Academic Integrity: Elective Seminar

“For exams I make my students sign an honor statement. ‘On my honor as a student I have neither given nor received help on this exam.’ And sometimes I’ll leave the room…with a smaller upper-division class it makes a difference. They feel they have something to lose if they cheat.”

~ Professor Cather Simpson, Chemistry

Seminar Description

Representatives from the Office of Undergraduate Studies will present the ethics policies of Case Western Reserve University as they apply to you as a graduate student and TA.

Seminar Objectives

- To learn about campus policies regarding academic integrity
- To discuss ways to implement these policies within your TA role(s)
- To discuss ways to plan courses
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Ethics and the Academic Community

The following statement of the ethical standards of Case Western Reserve University is taken from the Handbook for Undergraduate Students:

Universities seek to preserve, disseminate, and advance knowledge. At Case, as elsewhere, we recognize that to fulfill these purposes requires a norm of expected conduct shared by all in the University community, governed by truthfulness, openness to new ideas, and consideration for the individual rights of others, including the right to hold and express opinions different from our own.

The University’s mission rests on the premise of intellectual honesty—in the classroom, the laboratory, the office and the solitary examination desk. Without a prevailing ethic of honor and integrity not only in scientific pursuits but in all scholarly activity, the very search for knowledge is impaired. In these respects, each of us—especially but not exclusively faculty—must regard oneself as a mentor for others.

These principles we strive to uphold make it possible for the larger society to place trust in the degrees we confer, the research we produce, the scholarship we represent and disseminate, and the critical assessments we make of the performance of students and faculty, as well as judgments of staff and administrators.

To safeguard the standards on which we all depend, each of us must therefore accept individual responsibility for our behavior and our work and refrain from taking credit for the work of others.

The culture of a university also requires that the rights of all be protected, particularly by those entrusted with authority for judgment of the work of others.

The University, being a human community, is subject to human failings, ambiguities, and errors. It is therefore the responsibility of the bodies regulating the affairs of faculty, students, and staff to maintain processes for judging and resolving instances where these principles may have been violated. However, all such systems depend for their effectiveness, in turn, on the acceptance of common norms of conduct—the ties of trust which bind the university community together. (p. iii)

The above statement represents a positive approach to the question of academic honesty (and, by implication, academic dishonesty). Rather than espousing a philosophy which views cheating as inevitable, and policing and punishment its only treatments, the University has chosen to set forth a philosophy of honesty, integrity, and trust. This attitude should govern your approach to academic honesty in the classroom. Certainly, over the course of your teaching career you will encounter students who work dishonestly, who try to get away with as much as they can without getting caught; but much more often you will have the opportunity to
demonstrate by example an ethical pursuit of knowledge. Announce and enforce positive expectations of honesty, and you will inspire students’ attitudes as well as their conduct.

However, this does not mean you should be unaware of the ways in which academic dishonesty can arise in the classroom or unprepared to deal with cases of cheating. The following sections outline different kinds of academic dishonesty and provide some ideas about how to understand, prevent, and punish them.

**Academic Dishonesty and How to Prevent It**

All kinds of deliberate academic dishonesty share one basic motivation. The student wants to get a good grade and has determined that there is an easier way to secure that grade than applying individual effort. Some students may simply have decided to take the easy route rather than earning grades; others may be very driven to succeed but afraid they won’t be able to earn a high grade no matter how hard they try. We all experience the temptation to take short cuts or the fear that our work won’t be satisfactory; but whatever any student’s particular motivation may be, it’s clear that he or she has lost sight of the true purpose of an education and has decided that claiming credentials is more important than mastering the knowledge those credentials are expected to certify.

There are also students who inadvertently commit acts which may be perceived as cheating. This can happen when the expectations for an assignment are not made clear, or the student has failed to comprehend them. For example, a student may ask a friend whose programming skills are better to help improve a computer program, when the goal of the assignment is for the student to work without assistance. The professor might think the student has “cheated” by violating the spirit of the assignment, when the student thinks he or she has consulted with a tutor. Thus you should explain your expectations clearly, including how much collaboration is permissible or what devices such as calculators or spreadsheets are to be used in the completion of an assignment.

One of the first things you can do to discourage academic dishonesty is to get to know your students as individuals and build a rapport with them. If students regard the class as an academic community in which everyone has mutual expectations of ethical behavior, a climate of trust will be encouraged, and students will be less likely to violate that trust. Also, the better you know your students and the work of which they are capable, the more readily you will be able to identify anomalous exams or papers which may be a sign of cheating.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism occurs when a writer presents the work of someone else as his or her own. This may range from sloppy citation practices which obscure the line between a student’s own ideas and those borrowed from others, to careless assumptions about what is and isn’t common
knowledge, to full-fledged presentation of borrowed, stolen, or purchased papers written by someone else. The internet provides many opportunities to plagiarize; cutting and pasting without citation from internet sources and downloading complete papers from sites like "schoolsucks.com" is becomingly increasingly common. Students (and some faculty) may also be unaware that submitting the same paper for two or more courses without consultation with the instructors and without substantial revision also constitutes plagiarism.

Students may be tempted to plagiarize when working on an assignment which challenges their knowledge of the subject. Research may produce large amounts of information to draw upon, most of which is written gracefully and presents interesting ideas in words the student feels cannot be improved upon. Remind the student that finding the information is only part of the effort of the writing assignment; the work is not complete until the student has understood and built upon that information, which requires putting the concepts into the student’s own words and proceeding to draw inferences and conclusions. Make sure your assignments require both components.

To prevent plagiarism, make clear what standards of attribution are to be used when you assign written work. Point students to a style guide if possible; provide examples of acceptable and unacceptable use of sources. Make research writing a process that requires interim submissions of work (i.e. thesis statement, bibliography, first draft) for review and comment. Or design assignments which rely on the student’s own ideas and knowledge rather than on research, and so are difficult to plagiarize. Be aware, too, of common sources for previously written papers; these include professional literature in your discipline (from which students may copy, unaware you have read them), national firms which advertise in magazines and with flyers on campus, student stockpiles of “paper files,” and numerous sites on the World Wide Web. Familiarize yourself with these sources and let your students know you are aware of them. (Many faculty members now employ “Google searches” on key phrases or paragraphs to check for unattributed ideas or sources.)

Be careful with the graded work you return. Do not leave graded examinations or papers in the hallway outside your office door; it’s a violation of student privacy as well as an invitation to theft and reuse. Keep copies of student papers in a safe place so that you can consult them if a subsequent paper sounds disturbingly familiar. If you periodically clear old work out of your files, make sure you dispose of it safely by destroying it or removing it from campus rather than tossing it intact into recycling bins in the hallway.

Cheating on Exams

In exam rooms, students may cheat using the simple expedient of glancing at a fellow student’s paper. Other forms of exam cheating may include hiding slips of paper with answers or formulae in clothing or hats, using calculators in violation of the exam’s policies, exchanging text messages on cell phones or beepers, or obtaining an exam’s answers beforehand and
memorizing them to fill in on the paper. Students who do poorly on exams may also attempt to alter their papers, then bring them back to the professor or TA claiming an error in grading.

To prevent cheating, arrange examination seating so students cannot easily see one another’s papers or pass information around. Ask students to keep all extraneous materials at the back of the room or at the ends of each aisle. If you must seat students close together, design several examination sheets and distribute them randomly. And be absolutely clear what materials students are permitted to use during the exam, such as calculators or textbooks. It is strongly recommended that you require students to turn off cell phones and pagers and forbid them to take out or answer their phones. Remain in the room the entire time, walking up and down the aisles if the room is too large for you to see easily what students are doing. (This is a good idea anyway; students may have valid questions during the test and you should be available to answer them.) Don’t keep using the same exam term after term; it’s too easy for students to share past tests. Instead, design new exams frequently. Keep copies of your exams safe so that students won’t have access to them beforehand; don’t leave them out on your desk or put drafts in recycling bins, as students who visit your office may come across them. If it’s practical, make copies of graded exams and keep them in a safe place so that you have something to refer to if you suspect a student has altered an exam sheet.

Falsifying Data or Results

Laboratory or other research work may be falsified by students who, frustrated with their inability to get the desired results, fill in idealized numbers or made-up data instead of recording what actually took place.

To prevent falsification of data, consider requiring students to sign a pledge affirming that all work is their own. Many departments have such pledges as part of their assignments; they can discourage cheating by making students aware of the ethical norms of your discipline and more conscious of their own actions. Also, many students think twice about cheating if they realize they will be signing their names to a statement of integrity.

Grading policy also strongly influences the students’ perception of what is valued in the laboratory experience. If the right answer is all that earns credit, students will be tempted to cook (or falsify) data to produce that answer. Labs that allow students to make mistakes, learn from those mistakes, and earn credit for the mastery of that lab are much less prone to data falsification. Lab assistants can also prevent falsification by paying careful attention to what everyone in the lab is doing and attending to any problems students have in their research.

Collaboration on Work that is Supposed to be Individual

Most graded assignments at the University rely on individual effort; but many courses rely wholly or in part on student group work in laboratories, writing projects, classroom exercises, or discussions. Students may take advantage of study or lab partners to avoid doing work
themselves; they may also accidentally go too far in their group work without intending any dishonesty.

**To prevent collaboration from becoming dishonest, explain very clearly what your standards are for individual and group conduct.** Encourage collaborative work as much as possible—after all, the dynamic learning which can happen in a classroom is simply one variation of that academic collaboration—but specify what subjects or tasks may be done in groups and which are to be the result of individual effort. For example, you should indicate clearly whether laboratory groups are to write up a single research report or whether each member of the group must do an individual write-up. For group projects, you should also be clear on what roles each member of the group is expected to perform, and make sure those roles are defined as equitably as possible.

**Misrepresentation and Obstruction**

At times, students may believe that they are not adequately prepared to take an exam or turn in a paper. Claiming, “my grandmother died” is often the recourse to get more time to study for that test or to complete that paper. Falsely playing on an instructor’s sympathy to gain an academic advantage is a nasty deceit. It is also a violation of the current Academic Integrity Policy. There are two ways to prevent misrepresentation in your classroom. For papers, you might define a submission “period” rather than a specific day. Giving the students a range of days or a particular week to hand in their papers allows students to make better planning decisions and preempts the temptation to lie about a circumstance when a paper remains unfinished at the due date. Also, you are perfectly free to require documentation of circumstances that allegedly interfered with the student’s ability to sit for an exam or submit a paper.

Obstruction, or the deliberate act of interfering with another student’s ability to conduct scholarly endeavors (stealing a notebook, disabling a computer program), is also a violation of academic integrity. Make sure that your students are aware of the four types of academic misconduct: plagiarism, cheating, misrepresentation, and obstruction.
Computing and Network Ethics Issues

Computer networking and software can offer opportunities for violating norms of honesty, whether purposefully or inadvertently. Students may gather information without realizing copyright or citation rules apply. Email lists and networked discussion forums frequently feature material reprinted without the creator’s permission, often because of a common misperception that “if it is on the Internet, it must be free to all takers.” In addition, software piracy becomes misleadingly easy when students have access to a networked software library but do not take the time to familiarize themselves with the rules for its use.

Encourage your students to respect property rights for electronic media as you would for printed media. Direct them to the University’s computing and network ethics policy, which can be found in the Student Services Guide available without charge to all students. If you are encouraging students to conduct research via the Internet, draw their attention to notices of copyright, and teach them how to cite material drawn from websites, email messages, and electronic databases.

Cultural Issues Regarding Plagiarism and Intellectual Property

In the United States, we tend to think that issues of plagiarism and cheating are fairly clear-cut. Unless there is some real ambiguity about procedures for a given assignment, we assume that work is to be performed by individuals and that writing should reflect one’s own original ideas or give credit to sources. However, not all cultures share this individualistic perspective. In many countries, the mark of erudition is not one’s ability to generate original ideas but one’s ability to quote or otherwise demonstrate command of classically approved knowledge. American individualism may also blind us to the extent to which we really do work as teams and communities, while students with other national perspectives may be more accepting of group-oriented work. And in many nations, intellectual property is defined in different terms from those used in the United States. In the classroom, these cultural perspectives can clash in several ways: a student may ask a sibling or friend with a better command of English to review and revise a paper; students may collaborate on projects which are supposed to be done separately; most commonly, students may include ideas and information in their written work without giving proper credit to their sources. The students are not necessarily trying to cheat, but may genuinely be unaware of the fact that they are applying different ethical standards from yours.

You can avoid problems with different cultural attitudes toward intellectual property by discussing the issue openly in the classroom.
Explain in clear terms what you mean by academic honesty, including the broader principles underlying any specific policies. Clearly delineate when students may work collaboratively and when work is to be the result of individual effort. Hold a discussion of what it means to be a learned person in American culture, and invite questions. If you suspect copying or collaboration, determine whether it is possible that the student doesn’t realize which set of norms is supposed to apply before pursuing a charge of cheating. That said, once you have made it clear what your standards are, enforce them; you are ultimately obligated to uphold the standards which prevail in American culture, and you should not allow students to use cultural difference as an excuse for not learning and applying them.
How to Deal with Evidence of Cheating

If you suspect a student has plagiarized or cheated on an assignment, you need to arrange a conference with the student as soon as possible. Discuss the work in question. If you think material or solutions were copied from outside sources, ask the student to explain how the idea was generated or how the solution was derived. Determine whether the problem is the result of a misunderstanding about the rules for the assignment or about standards of citation, or if the student has deliberately infringed on academic regulations. Give the student a chance to admit wrongdoing or explain what happened; but if once you have discussed the matter you are still sure the student has cheated, follow the procedures detailed below.

Academic Regulations and Procedures

It is each undergraduate’s responsibility to know and to follow the academic regulations and procedures of the University. Complete information is included in the General Bulletin. Below are excerpts from the General Bulletin plus pertinent supplementary information.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honesty consistent with the University Statement on Ethics. Any work submitted by a student must represent his or her own efforts. Any student engaging in cheating, plagiarism, or any other acts of academic dishonesty will be subject to disciplinary action.

Students, faculty, and administrators share responsibility for the determination and preservation of standards of academic integrity. Not only must they adhere to their own personal codes of integrity but they must also be prepared to educate others about the importance of academic integrity, to take reasonable precaution to discourage violations of academic integrity, and to adjudicate violations. For students, education about the importance of academic integrity begins during the admissions process.

Faculty and students are expected to uphold standards of academic integrity by taking reasonable precaution in the academic arena. Reasonable precaution involves implementing measures that reduce the opportunities for academic misconduct but do not inhibit inquiry, create disruption or distraction in the testing environment, or create an atmosphere of mistrust.

The vitality of academic integrity is dependent upon the willingness of community members to confront instances of suspected wrongdoing. Faculty have the specific responsibility to address suspected or reported violations as indicated below. All other members of the academic community are expected to report directly and confidentially their suspicion of violation to a faculty member or a dean or to approach suspected violators and to remind them of their obligation to uphold standards of academic integrity.
Academic Integrity Violations

All forms of academic dishonesty—including cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, and obstruction—are violations of academic integrity standards.

If a faculty member suspects that an undergraduate student has violated academic integrity standards, the faculty member shall advise the student and the departmental chair and consult with the Dean of Undergraduate Studies about the appropriate course of action. Before speaking with the student, the faculty member also may choose to consult with the chair or dean about academic integrity standards. If the faculty member, in consultation with the dean, determines that the evidence is not adequate to charge the student with a violation, the matter will be dropped. Otherwise, the following procedures will be followed:

First Violations

If the faculty member and the student agree that a violation has occurred, and the violation is determined to be a first violation (the university has no record of previous violations by the student of the university’s Standards of Conduct), the faculty member may choose to sanction the student with either failure in the work in question or failure in the course. In such cases, the faculty member will be provided with a standard reporting form to be signed by both the student and faculty member.

Alternately, the faculty will refer the case to the associate vice president for student affairs for integrity board action if:

- The student claims not to have violated academic integrity standards or the student disagrees with the sanction imposed by the professor.
- The faculty member believes that the seriousness of the first offense warrants presentation to the academic integrity board.
- The faculty member prefers to have the academic integrity board investigate or adjudicate the alleged violation, or prefers that the board sanction the student.
- The signed report form from a faculty member or the finding of responsibility by the academic integrity board will become part of the student’s university judicial file. Students found responsible for a first violation will be required, in addition to any other sanctions imposed, to attend an ethics education program or to complete an ethics exercise, as assigned by the dean of undergraduate studies or the assistant vice president for student affairs.
Subsequent Violations

If the University judicial file indicates that the student suspected of a violation has been responsible for one or more previous violations of the university’s Standards of Conduct, the case will be referred to the associate vice president for student affairs for academic integrity board action.

Misrepresentation and Obstruction

Reports of suspected academic misrepresentation or obstruction occurring in settings other than the classroom will be referred to the assistant vice president for student affairs for academic integrity board action.

Violations of academic integrity standards are considered violations of the university’s Standards of Conduct and will be recorded in the student’s judicial record. University judicial files are maintained by the assistant vice president for student affairs in the office of student affairs.

In addition, the University is required to report to the funding agency the identity and misconduct of anyone, including a student, found guilty of falsification, fabrication or plagiarism in the performance of research that is receiving support from federal sources.

Additional Resources

The following resources offer additional insight into academic integrity:
