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# Academic Dishonesty

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## An Informal Summary of University Policies, Procedures, and Resources for Undergraduate Instruction

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### Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is a disturbing issue that all faculty members would like to avoid. But it is a substantial problem in college teaching and cannot be ignored. A number of major universities have reported studies in which over 75% of students surveyed admitted to engaging in some form of academic fraud ([www.nwu.edu/uacc/cai/research/recent/html](http://www.nwu.edu/uacc/cai/research/recent/html)).

A campus climate that appears to be tolerant of academic dishonesty, when combined with the added pressure that many students feel upon entering college, may actually encourage students who did not cheat in secondary school to adopt such a practice in college and throughout their lives. Faculty indifference to academic dishonesty may, similarly, communicate to students that the values of integrity and honesty in all aspects of academic life are not sufficiently important to justify any serious effort to enforce them. Most students are justifiably outraged when faculty and staff members appear to ignore obvious cases of academic dishonesty. Such feelings, should they become prevalent, will damage the sense of community on campus and alienate some of the best students from the institution. Finally, academic dishonesty deceives those who may eventually depend upon the knowledge and integrity of UCLA graduates.

The responsibility for establishing, maintaining, and fostering an understanding and appreciation for academic standards and values is held by every member of the UCLA academic community. Faculty members, however, play the most important role. They have multiple opportunities to set academic standards, help students understand academic dishonesty, teach students ways to avoid unintentional infractions, identify and confront violators of community standards, and serve as models of academic integrity.

### Defining academic dishonesty

Prevention is, of course, the best way to protect academic integrity on campus. Prevention can begin only after all members of the community understand the problem. Well-defined expectations and written standards reduce students' uncertainty about the appropriateness of

their own actions. Academic dishonesty can be divided into four categories and defined as follows:

### **Cheating**

Intentionally, or without authorization from the instructor, using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. “Unauthorized materials” include other students’ test papers during examinations.

### **Fabrication**

Intentional or unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Students have been known to create “facts” or citations when they are completing assignments, often at the last minute before they are due.

### **Facilitating academic dishonesty**

Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty. Students’ roommates and friends often overstep the bounds of academic honesty because it is not clear how much collaboration and outside help a particular assignment allows.

### **Plagiarism**

Representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise. For example, a student may copy text from a library book into his or her paper, either verbatim or paraphrased, as though it were his or her own words.

### **Strategies for preventing academic dishonesty**

Although it is unpleasant to realize that some students cheat or plagiarize, it is a fact that all instructors must face. Many instructors routinely incorporate into their course syllabi a statement about academic dishonesty that includes the above definitions of dishonesty, adjusted to fit the course specifically, as well as the consequences of such dishonesty. Faculty members might also advise students of their legitimate alternatives to dishonesty, including consulting with the instructor or their TA about any difficulties that they are encountering with an assignment and the appropriate tutoring options.

There are additional steps that faculty can take to reduce the likelihood of such dishonesty and to identify the student who does break the rules of academic integrity:

## **Examinations**

### **Preparing students**

Faculty members should state, preferably in writing and well in advance of an exam, their expectations for academic behavior. For example, let students know whether any materials will be allowed in the exam room, and be as specific as possible in describing those

materials; whether collaboration is permitted and what that includes; whether photo identification or bluebooks will be required; if texts are allowed, whether writing in the text or note cards marking pages will be allowed; whether students may enter or leave the room while the exam is in progress. While it is the student's responsibility to ask if he or she is unsure of the instructor's expectations, chances are good that if a behavior is not clearly prohibited, a student might assume that it is allowed. Instructors need not intimidate students, but many students are unaware that cheating may result in suspension or dismissal from the University. Do not belabor the point, but it may be worth mentioning from the outset to forestall any misunderstandings later on. Faculty members should also try to make students aware of the resources available to them if they are having difficulty with the material, including instructor office hours, the Academic Resources Center, special study sessions that TAs might organize, etc. The section on "Course and Curriculum Planning" of this Guide includes other suggestions for apprising students of standards of acceptable behavior and informing them that their instructor is aware of and prepared to deal with academic dishonesty.

### **Preparing the examination**

Even if instructors are not inclined to have completely different sets of questions for one exam, some disincentive for cheating is achieved by printing the same page on different colored paper so that it appears that different versions are being used, by collating the pages in different orders, or by scrambling the question order on several different versions of the exam. (Of course, instructors who use one of these options should number or letter the exams and have students indicate the appropriate number or letter on their bluebook.) Instructors who allow students to use notes or a page of formulas might consider providing that document themselves at the beginning of the exercise. Blue books can be collected before an exam and redistributed randomly, or faculty members may wish to provide blue books or paper from their department. Faculty members who are inclined to offer make-up exams might consider reordering the questions or using a different exam.

### **Grading the examination**

On occasion, a grader makes a mistake and marks an answer incorrectly. Many instructors routinely consider requests from students to correct those errors. Unfortunately, some students have attempted to exploit this practice by changing their answers after the exam has been returned and then resubmitting the fabricated work for credit. To minimize the likelihood of such fabrications, some departments photocopy all graded exams before returning them. If department resources do not permit this, some instructors photocopy the graded exam of students who, on earlier exercises, have requested regrading that resulted in a significant increase in the grade. If another regrading request is submitted, the returned exam is compared with the photocopy prior to modifying the grade. Another very simple strategy to discourage changes after a graded paper is returned is to draw a line through any remaining space at the end of an essay, lab report, or any other paper that might conceivably be altered.

### **Papers and take-home exercises**

There is no way for instructors to guarantee that plagiarism will not occur in their class.

Unfortunately, some students may wish to cut corners, others do not know how to respond to personal crises appropriately, and a few have confused notions of what documentation means. No assignment can be guaranteed plagiarism-proof.

There are, however, a number of useful strategies and tools that can be used to help reduce the likelihood of plagiarism in one's classes. The following suggestions are based on recommendations by Sonia Maasik of UCLA Writing Programs.

### **Positive motivation**

Faculty members should try to instill in their students a positive attitude toward learning. Do not let them think that the assignment is just one more hoop through which to jump. Faculty members can explain to their students why they have assigned a certain task and assure them that the instructor and TAs will read their work with care and interest.

### **Tailoring assignments**

Assignments can be tailored to encourage students to produce original work. First, make the topics specific. A broad question is easier to plagiarize for two reasons: (1) students are more likely to flounder, not knowing what the instructor wants, and (2) they can appropriate materials from a larger — and more accessible — pool of resources.

### **New assignments**

Do not recycle the same assignment quarter after quarter. Students usually know when an assignment is re-used, and some are not above borrowing a friend's paper. Admittedly, creating new assignments can seem like a lot of work, but it can frequently save time later. A side benefit, of course, is that it is more interesting for faculty members to read responses to new topics than to read the same ones over and over again.

### **The syllabus**

Let students know what plagiarism means at UCLA. Students often are taught different definitions of plagiarism in high school, and they should be informed of the standards that the University expects them to follow. The easiest way to do this is to include a note in the syllabus that defines plagiarism and explains the University's policy toward it. The following is an example of such a statement:

Plagiarism is a serious offense. It is the presentation of another author's words or ideas as if they were your own. University regulations require that any case of plagiarism be sent to the Dean of Students for review. If you have any questions about documentation, quotation, and related matters, please do not hesitate to ask me before submitting your work.

### **Collaboration**

Instructors can discuss with the class what they consider to be an acceptable level of collaboration, especially for researching and writing papers. Students sometimes do not know how to draw a line between discussing an assignment and writing up their ideas with

someone else, and need to be informed that the instructor expects their work to be their own and not that of a collaborator, if this is the case.

### **Rough drafts**

Faculty members might build the process of writing into the assignment by requesting rough drafts. Requiring a rough draft before the final version is due means that students are more likely to begin thinking of their own work and less likely to leave everything until the last minute when, in panic, they might resort to plagiarism. If reading rough drafts is not feasible, instructors might ask students to come in and discuss their plans for writing and researching an assignment. Faculty members can also ask students to submit their drafts and notes along with the final version. This is particularly effective in the case of research papers, as it provides a case history of the student's work. It is also useful for instructors to talk to the class about their own experiences with writing. Students often labor under the misconception that writing is a neat, linear process. Let them know that any writer can face false starts, dead ends, or failed research trajectories on the way to completing good work. Faced with such troubles, students may falsely conclude that the only way to complete an assignment is by plagiarizing.

### **Oral presentations**

Consider asking students to prepare brief, informal oral presentations based on their assignment; five minutes is probably sufficient. The entire class can benefit from delivering their work orally, and such a requirement serves as a check that students will actually do their own work. A student who copies his or her roommate's paper from last quarter will almost always find it difficult to present work that he or she did not originate.

### **Use of sources and documentation**

It is important that students understand the instructor's expectations regarding the use of sources and documentation. Are they supposed to read secondary material or use only their original thinking? What documentation system are they expected to use? What are acceptable and unacceptable uses of sources for this assignment? Addressing these issues can be of real pedagogical value. Students are often confused about when and how to document in different fields of study.

## **Confronting academic dishonesty**

### **Confronting cheating on examinations**

Registrar of the final grade outcome. During the exam, try if possible to get a second opinion from TAs or another observer to confirm the behavior you suspect. If possible, try to move the student who is apparently responsible to another location, creating as little disturbance as possible. Take note of the time, circumstances, and location of the observation. It is also important to take notes as to where the student was sitting in the room, whether there were empty seats separating the student from others, who was sitting nearby, etc. This will be especially useful if trying to compare examinations later. Remove any unauthorized materials that a student is using during an exam, again creating as little disturbance as possible, and

note the time and place in the exam.

Instructors should **always** allow the student to complete the exercise. Although it may seem unlikely at the time, there is always a chance that the instructor is mistaken in his or her suspicion.

After the exam, the faculty member should approach the student whom he or she suspects of cheating and explain his or her concerns. Be as objective as possible, and avoid being accusatory.

### **Confronting plagiarism**

A student's decision to complete an assignment by plagiarizing is one of the most unpleasant experiences a faculty member can face. Instructors may take some comfort in knowing that UCLA not only outlines an official procedure for handling plagiarism but also recognizes the unique contours of each case. A faculty member who believes that a portion of a student's paper was plagiarized should talk with the student. It is probably best not to begin by accusing the student of plagiarism, which may provoke belligerence in a guilty student or create panic in an innocent one. Instead, indicate what the evidence is and ask the student to explain how she or he wrote the paper. Instructors may use the word "plagiarism" when conferring with the student, although he or she will probably become defensive.

### **Reporting academic dishonesty**

Instructors may **not** assign a disciplinary grade (i.e., assign a student an "F" because he or she cheated on the exam). If appropriate, the instructor may tell the student that he or she is assigning a temporary grade of "DR" (deferred report) and referring the issue to the Dean of Students' Office ([www.saonet.ucla.edu/dos/](http://www.saonet.ucla.edu/dos/)) for resolution. The DR grade will not be calculated into the student's grade point average. Instructors will also want to put their concerns in writing, including copies of the original exam, with altered or copied answers marked and any supporting documentation. Materials should be sent to the Dean of Students' Office for adjudication (Academic Senate Regulation A-315). The Dean of Students will then inform the instructor about the outcome of the investigation and the instructor should in turn notify the