During my first semester as a TA, I had to handle an incident where I caught one of my students cheating on a test. The documents below summarize what happened and how it was handled. Included are the initial write-up of the incident and a series of emails between me, Mike, and Rodney Ashlock. To protect the student’s privacy, his name has either been changed or marked out.

The incident was unfortunate, of course, but it enabled me to minister to the student more pastorally than I would otherwise have been able to, and a good relationship developed between us because of that. For these reasons, I’m submitting this incident as a demonstration of MDiv **outcomes 6g and 7abc**, which deal with conflict management and care of souls, especially in crisis situations. Though most would not consider this a major life crisis, for this student it was just that. He feared that because he had been caught cheating on his first ever college test, he would fail the class, be kicked out of football, lose his scholarship, and have to drop out of school. His whole life’s path would have changed.

In the conversations that ensued between the student and I over the course of the semester as a result of this incident, I was able reassure him of my trust in and respect for him because of his willingness to confess his wrong and accept the punishment. (He was graciously given only a 40% deduction on the test he’d cheated on, but that meant he had to work very hard throughout the semester to make up for that deficit in order to pass.) I was able to encourage him to seek God, which he said he would try even though he had given up on God long before. (He later commented to me that maybe there really was something to the power of prayer.) I was also given a bit of a window into his life, his fears, and his family relationships, as he opened up to me because of the trust we’d developed. At the end of the semester, he texted me and said, “Try to be my TA next semester. ☺ “

While not wanting to downplay the seriousness of the situation or take too much credit for things other people and God did, I do believe my reaction to and follow-up on this incident allowed for it to be treated as an opportunity for growth and deeper relationship with a kid who was overcome by his fears and doubts.

Life and Teachings of Jesus

Laura Beall

Friday, September 10, 2010

Exam 1

While giving the first exam to my students this morning, 9:00 in BSB 120, it seemed like one of my students, Ethan might be cheating. About 15 minutes into the exam, I noticed him looking over in the direction of the girl to his right, Justine, and subsequently marking an answer. At first I thought I might be mistaken and wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt, knowing that at times I myself will look away and seem to be focusing elsewhere whenever I’m concentrating. So I didn’t say anything to Ethan at that point. As we continued throughout the test, though, it became pretty clear that he was looking at Justine’s test or scantron. I noticed this happening 6-8 times.

I didn’t want to disturb the rest of the class or embarrass Ethan too much, especially in case I might be wrong, so when Ethan finished and turned in his exam, about halfway through the hour, I told him I had a question for him and stepped out into the hall with him for a minute. Basically I said, “Ethan, I hate to have to ask it of you, but there were a number of times during the test that your eyes seemed to be wandering over to Justine’s paper. Can you tell me what’s going on there?” Immediately looking crestfallen, he responded, “Yeah, ya know... I can’t lie... I cheated a little. There were a couple of times where I looked over at her paper. I’m really sorry.” I assured him that I really appreciated his honesty and that I wouldn’t hold anything against him personally but that there were procedures that had to be followed in this situation. I told him I’d find out exactly what they were and let him know when I found out. He understood and we parted ways.

When the test was over, I told Wade about what had happened, and we proceeded to grade the class’s exams. Around 9:50, I got a text message from Ethan that read, “Sorry. Crazy nervous for my first college test. Studied and made notes but couldn’t help but check a couple of my answers with hers.” Wanting to be encouraging but firm, I responded to him, “I understand, Ethan. I really really appreciate your honesty. :) I’ll let you know as soon as I hear something.”



