

Department of Social Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies

Document on academic honesty: procedures and best practices

I. Procedures

A course director (CD) who suspects academic misconduct on the part of a student in her course is obliged to request that the department set up a hearing. Attending the hearing will be: a chair (a member of the academic honesty committee); an administrative assistant (currently Jacquie Selman); the CD; if applicable, the TA who brought the case to the CD's attention (optional attendance); the student; a representative of the student (optional attendance).

The hearing:

(i) The chair explains the form of the meeting to the student. In particular:

- (a) That the allegation has the nature of a *suspicion*, not an accusation.
- (b) That the hearing is thus *exploratory*.
- (c) That the student may not be "found guilty" of academic misconduct without her *written* consent in the hearing.
- (d) That failure to reach a resolution in the hearing will result in the case being forwarded to the Dean's office where a separate meeting will take place. In the Dean's meeting, a student may be judged to have breached the rules of academic conduct and penalised without her consent.

(ii) The chair explains that the hearing can issue in one of four results, three of which ((χ), (ψ) and (ω) below) necessitate the signing of forms at the end of the hearing:

(ϕ) The CD drops the allegation of academic misconduct. Therewith the hearing ends. All paper documentation concerning the hearing is destroyed, and those in attendance will treat the matter as confidential.

(χ) The CD and student agree that academic misconduct has taken place, and the student agrees to accept the penalty which the CD suggests (usually zero on the assignment in question for a first offence with no possibility of rewriting for a new grade; a harsher penalty for re-offenders, again at the CD's suggestion). The documentation regarding the case is forwarded to the Dean's office for review. The Dean's representative may amend the penalty if s/he sees fit.

(ψ) The CD and student agree that academic misconduct has taken place, but the student does not accept the penalty which the CD suggests. The hearing closes and the case is referred to the Dean's office where a further meeting will be set up to establish the penalty.

(ω) The CD maintains her allegation that academic misconduct has taken place, but the student does not accept this. In this case, the hearing closes and the case is referred to the Dean's office where a further meeting will be set up.

(iii) Finally, the chair explains that under outcomes (χ) and (ψ), a written record of the meeting and its outcome will be kept in the Dean's office until the student graduates whereupon it will be destroyed. In the majority of cases, the student's degree transcript will carry no record of the student's transgression (although this penalty is available, usually for multiple offenders). Under outcome (ω), whether a written record of the case is kept depends on the outcome of the meeting at the Dean's office.

The hearing takes place between the CD and the student (and/or representative). The CD presents the allegation and supporting evidence, the student (and/or representative) may respond. The chair and administrative assistant may interject points of clarification. If, after a certain amount of to and fro between CD and student, the chair sees little chance of agreement, she may suggest that the hearing be closed and the case forwarded to the Dean's office. Anyone present in the hearing may request a short consultation period (i.e., between student and representative, or between CD, chair and administrative assistant). For this purpose, one or more parties may be asked to leave the room. (Typical consultations between student and representative concern whether the student should settle the case at the departmental level or let it be pursued at the decanal level; typical consultations between the departmental members of the hearing concern the penalty appropriate to the case).

Under outcomes (χ), (ψ) and (ω), the student, CD and chair will be asked to sign forms on which the outcome of the meeting is recorded. The originals are sent to the Dean's office along with the minutes (kept by the chair and administrative assistant). The student receives a copy of the forms.

There are CDs who elect to “go it alone” and deal with a cases “informally”, that is, on a one-to-one basis with the student. In addition to neglecting her duty to report the case to the committee, a CD who proceeds thus faces or causes the following drawbacks:

- (a) There will be no documentation of the case available to the committee should the student commit a future transgression. Without documentation of all the student’s breaches of good academic practice, the committee will be unable to pursue its custom of increasing the severity of the penalty as the number of offences committed by the student increases.
- (b) The CD will be unaware of any previous breaches committed by the student and will therefore not be able to make an informed judgement about the penalty to be imposed.
- (c) The CD’s suggested penalty might not correspond to that she would suggest under the advice of the committee. This would result in unequal treatment of students.
- (d) Nothing stops the student from dropping the course and escaping any penalty. As soon as a case is reported to the Committee, the student’s account is “frozen” and the student cannot drop the course if s/he has committed academic misconduct.

By bringing a case to the committee, a CD will relieve herself of the burden of dealing with a student individually. Part of the committee’s task is to lift this burden from the CD and to transpose it to the committee level and, if necessary, to the decanal level.

II. Best practices

Many useful measures are listed under <http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity/> (see the links “for faculty” and “for TAs”). Advice includes the following:

- 1) In essay-based assignments, have students hand in successive drafts; instruct them in the art of note-taking; assign them (a choice of) essay titles which are very specific; require that they refer to particular pieces of literature; make sure they reflect many aspects of the course content.
- 2) Make frequent changes to the course readings, type of assignment and questions for assignments, otherwise students will recycle old assignments submitted by past students.
- 3) Use of text-matching software, e.g. “turn-it-in”, see also: http://www.yorku.ca/computing/facultystaff/teach_learn/turnitin.html

Other measures:

- Have students submit a printout of their personalised academic integrity test result. Have them do the test until they score 100% as a prerequisite of submitting their first assignment. (The test can be found on the library’s website: <http://www.library.yorku.ca/ccm/Home/ResearchAndInstruction/academicintegrityinfo>).
- Alert students to the department’s policies on academic honesty and announce in each course outline the expected penalty for transgressions (usually a minimum of zero on the assignment).
- Include the link to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty in each course outline (<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=69>).
- Alert students to the resources (including workshops) offered by York to help students learn academic skills (see the Learning Skills Services: <http://www.yorku.ca/cds/lss/>).
- Be rigorous in adverting to academic malpractice in feedback on students’ assignments. Failure to point out even “small” transgressions, e.g., missing quotation marks or full bibliographic information, leads students to assume that whatever they have done with apparent impunity is acceptable practice. Students have expressed surprise in hearings when they have been reprimanded for omitting quotation marks and page references. They have been known to take umbrage to being penalised for such lacunae because other instructors have not penalised or even drawn attention to such practice.