

Suspicious of Cheating in an Online Class

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dr. John Dobson is an Assistant Professor of Education Leadership at Northern New England State University (NNESU) who teaches traditional classes and online classes for his department. As the level of state financial support has decreased, online classes have become increasingly important to NNESU. They are one of the few growing revenue streams at the institution. While teaching a summer online course, Dr. Dobson comes to believe that one of his students is cheating. In this case, Dr. Dobson attempts to navigate the process of proving that the student is cheating, holding the student accountable for his/her actions, and garnering the institutional support necessary to hold the student accountable.

Keywords: Academic Dishonesty, Cheating, Education, Online Teaching, Social Science

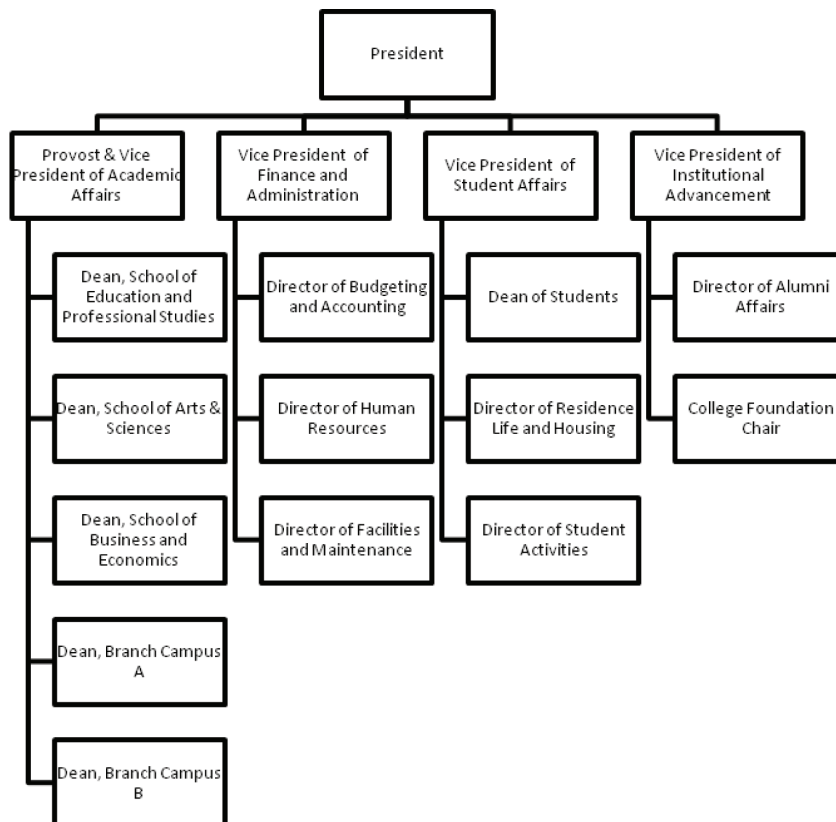
ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Northern New England State University (NNESU) is a four-year comprehensive state-supported institution located in a small city near the Canadian border. The university is comprised of three colleges: Arts and Sciences, Business and Finance, and Education and Professional Studies. It is the largest employer in the surrounding community.

Enrollment at NNESU is comprised of approximately 6,000 undergraduate students and 600 graduate students. Of the total student body, 90% come from the state and 60% hail from the four counties surrounding NNESU. There are 350 international students from 38 different countries attending the university, as well as approximately 400 full-time and adjunct faculty employed by NNESU. The hierarchy and reporting structure of the upper administration can be seen in Figure 1. The organizational chart shows the President's cabinet as well as each of their direct reports.

The organizational structure of the College of Education and Professional Studies is represented in Figure 2. The Dean employs an Associate Dean and an Assistant Dean, who are both tenured faculty members within the College of Education and Professional Studies. The Associate Dean is the first contact for student and personnel issues. The Assistant Dean works primarily on the various accreditation reports produced by the College. Department Chairs for each of the academic departments within the College of Education and Professional Studies report directly to the Dean.

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Figure 1. NNESU president's cabinet organizational chart

The university has two branch campuses, located at community colleges in the region. Branch campuses were established to offer full four-year degree programs for students at the community colleges. A select number of graduate degrees from the College of Education and Professional Studies including master's degrees in Educational Leadership, Curriculum and Instruction, and Special Education are also offered at the branch campuses. Courses offered at these locations are taught by on-site full and part-time faculty, faculty commuting from the main campus, and faculty teaching fully online. Each branch campus has its own Dean, who reports to the Provost/Academic Vice President at the main campus, and each graduate major offered at the branch campuses has one full-time faculty member. The majority of the graduate students attending the branch campuses are working professionals, who have shown preference for online classes. While traditional evening and weekend courses at the branch campuses are well enrolled, the online courses are always fully enrolled with long wait-lists. Online courses are also coveted by graduate students from the main campus.

State funding for NNESU has decreased dramatically over the past five years. Cost-saving measures have been taken which include increasing class sizes, requiring faculty to teach an extra course each year, and offering more online courses, especially those attractive to non-NNESU students, as a revenue generating stream. The Dean of Education and Professional Studies has implemented incentives to encourage faculty and staff to creatively decrease costs and/or in-

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