

TO: Dr. Rahul Shrivastav, Vice President for Instruction
Dr. Annette Poulsen, Chair, Educational Affairs Committee

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Prepared by: Courtney Cullen, Office of Academic Honesty

2020 Faculty Listening Tour

Background

Faculty play a significant role in any centralized academic integrity policy. Failure to notify the institutional office degrades the value of integrity because it undermines the importance of honest work and signals to students that cheating is an appropriate collegiate strategy (Coren, 2011; McCabe D. L., 2001). Faculty may also be tempted to handle incidents of academic dishonesty outside of official institutional channels, leaving no record of these incidents in a central office. Private deals may seem beneficial, but it increases the likelihood that the student will continue to cheat in other classes (Lang, 2013).

Unfortunately, there will always be students that cheat. Faculty can implement preventative strategies to decrease cheating in their classrooms (Bertram Gallant, 2017; Lang, 2013), but best practices for addressing cheating include a centralized policy and reporting method (East, 2012; McCabe D. L., 2001). Institutions can use the information provided by central reporting to focus resources, track student behavior, and reduce recidivism (Lang, 2013).

Though there should be a central record of integrity violations, faculty remain major stakeholders in any case of academic dishonesty. Lang (2013) commented that “the faculty members are the ones who will know best how to help a student learn from a cheating violation in their own courses”. When faculty catch students violating the academic honesty policy, their goal should be to create a teachable moment for students, helping them learn and grow into better scholars (Bertram Gallant, 2017; Lang, 2013; McCabe D. L., 2012). This approach is based in restorative justice; it is the foundation for the policy at the University. A policy based on restorative justice is designed to help students learn from their mistakes, understand academic integrity, and the value of said integrity (Lang, 2013; East, 2012).

Given that the Facilitated Discussion model is designed to create teachable moments and gives faculty significant leeway over sanctioning, it is difficult to understand why the reporting rate is so low. Thus, the Office of Academic Honesty conducted a virtual listening tour to determine how the office can better support faculty.

Learning Objectives

The overarching learning objectives for the Faculty Listening Tour (FLT) were as follows:

1. To discover why faculty may be hesitant to report academic honesty violations.
There were some superficial and some deeper concerns, but faculty discussed what would lead

them to not report their students to the Office of Academic Honesty. This further provided a forum for faculty to express their concerns regarding the current policy.

2. To provide information to faculty who have not previously interacted with the Office of Academic Honesty.

Some faculty may be unaware of the academic honesty policy, *A Culture of Honesty*, as they have come from other institutions and continued to observe their former institution's policies. A listening tour bridged the information gap and answered questions that faculty may have. Again, the focus was on listening to the faculty, not presenting on the policy. Instead, the Office of Academic Honesty addressed questions faculty had on the policy and academic integrity challenges.

3. To gauge faculty interest in, and understanding of, programming sponsored by the Office of Academic Honesty.

In the event that the Office of Academic Honesty is able to develop and implement new initiatives, such as the online module currently in production and a remediation option for sanctioning, the office needed to develop faculty buy-in. Faculty displayed interest in options for students, including the online module and a remediation option.

Conducting the FLT

Although a face-to-face meeting with faculty in their department meetings would be preferable, Zoom conferencing was used to substitute nearly all in-person meetings for the safety of the faculty and staff. In June, the Program Coordinator sent an e-mail to each department head that asked them to have a representative from the Office of Academic Honesty attend a departmental meeting. The request was to join for at least thirty minutes for an open and frank discussion of academic integrity within their unit. The following 21 of 86 departments agreed:

- Advertising & Public Relations
- Agriculture & Applied Economics
- Biochemistry & Molecular Biology
- Career & Information Studies
- Communication Studies
- Educational Psychology
- Epidemiology & Biostatistics
- Financial Planning, Housing, and Consumer Economics
- Food Science & Technology
- International Affairs
- Journalism
- Language & Literacy Education
- Management Information Systems
- Microbiology
- Pathology
- Philosophy
- Poultry Science
- Sociology
- Textiles, Merchandising & Interiors
- Veterinary Biosciences & Diagnostic Imaging
- Warnell School of Forestry

To encourage a forthright dialogue, representatives from the Office of Academic Honesty took notes but did not request the meetings be recorded or that faculty identify themselves for the record.

Major Findings

Faculty had concerns about record in office

Even if the sanction did not appear on a transcript, the presence of a lasting record discouraged reporting for minor infractions, such as cheating on a low-stakes homework assignment. The record in question is retained per USG policy for 5 years after the student has left the University, and is disclosed on a Dean's Certification or in the event that a student signs a waiver.

Faculty were also concerned about students with a second violation. Even though the Multiple Violations Review Board (MVRB) expels few students (no students were expelled in 2019-2020), the concern exists that reporting a student would "ruin their futures." This idea caused faculty considerable distress.

Stance on policy

Some faculty were unaware of the policy until they encountered an instance of cheating. They were then directed to the Office of Academic Honesty by their peers. While it is positive that faculty are helping each other locate the correct branch of the institution, all faculty should have more exposure to the office prior to teaching. Faculty experienced in the policy fell into three broad categories:

1. *Faculty appreciate the policy.*

Faculty that use the policy appreciated its flexibility in sanctioning and felt supported by having a neutral facilitator in the room. They often used phrases such as, "It went as well as it could, given the circumstances," or that, "It is difficult to have the conversation without the facilitator."

2. *Faculty would rather handle it on their own.*

This category did not request that faculty not report to a central office. Instead, faculty wanted to handle it in their office without a facilitator present, and only escalate to a facilitated discussion if the student did not agree to a violation or to a sanction.

3. *Faculty would prefer to hand it off to the Office of Academic Honesty for both the investigation and assigning sanctions.*

Faculty in this scenario often bemoaned the time it took to investigate cases and to pull a case together. The onus is on the faculty to prepare a case, and they felt under-supported in their investigations. They further felt that they would prefer a proscribed list of sanctions to choose from, rather than developing the sanctions themselves. This group often had faced cases that were more complex and lead to a Continued Discussion or by those feeling time poor.

Faculty feel under-supported in their ability to uphold academic integrity

Nearly every department displayed displeasure that the University has no licensed Plagiarism Detection Software (PDS) available for faculty use. Faculty coming from institutions that used PDS were frustrated that this University did not provide that service to faculty. Faculty indicated that they would attend training to learn how to appropriately use and interpret any PDS the University considered in order to access such software. Faculty also expressed concerns with proctoring software. Though it may catch blatant attempts to circumvent closed book exams, it is not fool proof. Faculty also shared concerns regarding privacy.

Faculty do not report “minor” instances of cheating with regularity. Most would not report a student for cheating on a homework assignment. Instead, they would only report a case if they had strong proof or the cheating is blatant on an important assignment, such as a term-paper or exam. For some faculty, the context of exam cheating would also be considered before filing a report. For example, if students copy/paste an incorrect answer on an exam, they already forfeited credit for those question. In such cases, the faculty felt that reporting to the Office of Academic Honesty seemed excessive, as the students failed to profit from cheating.

An additional conflict for faculty is the damage to the student-faculty relationship and fear for their course evaluations. These fears may be legitimate, as students could retaliate a violation by providing a poor evaluation. They may even convince their peers to leave negative reviews. There is currently no method to prevent this from occurring or enforcing a ban, even if the faculty were to include a ‘no evaluation clause’ as a sanction. As evaluations are used in decisions on tenure and lecturer/instructor status, faculty without tenure are more fearful of student retaliation.

Recommendations

Faculty governance should consider Academic Honesty

The Academic Honesty Policy, *A Culture of Honesty*, is governed by the Educational Affairs Committee (EAC). This presents the EAC with an opportunity to scrutinize the policy. Overall, faculty are pleased with *A Culture of Honesty*. Perhaps the time has come to develop an Academic Honesty Task Force to consider changes that faculty have not considered or issues that are not addressed with the advent of technology since its implementation in 2000.

Reconsider records retention through provision of remediation opportunity

There were many concerns regarding the internal records kept in the Office of Academic Honesty. Faculty felt uneasy reporting a student for a homework assignment may keep them out of graduate or professional schools in the event that students needed a Dean’s Certification or disclosure of the violation.

Faculty need training in academic integrity and e-cheating

Faculty are unaware of the methods students use to cheat in their courses. Many do not know how to catch the cheating or address integrity beyond the mandatory syllabus statement. With the pivot to distance learning, faculty had to re-evaluate their assessment strategies, often turning to the Center for Teaching and Learning. Any assessment should also go through an integrity checklist; faculty should have access to and knowledge of the academic integrity resources at the institution. Some resources could be boiler plate and would be distributed to all faculty (e.g., an honor code pledge student must sign before they can begin any exam).

Look at university-wide software support

The majority of faculty requested a University PDS license. If the institution were to provide such software, faculty would be willing to attend training in order to have access to this software. This would significantly reduce the time faculty spend on preparing for plagiarism cases, and may reduce some of the fatigue for faculty that investigate academic dishonesty.

References

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