

Boston University | Student Elections Commission Official Statement



April 8, 2014

Question at hand

On April 7, 2014 at 4:58 PM, the Student Elections Commission (SEC) received the following complaint:

To the SEC,

I would like bring to your attention a matter of plagiarism regarding BU's Push to Start's platform on their website.

On PTS's Platform tab, under Quality of Life Issues, the slate lists "Better career/internship resources for international students" elaborating by stating, "We would also like to continue current efforts in Student Government to create career/internship resources for international students who have a difficult time finding employers who will sponsor their work visas."

We would like to point out first and foremost that this was not an initial policy point on their website when they first launched their campaign. While there is nothing wrong with updating a website, it is essential to point out that TrueBU has a nearly identical platform policy on our website, present from the moment we launched it. You will also notice that our policy director Maria Hardiman placed a copyright symbol on every page of our long form policy document, reflecting our assertion of originality and ownership of the material.

It is the spirit of the Lifebook and the Boston University Academic Conduct Code that all students adhere to a level of integrity when it comes to intellectual property. We understand that students can have similar ideas and that slates may overlap platforms to a certain degree. However, we find fault in Push To Start's actions considering that they had plenty of time to analyze our ideas before updating their website. In our opinion, this is nothing short of plagiarism, and consequently, we have been forced to campaign against our own ideas.

Several have witnessed these website changes beyond our campaign. Should you seek further evidence, Push To Start should be able to provide their website archives via their domain, Wix. If they refuse, we can provide you with previous versions of the website in saved HTML documents.

With all sincerity,

TrueBU

Section 3.4.04 of the Elections Code states the following:

"Campaign tools, materials, tactics, etc. may not violate local, state, or federal law."

Section 3.4.05 of the Elections Code states the following:

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“Campaign tools, materials, tactics, etc. may not violate the policies of Boston University, including but not limited to those of the Student Activities Office, the Office of Housing, and the Office of Residence Life, as well as policies set forth in the Boston University Lifebook.”

Findings

While plagiarism is certainly an issue important in the University setting, having similar campaign ideas and platforms is not a form of plagiarism. In order for BU’s Push to Start to have copied this idea, the wording would have needed to be verbatim or close to verbatim to the wording in TrueBU’s platform. The SEC explored both platforms and was unable to connect the two closer than being similar ideas.

Likewise, in order for material to be copyrighted, it must be registered with the U.S. Copyright Office. If TrueBU has done this, they would need to provide proof and necessary similarity between the text in their platform to the text of BU’s Push to Start’s platform.

In elections, ideas tend to be very similar, and it is very possible that two campaigns share the same idea. There is no ownership over an idea in this case.

The SEC met in person to consider this complaint. In a 9-0 ruling, the SEC finds that there was no violation occurring in this incident. All members of the SEC were present for this vote.