

# Academic Misconduct: A Guide for Faculty

All forms of academic misconduct are prohibited by the Student Code of Conduct. Academic misconduct is defined as dishonesty or deception in fulfilling academic requirements. It includes, but is not limited to:

- Cheating (such as looking at someone else's test or quiz or unfair use of notes or text messages)
- Plagiarism (using someone else's research or writing without attribution)
- Purchasing term papers
- Un-permitted collaboration or copying another's work
- Forged attendance (when attendance is required)
- fabrication (e.g., use of invented information or falsification of research or other findings)
- Using advantages not approved by the instructor (e.g., unauthorized review of a copy of an exam ahead of time)
- Knowingly permitting another student to plagiarize or cheat from one's work
- Submitting the same assignment in different courses without consent of the instructor.

Faculty members have a responsibility to communicate to students the boundaries of acceptable academic conduct. If faculty members are unsure of academic misconduct, they should contact their program manager or the chair of the Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee (AMAC), the body established to address formal charges of serious academic misconduct. Moreover, faculty should address issues of academic misconduct in course syllabi and list possible sanctions. Also, faculty must carefully document academic misconduct violations.

If students are unsure about a question of academic misconduct, they should consult their instructor, program manager or the AMAC chair. For students who are found to be involved in academic misconduct, their instructor has the option of lowering a grade or giving a failing grade on the project or in the course, and/or referring serious violations to the Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee. Possible AMAC sanctions are suspension, expulsion, or any sanction not less than a reprimand.

## Information for Faculty/Staff

### Mission Statement

The purpose of this information is to assist faculty in creating an atmosphere that promotes honest academic interchange among all individuals in the classroom. One of the goals of the university is to ensure that students are honest and forthright in their academic endeavors. Incidents of academic dishonesty disrupt the educational process and produce a great deal of personal anxiety for faculty members, as well as students, so it is important to support the prevention and deterrence of such incidents.

One way to accomplish this goal is for faculty members to create an environment that promotes honesty by educating students as to the university's expectations regarding proper conduct and the consequences of dishonest behavior.

### **Promoting Honesty**

Academic dishonesty deserves serious attention. Both formal research and anecdotal information on the NMSU campus reveals that in a span of over 30 years there is a slight rise in the number and methods of academic misconduct. The advent of the Internet, text messaging, and telecommunications offers new opportunities for students to take academic shortcuts and receive grades not reflecting their actual level of academic achievement.

As an educational institution, NMSU is committed to shaping good work habits and study techniques, informing students of the moral pitfalls that academic dishonesty breeds, and helping students to change inappropriate behavior when identified. The NMSU Student Code of Conduct is predicated on the philosophy of educational discipline and provides faculty, staff, and students with a process by which to hold students accountable for behavior that is inconsistent with the educational mission of the university.

The Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee provides for the objective examination of facts surrounding alleged misconduct and reinforces responsibility through educational sanctions designed to encourage students to change their behavior and to learn from their mistakes.

### **Outline Your Expectations at the Beginning of the Quarter**

Assist your students in understanding academic integrity by engaging in the following:

- Include a statement on the university's expectation of academic integrity on your syllabus. For example: "Academic integrity and honesty are basic values of NMSU. Students are expected to follow standards of academic integrity and honesty. Academic misconduct is a violation of the NMSU Student Code of Conduct subject to a maximum sanction of disciplinary suspension or expulsion as well as a grade penalty in the course"
- Discuss the importance of academic integrity and clarify university policies regarding academic misconduct prior to any graded assignment
- Present an appropriate ethical model for students by setting an example of fair and consistent behavior
- Create an environment conducive to academic integrity by avoiding stressful conditions such as inappropriate assignments, unreasonable deadlines, or capricious changes in requirements.

## **Provide a Classroom Climate that Encourages Academic Integrity**

Prevention suggestions from experienced faculty:

- Files of past examinations are sometimes maintained by student groups and are readily available to large numbers of students. Number and collect copies of examinations or rewrite examinations frequently
- Access to examinations should be limited. Destroy "waste" copies and carefully screen employees who have access to examinations. Faculty offices are not secure places to keep examinations on file
- Research has shown that if a final examination or paper is a large percentage of the final grade, students are more likely to cheat or plagiarize. Provide multiple graded opportunities
- Use essay rather than multiple choice examinations if possible.

## **Recommended Responses to Suspected Misconduct**

Some faculty members assume that the established procedures to deal with academic misconduct are so complicated that it is better to ignore the problem. This puts honest students at a disadvantage. These practices may injure both responsible students and faculty, as well as prevent the university from identifying and confronting repeat offenders. When academic misconduct is displayed, two issues arise: the issue of the grade in the class over which the faculty member has complete authority, and the issue of dishonest or deceptive behavior over which University Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee has authority to take disciplinary action. Academic dishonesty is a violation of the NMSU Student Code of Conduct. Both issues are of great importance and must be addressed if the university is to maintain high academic standards, confront deceptive behavior, and assist in changing unethical behavior.

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## **Suggested procedures to follow when an instructor witnesses suspicious behavior**

Occasionally students engage in innocent behavior that looks suspicious and sometimes students commit dishonest acts. What follows are suggestions offered from experienced faculty to address suspicious behavior:

- If a student is using notes, or crib sheets, immediately and discreetly confiscate the notes
- If students are talking, announce that no talking is permitted during the exams, and/or quietly ask the students to stop talking
- If students are talking, texting or otherwise exchanging information, they can be asked to change seats, stop texting, or move apart
- If a student is looking at others' work, announce to the class that all work is individual and/or quietly tell the student that eyes must be kept on one's own paper
- Document the student's suspicious behavior and identify those students involved by setting their exams aside and recording their names.

After a review of the exams, and you find evidence of the student misconduct, schedule a meeting with the student and describe your observations and suspicions. Ask the

student for an explanation. Inform the student that you will handle the misconduct in a fair and consistent manner. If you are satisfied with the student's response, inform the student of possible consequences related to future suspicious behavior. If not satisfied with the student's explanation, inform the student of the course of action that will be taken. For example, you may:

- Assign the appropriate grade as described in the class syllabus, and send to the student **or**
- Contact the program manager and schedule a meeting between instructor, student and program manager to mediate the misconduct episode and seek a resolution **or**
- File a formal charge with the Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee, along with supporting documentation. AMAC notify the student of the pending charges.

**Note:** Supporting documentation should include a written statement from the instructor or any person who observed the incident as well as an account of the steps taken to resolve the incident, crib notes, tests, reports, programs, written statements by the accused student and witnesses, as well as the name, address, and telephone number of any witnesses.

### **Recommended Responses to an Accusation of In-Progress Misconduct by another Student**

If one student accuses another of cheating while an examination is in progress, do any of the following as appropriate, depending on the validity of the accusation:

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- Ask the student making the accusation to see you after the examination, and observe the behavior of the accused student
- After the examination get a detailed description of suspicious behavior observed by the student making the allegation
- Inform the student making the allegation of the process for filing a formal complaint
- Instruct the student making the allegation that this is a confidential matter and should not be the subject of gossip.

Faculty should investigate and document the allegation as described in the preceding section.

### **Filing a Formal Appeal with University Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee**

In order to file a formal complaint of academic misconduct, the faculty member, student and program manager must fill out and sign an "Academic Misconduct Appeals Procedures" form. This form provides two options:

- A signed agreement concerning the allegation and possible sanctions in which the student waives the right to further appeal **or**

- A formal request by the faculty member that the case is to be forwarded to the Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee.

Upon receipt of a referral, the chair of the Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee will notify the parties of the charges and schedule a hearing. The accused will be sent a copy of the formal charge, an information sheet outlining his/her rights and options as provided by the NMSU Student Code of Conduct.

During the hearing, both the faculty member who lodged the complaint and the accused will have the opportunity to present their perspective of the incident. Based on the testimony and evidence presented at the hearing, a decision regarding the charge will be rendered. If the accused is found responsible for the offense, an appropriate disciplinary sanction will be imposed.

After a decision is rendered, the accused has the right to appeal the decision in writing within ten working days.

Should the accused be dissatisfied with the decision of an appeal, under extremely unusual circumstances the accused may request that the Vice President of Academic Affairs and ultimately the University President review the decision. The faculty member will be kept apprised of the progress of this process.

For a more detailed description of the hearing process, please consult the document titled "Makeup and Procedures of the Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee".

### **Student Non-Misconduct Appeals**

Invariably students may express dissatisfaction with a faculty member's grade assessments or enforcement of syllabi and classroom rules. Just as faculty can bring students up on charges of misconduct, so too can students challenge their grade or the enforcement of classroom policies. For this reason, it is important to document grades and be able to support classroom policy decisions as consistent not only with syllabi but also with enforcement applied to other students. Moreover, careful retention of grades, records, correspondence, and notes of conversations helps document misconduct.

Student grade and classroom policy appeals are similar to the academic misconduct procedure. A student with a course complaint will be expected to talk individually to the faculty member and program manager. The program manager will discuss the matter with the faculty member and if no resolution is reached, a joint meeting will be scheduled with faculty member, student, and program manager. Every effort should be made to reach a consensus at this stage of negotiations.

If the student still is not satisfied with the decision reached by the faculty member and the mediation of the program manager, the student has a right to request an appeals hearing. The student will fill out an "Academic Misconduct Appeals Procedures" form and request the faculty member and program manager to sign the form so that it can be forwarded to the Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee. From that point all parties

are contacted and a hearing is scheduled in the manner described in the previous section.

**For More Information**

If you have any questions regarding academic integrity, please contact your program manager or **The VPAA Office at 287-6641**.

**Sources**

Several of the ideas in this document have been adapted, with permission (pending), from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

## **Supplement: Plagiarism Guide for Faculty**

Do not assume that students have been informed about plagiarism and correct documentation in high school or another class. During an early class period, identify your expectations and give concrete examples. In assigning term paper topics, discuss the issue of plagiarism and make sure students understand proper documentation of sources. Whether you assign specific topics or let students choose their own, provide a description of the type of analysis wanted for the paper. Ask for a copy of rough drafts, bibliographic notes, and revisions. Purchased papers are more likely to be submitted when the instructor assigns a paper but does not supervise research in clearly delineated stages.

Be sure to have a statement about plagiarism in your syllabus, notifying students about consequences should you find evidence thereof. Because plagiarism cases differ, from improper citations to outright theft, you should give yourself some latitude by using a statement like this: "If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing another's work, you may receive a failing grade for the assignment and/or class and may be reported to Academic Misconduct Appeals Committee."

Before you accuse a student of plagiarism, you should verify your allegation by finding, when possible, the source of the plagiarism. Do so for your own protection. Remember you must have solid evidence before you take action or fail a student; suspicion alone is insufficient. Otherwise you can expose yourself to counter charges or even legal action. To help you gather evidence, consider the methods below.

**Texts and the Library.** Two places to check for plagiarism are your textbook and the Library. Your text may have online study materials that could provide a convenient plagiarism source. The Library staff also may help track down a printed source that supported plagiarism

**Search Engines.** Thanks to the Internet, faculty has access to dozens of search engines to track down source documents. Here are some popular ones: Google, Excite, Alta Vista, Infoseek, Yahoo!, Lycos, Snap, Northern Light, et al. If one search engine fails, try another. You can also use a meta-search engine like <http://www.metacrawler.com/>, which accesses multiple search engines. To learn more about search engines, check out Search Engine Watch <http://www.searchenginewatch.com/>. Remember, when you find a source of plagiarism bookmark the site, download and electronic copy or print a copy for evidence.

**Start With the First Paragraph.** Your word-thief probably stole from the top of the source document. So enter into a search engine a phrase from the first paragraph. There's another reason to start with leads: many search engines, publication archives and library databases summarize them in abbreviated listings.

**Choose Odd Phrases or Illogical Word Combinations.** If your search fails, using leads enter awkward locutions into a search or meta-search engine. An NMSU student was caught plagiarizing because she used British spellings and these odd-sounding

phrases in a final project: "indispensable guarantors" and "considering advertising's social impact." In less than 10 seconds, a meta-search engine generated addresses for five sites containing the source document. The word "Boolean" means "logical word combinations," such as "advertising AND ethics." That combination produced 14774 hits on Excite.com-far too many to weed through in your hunt for a source document. To catch a plagiarist, make your Boolean searches illogical, taking a rare word from the plagiarized document-"beanbag," for instance-and combining that with your operative word. By contrast, the combination "beanbag AND ethics" yielded 13 hits on Excite.com.

Note: The Academic Appeals Committee recommends that this document be an amendment to the faculty handbook.