

CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM ON THE RISE?

“Academic integrity refers to the implicit commitment that every member makes to all others in the community to practice those principles that underlie the mission of the University and define academic integrity. These are: honesty and good faith; clarity in the communication of core values; professional conduct of work; mutual trust and respect; and fairness and exemplary behavior.”

The WORD Undergraduate Student Handbook, p.161

The Carnegie Mellon Code sets the highest standard for our community regarding personal integrity. However, in the midst of self exploration, struggles with fear of failure and the high demands of a challenging academic environment can create situations where some students have difficulty exercising good judgment.

Cheating and plagiarism have received considerable press nationally, with many colleges and universities reporting that breaches of academic integrity are increasing every year.

Are cheating and plagiarism on the rise at Carnegie Mellon?

Unfortunately, we do not have reliable numbers on incidents of cheating and plagiarism at Carnegie Mellon because many faculty members choose not to report incidents to departmental administrators and Student Affairs, opting instead to address infractions at the course level (typically by failing a student for the assignment or exam). This tendency to not report incidents of cheating and plagiarism prevents us from understanding the extent to which this “national epidemic” affects academic life here.

What we can say with certainty is that we have seen an increase in sophisticated and premeditated methods of cheating and plagiarism on our campus by both undergraduate and graduate level students. For example, in addition to the typical cheating and plagiarism cases, in the past several years the Academic

Review Board (ARB) has encountered cases in which Carnegie Mellon students have:

- illegally entered faculty members' offices;
- recruited friends to take exams in their place;
- accessed another student's computer to steal their completed assignment;
- taken other students' completed assignments from shared work spaces and turned them in as their own; and
- turned in papers downloaded or bought from the Internet.

What is the institution doing to address cheating and plagiarism?

We know that our academic environment places high demands on students, and we understand the pressure some of them are under. However, we also provide students with ample support services to thrive academically without dishonesty. Among these services are faculty and TA office hours, review sessions, tutoring, supplemental instruction, help in navigating cultural and second-language issues, and counseling services. In addition, we clearly define our standards for academic and personal integrity, and definitions of cheating and plagiarism are clearly stated (in the student handbook, among other places) and widely available to students.

What can faculty do to prevent cheating and plagiarism before they occur?

There are a number of steps you can take to discourage cheating and plagiarism in your courses. Here are a few of many strategies that have been effective for Carnegie Mellon faculty.

- Create unique paper and project assignments (e.g., that require connections to course readings and discussions) that cannot be downloaded from the Internet.
- Explain your policy regarding cheating,

plagiarism, and appropriate/inappropriate collaboration, and describe the consequences for violations.

- Provide examples of how and when to credit others' ideas.
- Require proposals for and drafts of papers, projects, etc., so you can see student work in progress.
- Inform students about the support services listed above to which they can turn for help.
- Ask students to sign a statement of academic integrity for particular assignments (verifying, for example, that the work is their own, or crediting co-workers).

To discuss these or other strategies in greater detail, contact The Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence at x8-2896.

What can you do to address cheating or plagiarism decisively after it occurs?

Most faculty members, when confronted with cases of cheating and plagiarism, talk to the student(s) involved and determine a penalty that seems appropriate. We ask that after you do this, you write a letter or e-mail to the student describing the infraction and the penalty you have levied, and explaining that a second offense will result in university action. Copy this communication to the Department Head, Dean, and the Dean of Student Affairs; this enables the University to maintain a record of individual student behavior across courses and identify repeat offenders. If a student is cheating or plagiarizing in your course, there is a good chance he is doing it or will do it again in another class. If this is the student's first offense, it goes no farther, unless the student appeals. If the student appeals, or if it is a second offense, it will go to the Academic Review Board.

What is the Academic Review Board (ARB)?

An Academic Review Board is composed of three

faculty members/administrators and two students. The ARB reviews the case and holds a hearing, which you will be asked to attend.

Is the process time-consuming and complicated?

The faculty member's role in an ARB hearing typically takes no more than one hour. The vast majority of faculty members who have gone before the ARB has been satisfied with the process and results.

Will the university support me if I pursue this?

The university stands behind faculty who report incidents of cheating and plagiarism. In fact, in the past 10 years, in 99% of cases that students appealed, the ARB upheld the action taken by the faculty member involved, often administering an additional penalty for egregious or second offenses (suspension for one year being the most common.) Moreover, the ARB takes the opinion of faculty members very seriously when considering appropriate penalties in specific cases.

For complete information about the process, go to the Standards for Academic and Creative Life section of the WORD, available on line at <http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/theword/university/standards.cfm>, or contact Holly Hippensteel in the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs at hbh@andrew or x8-2075.

If we want students to understand the seriousness of our commitment to academic integrity, we need to work hard to both prevent cheating and plagiarism, and to respond appropriately when it does occur. We appreciate your support in this endeavor.

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