Internal affairs: the fate of authors from the University of the Philippines accused of plagiarism, 1990s to 2010s

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Abstract

Purpose: This study centers on 25 cases of plagiarism in scientific publications committed by faculty members and students of the University of the Philippines and dealt with by eight of the university's academic publishers.

Methods: We focus on the publishers' responses to these cases, details of which we obtained from various sources, vis-à-vis the University of the Philippines' policies on plagiarism.

Results: The responses to plagiarism were found to vary, at times seemingly arbitrarily, but tended toward protecting the identities or details of the accused, unless the case became publicized.

Conclusion: Such maintenance of confidentiality is inimical to the fulfillment of academic publishers' duties to the rest of the academic community. We herein suggest policies to address the identified deficits.

Keywords

Confidentiality; Philippine publishers; Plagiarism; University of the Philippines

Introduction

Reputable academic or scholarly publishers necessarily have stringent policies on plagiarism. Without plagiarism checks, a scholarly publisher risks publishing texts that not only fail to follow accepted norms of attribution, but also potentially pollute or distort scientific literature, making the previously published (perhaps even refuted or falsified) seem novel, or obscuring the actual progression of scholarly inquiry on a particular matter. From a legal perspective, plagiarism per se is not a crime in any jurisdiction, but plagiarized content might be copyrighted. In short, checking submissions for plagiarism is in line with the gatekeeping functions of academic editors [1].

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Currently, there are no national guidelines on dealing with plagiarism for academic publishers in the Philippines, or even for the University of the Philippines (UP), the country's national university and the institution focused on here. While the numerous scholarly journals published by various UP units may have their own internal counter-plagiarism processes and measures, few such processes and measures are accessible via the university's online journal portals (e.g., <http://www.journals.upd.edu.ph/>, <https://ovcre.uplb.edu.ph/journals-uplb/>, and <http://ojs.upmin.edu.ph/>) or other UP journal websites. Exceptions include the *Philippine Journal of Social Development*, whose publicly accessible 2016 editorial and publication policies include a definition of and guidelines on plagiarism [2], and the shared 2009 "Journal policy on research misconduct" of *Humanities Diliman*, *Science Diliman*, and *Social Science Diliman*, which has been included in open-access issues of these journals since 2016 [3]. Indeed, participants in one of the few recent nationwide gatherings of journal editors in the country did not consider plagiarism to be a major concern [4].

Besides being little discussed locally as a policy matter by academic publishers, plagiarism in the Philippines in any context is still largely understudied. Extant work generally focuses on plagiarism by students, tackling pedagogical interventions [5], or plagiarism in relation to legal issues [6]. Studies discussing scholarly publishing in the Philippines tend to focus

on the factors constraining publishers from matching the quality and quantity of output of their Western counterparts, sustainability concerns, and other publishing challenges [7-9]. No existing publication has thus far intensively engaged with the subject of plagiarism by faculty members of any Philippine educational institution.

Given the lack of standardized rules and dearth of scholarship, this study is an initial attempt to analyze the responses of academic publishers in the Philippines to plagiarism, with the aim of using these responses to suggest counter-plagiarism policies for similarly situated academic editors. Specifically, this study looks at cases wherein both the publisher and the author(s) accused of plagiarism are or were members of UP's academic community (i.e., as a faculty member or student), with the presupposition that such cases are particularly difficult to address because they involve internal policing. Focusing on such cases thus allows us to examine the nexus between the preservation of institutional reputations or academic integrity, and the scholarly gatekeeping function of academic editors.

Methods

Data discussed in this paper were mainly gathered during two research projects, both of which aimed to analyze UP's responses to plagiarism, with one focusing on plagiarism by

Table 1. UP rules on confidentiality for records of student and faculty member cases

	Period	Rules (year implemented)	Relevant text of provision
Students	1976-2014	Section 24 of the Rules and Regulations on Student Conduct and Discipline	"Original records pertaining to student discipline shall be under the custody of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Such records are hereby declared confidential and no person shall have access to the same for inspection or copying unless s/he is involved therein, or unless s/he has a legal right which cannot be protected or vindicated without access to or copying of such records."
	2014-present	Section V.7. of the Code of Student Conduct of UP Diliman (completed in 2012, adopted by other UP constituent universities)	"Original records pertaining to student discipline shall be under the custody of the [Student Disciplinary Council] and/or the Dean. Such records are hereby declared confidential and no person shall have access to the same for inspection or copying unless s/he has a legal right which cannot be protected or vindicated without access to or copying of such records, or unless authorized in writing by the Chancellor."
Faculty	1961-present	Article 247 of the Revised Code of the University of the Philippines, as stated in Section 10.2.11 of the 2003 University of the Philippines Diliman Faculty Manual (adopted by other UP constituent universities)	"No member of the faculty, officer, or employee shall publish or discuss publicly charges or complaints against any other member of the faculty, officer, or employee concerning his/her official duties or his/her private life or conduct."
	1963-present	Section 13 of the Rules and Regulations on the Discipline of Faculty Members and Employees	"All proceedings held before the [Hearing Committee] shall be set down in writing by a competent stenographer and shall be confidential. Any disclosure of matters related to the proceedings shall subject the offender to disciplinary action."

UP, University of the Philippines.

faculty members throughout the UP System, which has eight constituent universities and 17 campuses across the Philippines, and the other on faculty and student plagiarism cases at UP Diliman, the System's largest university. For both projects, the main obstacles to data gathering were UP's strict rules on confidentiality in cases involving research malpractice or academic dishonesty, as previously stated in relevant publications [10,11]. These rules are listed in Table 1.

Despite these restrictions, we were able to identify a number of documented and verifiable cases of plagiarism by members of UP's academic community via nonconfidential university records (e.g., minutes of the meetings of the UP Board of Regents), key informant interviews, and online and print publications. UP Diliman's Office of the Chancellor authorized us to examine selected final and executory student case files of the defunct Student Disciplinary Tribunal. Regarding faculty case files, we wrote to relevant offices in all UP constituent universities requesting access to case decisions or resolutions, assuming that such are either beyond the level of charges or complaints mentioned in the "UP system code" or outside of the verbatim proceedings contemplated in the "Rules and regulations on the discipline of faculty members and employees"; few offices shared our interpretation, however, with only two granting access to preselected case files. Data gathering was primarily conducted between 2011 and 2015. Cases identified after 2015 became known to us through chance encounters with details in published texts or our positions on the editorial staff of the publication involved. We identified 74 verifiable plagiarism cases—wherein at least a description of what was committed and how the case was handled may be obtained from authoritative sources—involving dozens of UP faculty members and students at UP Diliman, as well as a handful of students at other UP constituent universities, all occurring between 1936 and 2018. Of these cases, 34 are detailed in a 97-page confidential document we wrote titled "Final research report on academic and authorial integrity in University of the Philippines-Diliman," a copy of which was deposited with UP Diliman's Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Development.

A total of 25 of the 74 cases involved students and faculty members of the UP System who, during the time they were connected to UP, had their work published or considered for publication by a UP publisher (i.e., a unit, department, or college within UP with a publications program). The term "publication" here is broadly construed; included are dissertations, which are publicly accessible through various libraries and whose editors may be considered to be the dissertation adviser/committee members. Eight UP publishers, two of which are not based at UP Diliman, are involved in the cases discussed here.

We know the details of 18 of the cases because of our involvement with the publications that processed the works. We received information about one case from informants and an examination of the submission in question. The details of another case came to our attention via interviews with current and former university officials. A UP office gave us access to selected confidential documentation of one case, and we filed one of the other cases ourselves. Lastly, three cases are discussed in public records or publications.

Given that this study seeks to make case-based policy recommendations, we concentrate on publishers' responses to plagiarism in a work they had published or are considering for publication. We provide context by indicating the decade when the plagiarism was committed, whether the offense was discovered after a faculty member or student had already been separated from the institution or graduated, and if the accusation was made before or after a work's publication, thereby showing possible jurisdictional constraints on the actions of the publishers involved.

Through personal knowledge, social media, and websites such as online employment services, we attempted to track the post-response effects on the academic careers and scholarly credibility of the faculty members and students accused in the 25 cases. These effects served as a proxy for response effectiveness, assuming that the thrust of the response generally is punitive rather than rehabilitative. We initially assumed that those who receive the most severe penalties (e.g., termination/involuntary resignation or degree withdrawal) suffered the most in terms of loss in scholarly stature (here shown by the approximate number of years between the final case response and the resumption of an academic career). To test this assumption further, we also analyzed the post-response effects on UP faculty or students whose work containing plagiarism was published by non-UP publishers. Regarding those who did not resume their academic careers after committing plagiarism, we tracked their post-response publications, if any, and non-self-citations to see if their scholarly contributions continued to be valued.

Results

Table 2 summarizes the 25 plagiarism cases committed by UP faculty members or students and published by UP. We gave the cases numerical designations, with the order determined by the approximate date when the publisher initiated proceedings in response to plagiarism. We cannot mention the constituent university, publisher, or any similar identifying information because of UP's confidentiality rules. Besides confidential records, key informants, the text of the manuscripts or publications themselves, and our personal knowledge, other

Table 2. Summary of UP academic community plagiarism cases involving UP publishers

Case no.	Decade	Publication type	Plagiarism discovered after separation from service/graduation	Plagiarism discovered after publication	Response/action taken
1	1990s	Textbook	No	Yes	Author reclassified persons previously termed co-writers/collaborators into research assistants, relegating them to the acknowledgements section of the book's second edition; an errata sheet was pasted onto copies of the book's second edition, which stated that the assistants should be called contributors and the author should be called an editor Errata also indicated that the book is not published by UP, but university catalogues and both editions of the book state UP as the book's publisher; publisher apparently disowned the book Author's contract as instructor not renewed
2	1990s	Dissertation	No	No	Publisher forwarded case to higher authorities, with recommendation to withdraw the author's doctorate Degree of author withdrawn
3	2000s	Dissertation	No	Yes	Author's privileges and teaching duties were curtailed Publisher forwarded case to higher authorities Caveat regarding dissertation's contents was ordered inserted in copies of the publication
4	2000s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected Publisher filed an official complaint with higher authorities Faculty terminated from service
5	2000s	Introduction of an edited book	No	No	Chapter rejected; copies of the introduction were removed from printed copies of the book and replaced with a new introduction from a different author
6	2000s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
7	2000s	Academic journal article	Yes	Yes	No action; article remains accessible online; no retraction issued
8	2000s	Dissertation	Yes	Yes	Copies of the dissertation pulled out from the University's libraries and removed from the UP online catalogue Case was forwarded to higher authorities with recommendation to withdraw the author's doctorate Degree of author withdrawn
9	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
10	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
11	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
12	2000s	Academic journal article	Yes	Yes	No action by the publisher Investigation of accusation by a committee of UP faculty members not connected to the publication requested by the accused; accused exonerated

(Continued to the next page)

Table 2. Continued

Case no.	Decade	Publication type	Plagiarism discovered after separation from service/graduation	Plagiarism discovered after publication	Response/action taken
13	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected Faculty member who was leader of the project from which the paper was drawn from was informed of the plagiarism issue
14	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Faculty member forced to resign Manuscript rejected
15	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Author was requested to make adjustments to the manuscript, which was eventually accepted for publication
16	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
17	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
18	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
19	2010s	Textbook	No	Yes	Commitment from head of constituent university/ publisher that plagiarism issues in the book will be taken into account in the material's revision
20	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
21	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
22	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
23	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
24	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected
25	2010s	Manuscript for an academic journal	No	No	Manuscript rejected

UP, University of the Philippines.

sources for Table 2 are a court decision [12], an issue of the *UP Gazette* [13], and a book [14].

In case 12, which ended in exoneration, the accused had already voluntarily separated from UP because of career advancement well before her case was investigated. Cases 5 and

7 involve the same person, who had previously been scheduled for termination due to another dishonesty issue. Thus, these cases are excluded from Table 3, which shows how the specific responses to plagiarism by publishers within UP and in other institutions are related to the academic careers of the

Table 3. Plagiarism response/response result and academic careers of UP faculty members and students

Response/response result	UP publishers			Non-UP publishers		
	Case no.	Years before resuming academic career after response	Case publicity level ^{a)}	Case letter (decade)	Years before resuming academic career after response	Case publicity level
Termination/ involuntary separation from service	1	≤ 1 year	Low	C (1990s)	Not resumed	None
	4	≤ 1 year	None			
	13	≤ 1 year	None	D (2000s)	Not resumed	Medium
				E (2000s)	≤ 9 years	Medium
Degree withdrawn				G (2000s)	Not resumed	Medium
	2	Not resumed	Medium			
Curtailed duties and privileges	8	≤ 2 years	Medium			
	3	N/A	None			
Publicized finding of “academic sloppiness”				H (2010s)	Not resumed	High
Manuscript rejected	6	N/A	None			
	9	N/A	None			
	10	N/A	None			
	11	N/A	None			
	14	N/A	None			
	16	N/A	None			
	17	N/A	None			
	18	N/A	None			
	20	N/A	None			
	21	N/A	None			
	22	N/A	None			
	23	N/A	None			
	24	N/A	None			
	25	N/A	None			
Pre-publication correction	15	N/A	None			
Commitment to correct post-publication	19	N/A	None	A (1930s)	NA	None
Complaint filed, case unresolved				F (2000s)	NA	None
Identified, no complaint/action				B (1990s)	NA	None
				I (2010s)	NA	None

UP, University of the Philippines; NA, not applicable.

^{a)}Gradations: 1) None (absolutely confidential cases; only parties involved and concerned university officials were privy to the case details); 2) Low (details of the case can be found at most in one print publication with limited distribution); 3) Medium (details of the case could be viewed, at most, in 2 print and/or 1 online publication soon after the case's resolution); 4) High (details of the case easily obtainable, offline and online, appearing in various publications and having had mass media coverage while it was still pending or immediately after it was resolved).

accused. The non-UP publisher cases are designated as cases A-I and arranged in approximate chronological order. Since we considered suspension or termination of academic career as the main effect, we gave a notation of “N/A” (not applicable) for cases wherein careers were never suspended or terminated because of a response to plagiarism. We also highlighted case publicity level. In terms of the relatively public cases (2, 8, D, and G), most became public because the forums chosen for resolution needed decisions to be published, while details of two cases (E and H) were leaked to the media. Besides the abovementioned sources for Table 2, the other sources for Table 3 are a book chapter [15], two *UP Gazette* issues [16,17], a news article [18], and the unpublished text of a presentation [19].

We will provide here as much contextualization as is allowed by the university’s confidentiality rules. In case 1, though the author’s temporary faculty member appointment was not renewed, he was retained as a member of UP’s non-teaching academic staff before becoming affiliated with other institutions. In case 4 and 13, the faculty member who resigned or was terminated continued to have an academic career outside UP, despite the seriousness of their offenses in terms of the quantity or contribution of plagiarized content in their work. In two related cases (8 and G), the sections with plagiarized content were so crucial to the purportedly new work that doubt was cast on the originality of their projects. The author in case 8 was nevertheless able to return to teaching outside UP after about 2 years, while case G’s author con-

tinues to work in a field related to his discipline. The author in case D has followed a track similar to that in case G.

Although the authors in case 2 and case C ceased to be connected to the academe because of plagiarism, they were able to have scholarly work published and deposited in university libraries. Other scholars have cited the post-academe publications of both more than once. Meanwhile, case H’s author was effectively promoted to a position wherein he is directly involved in the production of texts that are among the main objects of analysis in his discipline. Lastly, even the author in cases 5 and 7 has been able to pursue a career in publishing outside of the Philippines.

Discussion

As stated in our introduction, the thrust of these responses to plagiarism was assumed to be punitive rather than rehabilitative, even if a relatively lenient response was executed most of the time. This assumption was based on our previous findings examining the university’s rules on plagiarism [20], which are summarized in Table 4.

Especially at UP Diliman, there only recently has been a turn from the punitive/legalistic to the corrective/academic-ethical regarding policies on plagiarism for UP’s faculty and students. However, as our data shows, the absence of clear guidelines has left responses to plagiarism—from harsh penalties to no punishment at all—entirely within the discretion of UP publishers.

Table 4. Main rules and regulations on plagiarism for UP students and faculty members

	Period	Rules (year implemented)	Summary of provisions
Students	1976-2014	Sections 2a, 2m, 25a, and 25m of the Rules and Regulations on Student Conduct and Discipline	Dishonesty in relation to studies (plagiarism, cheating in examinations) is penalized with suspension for at least one year, while any other form of misconduct (including plagiarism in a non-academic context) may be penalized with, at most, expulsion, depending on how grave the offense was and the attendant circumstances
	2014-present	Section 1.a, Article IV of the Code of Student Conduct of UP Diliman	Plagiarism merits a “corrective measure” of, at the minimum, one semester (up to expulsion) for a first offender, and expulsion for recidivists
Faculty	1963-present (other UP constituent universities)	Section 18 of the Rules and Regulations on the Discipline of Faculty Members and Employees	An employee may be removed, suspended, or reprimanded due to dishonesty (which has often been contemplated to include plagiarism)
	1963-2001 (UP Diliman)		
	2001-present (UP Diliman)	Decision during the 75th Meeting of the UP Diliman University Council in July 2001	Academic dishonesty cases (including cases of plagiarism) are brought under the jurisdiction of an Ethics Committee, whose function is not to immediately recommend administrative sanctions but to serve as “peer reviewers” of cases such as those involving intellectual dishonesty ^{a)}

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^{a)}Not successfully implemented given, as per confidential key informants, the lack of faculty who wanted to serve as members of the Ethics Committee. The jury system (no standing committee, case-to-case committee members drawn from all full professors) was implemented by the UP Board of Regents on 27 October 2011.

Besides this arbitrariness, the data also reveals that a plagiarism charge and/or penalty does not necessarily mean that credibility becomes widely questioned. One possible explanation is that most of those charged and proven to have committed plagiarism in these cases may have been able to rely on the mitigating circumstance of being a first-time/one-time offender. Besides such circumstances, the rarely breached university rules on confidentiality almost always ensure that the careers of members of UP's academic community remain undisturbed by a UP publisher finding plagiarism in their work. These very rules keep us from thoroughly discussing response appropriateness (type, severity) in relation to the extent of plagiarism committed.

As previously noted, we wanted to examine how UP publishers deal with the need to keep the reputation/integrity of their institution intact while also fulfilling their gatekeeping functions. Strict confidentiality allows publishers to dispose of plagiarism-laden submissions without getting a reputation for being overly strict or hostile to authors and, in the case of the "internal affairs" discussed here, to maintain a veneer of high academic standards for the university to which they are attached. Confidentiality, however, does not help publishers fulfill their responsibility to keep the fruits of dishonesty from being published. If only the author is informed of his or her plagiarism, it cannot be guaranteed that such a breach in proper scholarship is corrected; work with serious plagiarism issues may still be disseminated and referenced by other scholars. Indeed, of the 25 cases involving UP publishers and the nine cases involving non-UP publishers tackled here, most, if not all, of the works that were proven to be plagiarized after publication remain accessible in at least one library; save in one case, promises to correct disseminated publications were not known to have been carried out. At least one of the manuscripts that was rejected after submission was later published by another journal, with problematic sections still unaddressed.

To address response arbitrariness and the ill effects of strict confidentiality—and perhaps to serve as a deterrent against submitting plagiarized manuscripts—we recommend that 1) all UP publishers write down and publicize clear guidelines on how they will deal with plagiarism, including rules on retraction; 2) UP publishers require a paper submission provenance detailing where the work was previously submitted, why it was withdrawn or rejected, and, if the rejection was due to plagiarism, what the publisher's findings were and how they were addressed; 3) a list of those discovered to have committed plagiarism—along with the findings of the editor(s) who assessed their work and the penalties given, if any—is made accessible to the community of UP publishers and, ideally, all academic publishers who want information on sub-

mitting authors; and 4) a body is established to manage the aforementioned list and monitor if penalties or corrective measures are implemented.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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