

## Faculty Commitment to Academic Integrity

[From: Association for Student Judicial Affairs; Law and Policy Report; February 19, 2003, No. 90]  
The following document -- "Faculty Commitment to Academic Integrity" -- from the "Law and Policy Report" of the Association for Student Judicial Affairs (ASJA) [<http://asja.tamu.edu>] is posted here as a valuable discussion of the need for faculty to be on board as to the enforcement of high moral and ethical principles in academe. The ASJA is an organization striving to serve the needs of judicial officers at institutions of higher education. N.B. The document is clearly applicable to the distinctive situation at the University of Maryland, College Park. Nevertheless, Stanford University's Office of Judicial Affairs is in complete agreement with the document as far as it *not* being "possible to maintain high academic integrity standards if significant numbers of faculty members lack commitment to academic integrity enforcement."

### 03.6 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

It isn't possible to maintain high academic integrity standards if significant numbers of faculty members lack commitment to academic integrity enforcement. At the University of Maryland and other schools with new (or "modified") honor codes one of the major responsibilities of a student Honor Council or Committee is to keep faculty members informed about pertinent institutional policies, and how those policies are working. Providing general data about case outcomes is especially important, since faculty members who refer cases decided in favor of an accused student will tend to assume convictions are rare.

What follows is a letter sent last fall (in paper format) by Honor Council Chair Andrew Canter to several thousand faculty members at the University of Maryland. We've received requests for copies from sister institutions, and thought an electronic version might be helpful to ASJA members. While Mr. Canter's letter is focused on the University of Maryland \*Code of Academic Integrity,\* we think it provides a valuable template for comparable efforts elsewhere. Additional information for faculty members, students, and parents is also available at the Maryland Student Honor Council website: <http://www.umd.edu/honorcouncil>.

September 3, 2002  
TO: College Park Faculty  
FROM: [Andrew Canter](#)  
Chair, Student Honor Council

This is the Student Honor Council's annual report to the faculty on the University academic integrity system.

Faculty members are critical gatekeepers for our Code of Academic Integrity, and are referring cases to the Honor Council in record numbers. Last year faculty members referred 243 academic dishonesty cases (contrasted with 127 cases referred in 1995). Approximately 70% of referred cases resulted in a finding against the accused student. Nearly 90% of students found responsible for academic dishonesty received the XF grade penalty, recorded on the transcript as "failure due to academic dishonesty." (First time offenders who receive the XF grade are usually given an opportunity to remove the "XF" transcript notation, if they complete an academic integrity seminar).

Maryland's Code of Academic Integrity isn't geared to punishment alone. Our primary aim is educational. Faculty members can help by stating their commitment to academic integrity in their syllabi, and by talking with students about why academic integrity is important. This effort has never been more important, as the larger society struggles with critical issues of integrity in business and government.

An especially important part of our educational programming is the University Honor Pledge. Last November Vice President Destler sent every faculty member a letter encouraging use of the Pledge. The text of his letter is available at <http://www.umd.edu/honorpledge>, along with questions and answers about Pledge implementation.

Honor pledges are a hallmark of distinguished sister institutions with traditional honor codes. Most students readily sign honor pledges, as a statement of their commitment to academic integrity. An analogy can be made to physicians taking the Hippocratic Oath. Public affirmation of duties and principles enhances personal commitment, and can be a lasting source of pride. We urge you to invite both graduate and undergraduate students to write and sign the University Honor Pledge in all your classes.

The Student Honor Council welcomes faculty comments about the academic integrity system. Faculty members can also help maintain and improve the system by assuming positions of responsibility within it, as voting members on hearing panels. The time commitment involved in serving on a panel can be as little as two or three hours a semester, depending on the participating faculty member's schedule. Please contact Andrea Goodwin at 314-8206 to volunteer.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE "CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY"

### **Is the Maryland Code of Academic Integrity an Honor Code?**

Yes, if by "Honor Code" you mean that students are asked to sign and abide by an honor pledge; assume responsibility for educating their peers about the importance of academic integrity; and are given significant authority to resolve academic dishonesty allegations. However, in most departments, we do not have unproctored examinations or require students to report each other. It would be best to say that Maryland has a modified honor code governed by an all-student honor council. Our Code has been attracting considerable national attention, and led to Maryland's recognition in the Templeton Guide to Colleges that Promote Character.

### **Why has Maryland developed such a Code?**

Substantial research indicates that there is significantly less academic dishonesty at schools with honor systems, contrasted with similar schools without honor systems. A distinguishing factor at honor code schools appears to be peer involvement in setting and administering honor code standards-suggesting to the student body that academic integrity is a shared value, not an "us versus them" contest with faculty members.

### **Is there any evidence the Maryland "Code of Academic Integrity" has influenced student attitudes or behavior?**

Yes. We have two measures. First, Rutgers University management professor Donald L. McCabe has published the results of a survey on academic integrity involving over 2,100 students at 21 campuses, including the University of Maryland ("Some Good News About Academic Integrity," Change Magazine September/October 2000). Professor McCabe found significantly less cheating at schools with traditional and modified honor codes, compared to comparable institutions without such codes. McCabe paid particular attention to the University of Maryland's modified honor code, and wrote that: "[t]he major finding of this new research was empirical confirmation of a relationship between modified honor codes and lower levels of student cheating, even at large campuses where student cheating is generally higher." A specific example was the response of University of Maryland students to the question "[h]ave you ever seen a student cheat during a test or an exam . . . ? Nearly 53% of the Maryland student respondents said no, compared with 43% of students at universities without an honor code.

A second measure of the influence of our Code of Academic Integrity is the overall assessment of students themselves. During the spring semester 2000, in a survey conducted by the Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG), over 1,300 upperclass students responded to the statement "UM's Code of Academic Integrity/Student Honor Code is an effective system for maintaining intellectual and academic honesty." Fifty-seven percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (30% were neutral). When students were asked to respond to the same statement in 1998, 47% agreed or strongly agreed (35% were neutral). The favorable direction of student perspectives is pronounced, and is something we hope can be demonstrated in future CAWG surveys.

Maryland's Honor Code has also had a significant impact on the students who help administer it. About thirty student leaders serve on our Honor Council. Their experience was well summarized by Honor Council Vice-Chair Mona Siddiqui, when she received the University Medal, and delivered the student address at the year 2000 Commencement:

*One of the most unique groups that this University has is a Student Honor Council . . . The Council is a tremendous learning experience. We learn about what we expect from ourselves and others. We learn about upholding certain standards when the consequences are potentially unfavorable. Words like integrity, honesty, and respect take on real meanings in daily activities.*

### **How common is academic dishonesty at colleges across the country?**

In one study, Donald L. McCabe surveyed the extent of self-reported cheating by 1,800 students at nine medium to large state universities. He found that 52% of the students admitted to copying from others on an examination; 38% admitted to some form of test cheating on three or more occasions. McCabe's research has important implications in light of recent corporate scandals. It's reasonable to hypothesize that students who develop the habit of cheating in college may also see cheating as an effective strategy in the workplace.

### **How common is academic dishonesty in high school?**

Cheating in high school appears to be even more widespread than cheating in college. One survey of high-achieving students conducted by Who's Who Among American High School Students found that nearly 90% of the students said cheating was "common at their school;" 76% said they had "cheated on tests;" 58% said "it would be easy to obtain test questions or answers."

### **Can students who cheated in high school be persuaded not to cheat in college?**

Yes, but only if faculty members and student leaders work together to foster higher standards for academic integrity on campus. Donald McCabe made the following observations in a 1996 interview:

You hear students say, "college is for real, high school is only to get into college, and everybody is cheating in high school anyway, so it doesn't matter . . ." The assumption that different standards apply in college can be reinforced at institutions where upper class students tell new students that blatant cheating won't be tolerated. That's something most [schools with] honor codes do well . . . I would go one step further and say that message needs to be reinforced in many other ways. This is my "20-60-20" theory. As many as 20 percent of college students will cheat no matter what we do. And as many as 20% will never cheat no matter what we do-perhaps due to religious convictions, or the fear of getting caught. We're fighting for that 60% in between. They come as freshmen and hear what we say about academic integrity and say, "Okay, I'm willing to wait to see what happens." If they watch upperclassmen not cheating they tend to go in that direction, but if they see widespread cheating, they'll probably join the cheaters.

### **What can faculty members say that might help students understand the importance of Academic Integrity?**

Students need to know that complex societies depend on high levels of trust. One simple exercise is to invite students to glance at the classroom ceiling. They might then be reminded that thousands of pounds of steel and concrete are balanced directly above their heads. Everyone in the classroom-at the precise moment of the conversation-is dependent on the integrity of the people who designed and built the building.

Thoughtful comments concerning the role of trust and integrity in business were made by Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, in a June, 1999 Harvard commencement address:

*The true measure of a career is to be able to be content, even proud, that you succeeded through your own endeavors without leaving a trail of casualties in your wake. I cannot speak for others whose psyches I may not be able to comprehend, but, in my working life, I have found no greater satisfaction than achieving success through honest dealings and strict adherence to the view that for you to gain, those you deal with should gain as well. Human relations-be they personal or professional-should not be zero sum games . . . And beyond the personal sense of satisfaction, having a reputation for fair dealing is a profoundly practical virtue. We call it "good will" in business and add it to our balance sheets. . . Trust is at the root of any economic system based on mutually beneficial exchange. In virtually all transactions, we rely on the word of those with whom we do business. Were this not the case, exchange of goods and services could not take place on any reasonable scale. Our commercial codes and contract law presume that only a tiny fraction of contracts, at most, need be adjudicated. If a significant number of business people violated the trust upon which our interactions are based, our court system and our economy would be swamped into immobility. . .*

### **What can faculty members do to reduce Academic dishonesty?**

Faculty members can help reduce academic dishonesty by discussing the importance of academic integrity in their classrooms, by inviting students to write and sign the University Honor Pledge (<http://www.umd.edu/honorpledge>), and by distributing an "academic integrity guide" early in the semester (please call 314-8204 for copies). Additional instructions might be provided in the course syllabus, addressing issues like the scope of permissible collaboration on homework and laboratory assignments.

It's important not to create circumstances in which students are unduly tempted to cheat. Faculty members should arrange for effective proctoring; make sure examinations are secure; and (in larger classes) require identification of test takers.

Creative pedagogy can also discourage academic dishonesty. Plagiarism, for example, may be reduced if students are asked to discuss their papers in class, and respond to questions from other students and the teacher.

### **What penalties are imposed Academic dishonesty at Maryland?**

Strict penalties are necessary, so academic dishonesty is not trivialized. For example, the common practice at many colleges of simply awarding a failing grade for academic dishonesty is no deterrent to a student already in danger of failing the course.

The standard sanction for academic dishonesty at Maryland is the "XF" grade penalty, noted on the transcript as "failure due to academic dishonesty." Students may petition the Honor Council for removal of the "X" from the transcript one year after being found responsible for an offense, if they successfully complete an academic integrity seminar.

### **How is "education" part of the Academic Integrity system at Maryland?**

In the broadest sense, simply holding individuals accountable for their behavior has an educational value, both for them and the community as a whole. Beyond that, administrators and Honor Council members give dozens of

classroom presentations each semester, reviewing and discussing University academic integrity policies. (To arrange such a presentation, please call Andrea Goodwin at 314-8206). The academic integrity seminar (taken by students who wish to remove the "X" designation from their transcripts) is also an important part of Maryland's educational program. Seminar leaders use readings, case studies, and group discussions to focus on the underlying ethical issues regarding academic dishonesty. A detailed syllabus is available online, at <http://www.umd.edu/ethics> ("integrity seminar").

The Honor Council initiated a broader educational initiative last semester when we presented the first "What Matters to Me And Why Forum," featuring Honors Program Director Maynard Mack. Additional forums will be held each semester. "What Matters to Me and Why" speeches are transcribed, and will be available at the Honor Council website (under construction).

**Isn't it burdensome and time-consuming to report incidents of Academic dishonesty?**

A few cases are protracted. Most are not. Accused students often admit the offense and accept the XF grade penalty. If a hearing is necessary, it is conducted as an inquiry (not a trial) by a panel of students and faculty members. Questioning by lawyers is not permitted. Furthermore, a student "community advocate" is employed to assist faculty members in presenting appropriate evidence. The vast majority of cases going to hearing result in a finding of responsibility, and imposition of the XF grade penalty.

**Why have hearings at all?**

Academic dishonesty is a serious offense. It isn't reasonable-legally or ethically-to impose strict penalties without providing appropriate due process. Furthermore, when hearings are held, the process of appearing before a judicial panel helps students understand the importance of academic integrity.

**What about the threat of lawsuits?**

The state has policies to represent and indemnify employees for litigation arising out of the performance of their duties. Furthermore, we know of no reported case in the country where a faculty member has been found liable for a good-faith report of student academic dishonesty-even if the student was later determined to be innocent of any wrongdoing. No court has overturned a finding under the University's Code of Academic Integrity even though over a thousand students have been held accountable under the Code-most with serious, transcript notation penalties.

**I reported a case, and the student wasn't punished. Why should I report another?**

No fairly administered judicial system will find against the accused in every case. At Maryland, given the severity of the XF transcript notation penalty, the \*Code of Academic Integrity\* requires "clear and convincing" evidence to support a charge. In close cases, students and faculty members on hearing panels will give the benefit of the doubt to the accused. Nonetheless, even the minority of students who "win" their cases regard a hearing as a serious and solemn event. Recidivism is extremely rare.

**Is there any survey data about faculty experiences with the code of Academic Integrity?**

Yes. Referring faculty members and faculty members sitting on hearing panels receive satisfaction surveys by e-mail. Responses are kept on file in the Office of Judicial Programs. A substantial majority of respondents express satisfaction in all areas addressed, including timeliness, conduct of the hearing, and outcome of the hearing.

**Do Academic Integrity cases take a long time to resolve?**

No. On average, in spite of a record number of referrals, cases were resolved in 45 days or less during 2001-2002. Delays tend to occur when cases are referred at the very end of a semester, and cannot be resolved until the parties return to campus.

**How should I document an allegation of Academic dishonesty?**

Keep the original evidence and send copies (with a cover memorandum marked "confidential") to Andrea Goodwin at the Honor Council Office (2118 Mitchell Building, Campus). Do not impose a penalty or dismiss a student from class. Faculty members are encouraged to confer with accused students and to inform them the Honor Council will be conducting an appropriate inquiry. Concerned students, parents, or other parties should then be referred to the Honor Council administrator.