Dealing with Academic Dishonesty: Faculty Approaches and Institutional Policies

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“‘This is superior work,’ wrote a professor on a student’s paper…

‘It was excellent when Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote it, just as it is today…

‘Saint Thomas gets an A…

‘You get an F.’”

Alschuler and Blimling, 1995, p. 123
Academic Dishonesty: What?

- **Cheating**: copying, using unauthorized assistance (notes, study aids…); ≈ stealing
  - Hatch, 1992; Oakton Community College, 1997

- **Plagiarism**: “an act of literary fraud”; ≈ forgery, copyright violation.
  - Hatch, 1992, p. 11; Maddox, 1995

- **Substitution**: turning in someone else’s work, downloading/buying a term paper; ≈ counterfeiting
  - Applebome, 1997

- **Misrepresentation**: fabricating or fudging results
  - Dames, 2006; Hatch, 1992; Maddox, 1995; Roig and Caso, 2005

- **Misusing technology**: cutting and pasting from the internet; using cell phones in class
  - Applebome, 1997; Hansen, 2003; McCollum, 1996; Ross, 2005; Van Sack, 2004
Academic Dishonesty: Why?

- Social/peer pressure
- Stress
- Grades; fear of imminent failure
- Time
- Workload
- Course difficulty
- Unfair/overly demanding professors
- High rate of return (low risk of getting caught; weak sanctions)
- Ignorance
Academic Dishonesty: Impact?
Legal Bases for Dealing with Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is of great concern to educators, administrators, and students alike. On the surface, it appears to be a straightforward problem of outlining and enforcing a strict code of honor: faculty delineate the parameters of acceptable behavior, communicate these policies to their classes, expect students to adhere to the guidelines, and enforce penalties for various types of infractions. When administrators delve into the legal aspects of academic dishonesty, the once-clear waters suddenly become murkier. To begin with, there is not universal agreement on what constitutes academic dishonesty: what some call cheating, others call collaboration. Next, policies are not always clearly written or well communicated. In addition, faculty are faced with the difficult decision of whether to handle instances of cheating on their own or to follow stated procedures and refer the student to a disciplinary committee. Finally, faculty and administrators must be very careful to provide students with due process so as to protect their rights.

This paper provides an overview of key legal bases that inform institutional procedures dealing with cases of academic dishonesty. The goal is to make faculty and administrators aware of due process and the need to communicate policies in a timely and consistent manner.

Overview of Academic Dishonesty

When dishonesty in the classroom is discussed, most teachers and students think first of cheating, "the academic equivalent of urban crime" (Alschuler and Blimling 1995, 123), which encompasses a laundry list of unacceptable behavior, such as copying or using unauthorized sources or aids while completing tests and assignments. There are also many other forms of academic misconduct (Maramark and Maline 1993), such as plagiarism, falsification, and misrepresentation (Dames 2006; Hatch 1992; Maddox 1995; Roig and Caso 2005). Perhaps the most recent form of academic dishonesty revolves around the misuse of technology, particularly the Internet (Applebome 1997; McCollum 1996; Ross 2005), which makes it temptingly easy for students to plagiarize papers by cutting-and-pasting passages from web pages (Hansen 2003; Malesevic 2006; Ross 2005; Smith, Dupre, and Mackey 2005). Misuse of technology is moving into the classroom in the form of cell phones equipped with cameras and text-messaging capabilities (Van Sack 2004). In short, academic dishonesty can be viewed as a range of deliberate, unacceptable behaviors that students use to gain an unfair advantage on tests and assignments (Definitions 2006; Nelson 1995).

Several general studies have examined the prevalence of cheating on many campuses. In his ambitious 1964 project involving 5,000 students at 99 institutions, Bowers (1964) reported that 75% of the participants had cheated in some way at least once. More recent studies (Birchard 2006; S. Davis 1993; May and Loyd 1993; McCabe, Butterfield, and Trevino, 2006; McCabe and Trevino 1993, 1996) described increases in instances of academic dishonesty.

A few studies have focused on the causes of academic dishonesty, including social pressure and personal values (Stevens and Stevens 1987), stress, grades, time, workload, and course difficulty (S. Davis 1993; Lipson and McGavern 1993); peer pressure, a high rate of return (i.e., less personal effort, low risk of getting caught, weak sanctions), a value system that "does not prohibit cheating" (Payne and Nantz 1994, 93); unfair and/or overly demanding professors (McCabe and Trevino 1993); the fear of imminent failure ("Your Cheatin' Heart" 1992); and the belief that collaboration enhances the learning process (Lipson and McGavern 1993).

There are undoubtedly more reasons that students participate in academically dishonest behavior, but a shorter working list covers the majority of cases. McCabe and Trevino (1993) have determined five main factors that influence academic dishonesty: peers’ behavior, the existence of an honor code, the severity of penalties, the certainty of being reported, and the understanding of the institution’s policy on academic integrity. The most strongly associated variable is peer behavior, which "may suggest that academic dishonesty not only is learned from observing behavior of peers, but that peers' behavior provides a kind of normative support for cheating" (McCabe and Trevino 1993, 533).

A sixth factor should be added to this list, however: ignorance. "Too many students stumble into plagiarism unawares, because they have never learned how to use sources properly, and sometimes even because they have been taught that research [in high school] means plagiarism” (White 1993, A44). Furthermore, students are not always able to differentiate between plagiarism and correct paraphrasing (Roig 1997). In effect, honest students are apt to plagiarize by mistake rather than on purpose (Renard 2000). On a similar note, faculty do not always agree on what constitutes plagiarism or how serious the alleged infractions are (Julliard 1994).
Legal Bases for Dealing with Academic Dishonesty

**U.S. Constitution**

14th Amendment: Due Process Clause

*Students enjoy due process when faced with the potential loss of liberty and property*

- federal statutes (e.g., against discrimination)
- contract theory
- laws of professional associations
- denominational guidelines
- academic custom & usage
- internal rules & regulations
- college catalogs
- student handbooks
- course syllabi
- clear communication in class
Legal Bases for Dealing with Academic Dishonesty

Case law: three landmark cases

- **Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education, 1961**
  - minimal safeguards (notification & hearing = due process) for students accused of misconduct

- **Esteban v. Central Missouri State, 1967**
  - established norms to safeguard defendants: timely notification of accusation, a timely hearing, and an opportunity for students to present their side of the story.

- **Goss v. Lopez, 1975**
  - schools must follow stated procedures, especially when more severe penalties (e.g., suspension, expulsion) are involved
Addressing Academic Dishonesty

Approaches for Faculty

Approaches for Administrators
Approaches for faculty

- **Before**
  - Faculty must become familiar with institution’s policies and practices
  - Notify students of your policies wherever a grade is involved: syllabi, assignment and project sheets, statement of expected behavior
  - Develop in-class exercises to help students with proper methods of citation

- **During**
  - Remind students of expectations just before starting a test or assignment
  - Design tests and assignments to minimize opportunities to engage in dishonest behavior
  - Establish clear rules on the use of electronic devices (cell phones, Blackberry, iPods) in class.

- **After**
  - Make sure it’s really academic dishonesty!
  - Collect evidence (keep a paper trail)
  - Follow institutional and classroom procedures (due process)
  - If permissible, deal with isolated instances on an informal in-class basis, but be sure to observe all class and institutional procedures.

- More suggestions on the handout!
Approaches for administrators

- **Before**
  - Review institution’s policies and practices: look for comprehensive statements on dealing with instances of academic misconduct
  - Make sure the policies are in line with current legislation and the institution’s mission, policies, customs, and/or existing honor code and that they are being followed
  - Consider implementing a system that meets institution’s unique characteristics, e.g., Rutgers University’s two-tiered response based on the level of seriousness
  - Make sure that faculty and students can find the policies (website, handbooks, orientation)
  - Review syllabi; if necessary, compose a short statement or web page URL that can be inserted into a syllabus
  - Create opportunities for faculty, administrators, and student leaders to talk about academic dishonesty: frequency of instances, effective responses, due process, etc.

- **After**
  - Document each instance
  - Periodically review the process for compliance and practicality
  - More suggestions on the handout!
References Used

- *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education*, 294 F.2d 150, 158 (5th Cir. 1961)
References Used


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