

When an individual submits forged or altered documents they are misrepresenting both their skills and themselves to instructors, staff, and peers. Academic institutions, potential employers, and the United States legal system place a strong emphasis on operating ethically. Choosing to fabricate information undermines the integrity of our community and is considered a serious form of academic misconduct.

Members of our community are expected to complete their work, whether it be research, an assignment, or exam, ethically. Misrepresenting your skill set or information about yourself can have an impact on you academically, professionally, and potentially legally.

Let's take a look at an example case submitted to the Office of Student Academic Affairs:

Example #1

An instructor schedules exam two in her biology course in mid to late October. On the morning of the exam, one of her students reaches out indicating that he has been very sick with the flu. During the past 24 hours he has been unable to do much of anything outside of sleep and if possible he'd like to reschedule the exam to a later date.

The instructor agrees provided the student has a doctor's note validating his claims. In addition, she encourages the student to visit a doctor or University Health Services (if he hasn't already) and get some rest in the meantime.

The next day the student emails a copy of the doctor's note he received to his instructor. The Biology instructor reviews it, noting that it indicates symptoms the student experienced and the date he visited. She also notices that the doctor's note has several grammatical errors and does not include a letterhead.

The instructor follows up with the student, indicating that she cannot accept the note in its current form as it does not provide the healthcare provider's office location. The student apologizes and indicates that when he went to the doctor's office, he told the doctor that he needed a note because he was missing the biology exam. The doctor had simply typed up their recommendation quickly and provided it to the student.

The student provides the note complete with a letterhead, indicating that the provider's office is located in Canton, MI. The instructor is unsure why the student would meet with a doctor in Canton, when he's indicated several times that he is from Texas. This peculiarity, coupled with the initial note not having a letterhead are concerning to the instructor. She reaches out to the Office of Student Academic Affairs for additional support and provides all the evidence that has been collected.

In his meeting with the Coordinator of Academic Integrity, the student indicates that he met with the doctor in Canton because he was staying at his Aunt's house while he was sick. The doctor's office is one that his Aunt frequents and she simply took him there. The Coordinator accepts this rationale, but lets the student know that they will follow up with the doctor's office

to verify the notes received are authentic. The student indicates that's fine and will wait to hear the results of the resolution process.

The Coordinator contacts the doctor's office and discusses the notes received, simply asking them to indicate whether it is legitimate or not. The doctor's office after reviewing the documents indicates that they were not issued by their office. As a result, the student is found responsible for academic misconduct and suspended for a semester.

What could the student have done differently?

1. **Be Honest!** Oftentimes individuals make mistakes and they're afraid of the resulting ramifications. Rather than accepting responsibility, they continue forward with the initial mistake because they're unsure how to proceed, making matters worse. Being honest about mistakes helps us to better learn from the experience and address the reasons why the mistake might have been made in the first place.
2. **Communicate!** In this circumstance, the student was likely experiencing stress and/or anxiety as it related to the second biology exam. Reaching out to his professor to discuss his concerns and learn about strategies may have benefited him.
3. **Take Advantage of University Resources:** There are a number of resources on campus designed to assist students, whether they be academic or personal. We encourage you to check them out on our [Resources for Students](#) page.