, and Denise casually mentioned how she was finally able to get the extra credit paper done.

After class that day, Mary slipped an anonymous note under the professor's office door telling her to check Denise's paper closely. Thus alerted, the professor noticed a particularly well expressed paragraph and placed it in the GOOGLE internet search engine. In .02 seconds, GOOGLE returned 5 hits including FREE-ESSAY.COM and the original source which Denise had found and

referenced in her submitted paper. The professor decided this was a case of academic plagiarism where a student presented, as one's own, the ideas or words of another for academic evaluation without proper acknowledgment. The professor gave Denise an F in the course as an academic consequence.

Denise maintained she thought she had properly referenced the original sources and requested a hearing before the University's Judicial Council comprised of three faculty members and two students. The Judicial Council heard the case a few days before Denise's remaining finals began and decided that Denise had committed academic misconduct by plagiarizing for failing to cite the FREE-ESSAY.COM assistance. The F grade for the entire organic chemistry course was therefore posted on her transcript and she was also placed on disciplinary probation for the next semester.

Denise knew the F in organic chemistry probably doomed her chances for getting into medical school. She got so upset about this and her new disciplinary record she started to get very depressed as she tried to concentrate on her finals. She turned to Larry for comfort and he shrugged it off. She was afraid to call her father fearful she couldn't keep the truth from him and she was petrified of his reaction. And she couldn't sleep even though she felt exhausted. Denise did very poorly on all her finals and subsequently did not return to Winthrop the next semester. She never completed her undergraduate degree and she never became an MD.

Rate each of the characters according to their responsibility for Denise's departure from Winthrop. Identify the least responsible as #7 to most responsible being #1.

\_\_\_\_\_ The professor

\_\_\_\_\_ Denise

\_\_\_\_\_ Her father

\_\_\_\_\_ Larry, her boyfriend

\_\_\_\_\_ Susan, her co-worker

\_\_\_\_\_ Mary, her classmate

\_\_\_\_\_ The Judicial Council

### **PROCESSING THE "ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT QUANDARY" EXERCISE**

#### *Learning Outcomes:*

1. An understanding of the University's policy and procedures on Student Academic Misconduct.
2. An intellectual understanding of the expectations for academic honesty in the learning academy.
3. A deeper understanding of the personal pitfalls associated with academic work.

#### *Suggested Process:*

1. Handout the exercise and have all students read it silently and rate the characters on their own.
2. Breakout the class in small groups and have each group attempt to reach a consensus rating of the characters.
3. Facilitate a class discussion by listing each small group's ratings on the board and try to reach a class consensus rating of each character's responsibility. Ask

questions like the following: How and why did your individual ratings change by the small group discussions? What gray areas of proper academic conduct need to be better understood in relation to the university's policy on student academic misconduct? How do personal circumstances affect values and decisions? What habits of intellect and appetite must be practiced by students to be successful at Winthrop and in life?

Written by Frank Ardaiole, Vice President for Student Life, Winthrop University, July 30, 2003, based upon a format gleaned from reading a classic values clarification exercise named "The Drawbridge Exercise" (original author unknown).