



THE EVOLUTION OF A LIE

Chapter 7

UOW's problem with cheating, bribery and soft marking.

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I

When Scott Dobbs was a member of the academic staff of the Faculty of Commerce, in the Finance & Accounting School of the University of Wollongong over the years 2000-2005, there were two areas in which the Faculty had a problem and was facing trouble.

The problem concerned cheating and attempted bribery among overseas students attending the Wollongong campus and among students attending the off-shore courses in Dubai. Flowing on from this was the problem of soft marking (that is making it easy for students to pass without having satisfied the course requirements, including the end-of-course examination). This meant that certain academic staff members in the Faculty, particularly some in more senior positions were complicit with the cheating and corruption, or at the least they failed to deal appropriately with it when it had been brought to their attention.

It is fair to say that this problem of cheating and attempted bribery was not confined to the Commerce Faculty of the University of Wollongong, but was found in similar Faculties in many other Australian universities. One potential cause was that overseas students paid a substantial amount to attend an Australian University, and some of them simply expected a pass in the subject that had been paid for. Another issue was that for some such students, offering inducements of some sort or another was a culturally acceptable method of doing business. Yet another potential cause was that some of these students were desperate to pass because they would then qualify for permanent residency in Australia. And then, for others, for whom their parents had made great sacrifices to provide the students with the opportunity to study in Australia, to go home without having passed would involve great loss of face, and distress to the family. Faculty members in other universities faced similar dilemmas.

And the trouble that the Faculty faced was two-fold. There was at this time a very real threat of adverse publicity about the problem which could appear in a major newspaper which employed a journalist who was 'sniffing around' after the story. This would have been picked up by other media outlets with damaging consequences for the reputation of the University and its' overseas courses. From that could flow a scandal culminating in a review of these courses generated by or for the Federal Minister for Immigration among other senior members of government.

Apart from that, graduates from these courses seeking employment would be disadvantaged because the integrity of the courses had been undermined with prospective employers. Once that became apparent, then prospective students would choose another university with courses of better reputation with employers.

II

Cheating and bribery (with a spot of attempted blackmail) and soft marking on the Wollongong campus of the Faculty.

During this period, among international students, mainly those from China, attending courses in the Faculty on the Wollongong campus there was a high incidence of cheating, and in addition, several staff members, including Scott, had reported to senior academics that a bribe had been offered to ensure that the student passed a subject. In at least one case a female student

was reported to be ‘coming onto’ one of the male lecturers, either to offer sex for a pass mark, or to lay the ground for a threat of a sexual harassment case to ensure a satisfactory mark.

Another aspect of the problem on the Wollongong Campus in the Faculty was the suspected complicity of some members of the academic staff, such as when a senior academic staff member instructed a more junior one to give an Asian student who had failed the subject a take-home supplementary exam paper. That gave rise to the suspicion of complicity among some more senior members of the academic staff, which was given currency by the refusal of some of these staff members to deal appropriately with complaints about bribery and cheating when they were made by other members of the academic staff. As well, some of the senior academics in the Faculty interfered in the marks allocated to certain student by their markers to raise the marks and to pass students who had, in the legitimate view of the marker, failed.

In these instances, and that of the grant of an additional take-home exam, the proper processes of the University for a student to obtain a review of his or her marks or to be granted a supplementary exam was by-passed.

Examples of bribery and ‘soft’ marking.

Summer 2004: the overseas student failed by Scott Dobbs but passed by Mary Kaidonis.

In the summer of 2004 many of the Faculty, Scott included, attended the APIRA Conference in Singapore and he presented a paper he had written. While the conference was in progress, he was emailed by Mary Kaidonis, who was Acting Head of School in the absence at the conference of the then Head of School. She wrote to inform Scott that she intended to pass a student that Scott had failed because ‘*she is due to graduate this semester.*’ He wrote a terse response: ‘*I am unaware that there is any other criterion for passing my class other than merit.*’

There was no reply, but when a little later she also came to Singapore for the rest of the conference she was distinctly cold in her attitude towards him. That student passed the subject.

2004: the overseas student whose email offering a bribe for a pass mark was forwarded to Head of School John Patterson.

In 2004 also Scott emailed John Patterson and the then Head of the School of Accounting & Finance, attaching an email from an Asian female student in which she offered to pay Scott the amount of the subject fee - \$2,300 - to obtain a pass mark. Scott had refused the bribe. He did not receive any response from either at the time. In summer 2004 Scott emailed John Patterson again, asking what had happened about that student. He received an email in reply saying merely ‘*I’ll get back to you.*’ About 15 minutes after that email was sent, Scott received a call from the then Head of the School of Accounting & Finance to say that they ‘*had decided to wait until the student was back on campus*’ as she had returned home to China for the summer vacation. Scott had never received any further information about what if anything had been done about the blatant case of attempted bribery.

The overseas student who offered a bribe to a tutor.

More recently a tutor for one of his subjects, Zaffir Subedar told Scott that a student had pursued him across the car park offering a cash bribe of \$2,000 for a pass mark, which he refused.

III

What Helen Irvine said to Ken Tylor about the culture of cheating on the Wollongong campus of the Faculty.

Helen was a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty at the time of these events. The following answers by Helen Irvine (HI) to questions put by Ken Taylor (KT) the investigator engaged by Sydney diocese, indicate that Scott had been going against the culture of cheating and corruption and a culture among some senior academics at least to ignore it. In this part of that interview she shows indeed how little she was prepared to do about the reality of cheating and corruption at the

University and she is rudely dismissive of Scott's attempts to do so:

HI '... *He did have a tendency to become a little obsessive about some things like preventing cheating.*'

Perhaps aware that this did not sound too good from a senior academic, she adds:

'We're all very keen to prevent cheating, but he went to extraordinary lengths to, um, ensure this didn't happen. Even once, I remember going to his office, he was sticky taping up the exam papers, all the exam papers. ... So he, I think he just got his priorities a little bit wrong here.'

She gives details of how Scott's attempts to put a stop to cheating were such that a group of overseas students had taken up a petition against him alleging "racism". She also confirms that the Press was at that time interested in the issue of corruption in universities.

HI *'That was about accusations of racism and not treating them fairly, that kind of thing. There was, quite a lot of them signed a petition. ... I think it was because he used to tell them you can't, "You might cheat at home, but you can't cheat here" or something. ... Alluding to the fact very strongly that a lot of Chinese students come over here and are very desperate and cheat, alright.'*

KT *'Oh, well he was probably, the press was rather, taking that line as well.'*

HI *'Yes, that's right.'*

KT *'Well they were in Sydney.'*

HI *'Look, that's the reality we have to deal with.'*

Helen Irvine on the screaming student who wanted a supplementary examination:

She describes another incident which came to her attention, which while it was also in reality about corruption, it involved a female student, so that it might be able to be twisted into a 'complaint' about 'sexual harassment' although the student made no complaint.

Helen describes it this way:

HI *'Yes. ... I came back to my office and I heard screaming and I went around there. It was a girl having a bit of a tantrum with Scott, thinking she should have got another exam or something I don't think that was related to anything particularly bad that he'd done, except maybe being a little insensitive about her needs for another exam. ...'*

This confirms that in Helen's world it was OK for a student to be given a supplementary exam when they failed even when they did not qualify for one according to the University rules, and the academic who refused to do so was the one who was at fault. It was Helen Irvine who had complied with the request of her superior to give a fail student a take-home exam, thus ensuring that she (or someone) completed a satisfactory exam paper, and by-passing the University process

for students who fail.

Helen Irvine and Anne Abrahams refused to support Scott in his complaints about cheating and attempted bribery.

Both Scott and Mabelle approached Helen Irvine and Ann Abrahams, both of them Scott's colleagues in the Faculty and parishioners at FAC. They asked both Christian women to back him up in reporting their own experiences with cheating and bribery among the overseas students on the Wollongong campus, but both refused.

IV

Problem with the courses run in Dubai.

The second problem lay in the overseas courses run by the Faculty on an off-shore campus in Dubai for similar reasons, and Scott Dobbs had evidence of one member of the senior academic staff making an inappropriate response to students cheating or failing the subject, by altering the fail marks to a pass.

Quality Assurance of the Dubai overseas learning course: students failed by Scott are passed by course coordinator with knowledge of Head of School Dubai overseas learning

Scott had been assigned to do quality assurance on one branch of the overseas learning provided by Wollongong University, specifically in the subjects Investments 1 & 2 for the Dubai campus. During his audit, he came across evidence of corruption in the form of a member of the academic staff on the Dubai campus altering the marks of students who had scored a "fail" assessments and allowing them to pass.

Scott was required to issue a Statement of Quality Assurance which went to the Dubai government. He reviewed one class of about 24 students, noting that four of them had very low scores and should not pass the subject. He discussed this in emails with the course coordinator on the Dubai campus, who agreed that these students should fail the subject. Scott then agreed that on the basis that these four students failed, he would issue the Statement of Quality Assurance, and he did so.

It was several weeks later that he opened an attachment to an email from the Dubai campus with the final results for the students of that class. All four students had been passed. He wrote a 'please explain' email to the course coordinator, who did not reply. However, the Dubai campus Head of School replied, unsatisfactorily, and picked up on all future correspondence about the issue, which was never properly dealt with.

V

Formal complaint by Scott to Don Lewis not acted upon; advise from Michael Gaffkin

Scott wrote a formal complaint. He reported it to Don Lewis who was at the time Sub-Dean of the Faculty of Commerce. He says that Don Lewis said to him: 'Be quiet and don't make waves.' Scott says he was unaware at the time that Mary Kaidonis was in a personal relationship with Don Lewis. Sometime after this they were married.

He also sought advice from Michael Gaffikin, then Head of the School of Accounting and Finance. His advice was prescient: he said *'You have to do what you think right but you will pay a price.'*

Scott never for an instant thought that the price he would pay would be as a result of the manufacture of a false claim of sexual harassment disseminated in secret to the members of the APC. This allowed Mary Kaidonis to block his application for permanent employment. This she was able to push through over-riding the views of more honest committee members notwithstanding his real achievements as a lecturer, postgraduate student adviser and organizer of the Faculty seminar program, and, most of all, his admirable attempts to stand up for the integrity of the university and faculty reputation.

None of the participants in the UOW Lie could have known that an opportunity would be created to take the revived (and expanded Lie) into FAC due to the eager gullibility, if not outright malice, of Helen Irvine. But perhaps Helen might have foreseen how her actions would result in the disgusting abuse of an alleged victim by FAC personnel and diocesan officers (including her husband), and the extraordinary 'ex-communication' of Scott, his wife and all six of the lively Christian Dobbs children and young adults who had been such a mainstay of the youth and children's activities in FAC.
