

The Pandemic, Mental Health & How Educators Can Promote – and Undermine – Academic Integrity

Alexandra Jeikner

Deree – The American College of Greece
6 Gravias Street GR-153 42 Aghia Paraskevi Athens, Greece

ajeikner@acg.edu

ABSTRACT

This presentation discusses student engagement and academic integrity as well as the responsibility of the educator based on insights gained through personal experience of teaching writing courses at an undergraduate level at Deree – The American College of Greece. The student body at Deree is diverse, consisting of students from Greece and 56 countries and regions, with English being the language of instruction. Research has shown that the demands of attending a foreign university can push students toward breaches of academic integrity. The overall question this presentation addresses is what insights educators gained through virtual classes held March 2020 up to June 2021, and the subsequent return to campus in September 2021. More specifically, the presentation explores the effects of this return on students' academic performance and integrity as well as the role of the educator in encouraging student morale and morality while respecting mental health challenges. The initial hypothesis of this presentation was that the return to campus would be perceived as a joyous event, inspiring students to engage in their studies with more zest. However, personal observations indicate that the initial excitement and enthusiasm have turned into frustration, even panic, with students often falling behind with their assignments as well as disregarding feedback, course and college policies. On their side, and owing to their own mental and emotional exhaustion, fear of complaints, or compassion for the student, instructors might accept work potentially written by a ghost writer. This presentation stresses the need for educators to pull students toward authentic learning and offers some suggestions as to how to achieve a balance between respecting students and promoting academic performance.

KEYWORDS: Foreign university; virtual classes; Covid-19; mental health; academic integrity; contract cheating; ghost writer; the role of the educator.