Academic Dishonesty: A Survey of Policies and Procedures at Ontario Universities

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INTRODUCTION

This working paper has its origins in:
- ➢ the experiences of its authors (James Dianda, Ryerson University and James Neufeld, Trent University), both as teachers and as faculty responsible for handling plagiarism cases at various stages in their respective universities;
- ➢ recent media attention to the issue of academic misconduct at Ontario universities (see, for example, "The Great University Cheating Scandal" *Maclean's Magazine*, February 9, 2007);
- ➢ two recent studies by Julia M. Christensen Hughes (University of Guelph) and Donald L. McCabe (Rutgers University): "Understanding Academic Misconduct" (*The Canadian Journal of Higher Education/La revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur*, Volume 36, No. 1, 2006, pages 49 – 63); and "Academic Misconduct within Higher Education in Canada" (*The Canadian Journal of Higher Education/La revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur*, Volume 36, No. 2, 2006, pages 1 – 21)[1].

The scope of the present paper is limited. It surveys the current policies regarding undergraduate academic misconduct at all COU member institutions and highlights the five following issues:
1. Definitions Of Plagiarism In Policies Governing Student Behaviour
2. Penalties for Academic Dishonesty: Cheating and Plagiarism
3. Being Proactive
4. Transcript Notation And Public Reporting Requirements
5. Collaborative Learning And The Internet: Adjusting To Diverse Student Attitudes

Recommendations for action are summarized in a separate concluding section.

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[1] "The Great University Cheating Scandal" is available online at:
http://www.macleans.ca/homepage/magazine/article.jsp?content=20070209_174847_6984
abstracts of "Understanding Academic Misconduct" and "Academic Misconduct within Higher Education in Canada" are available at: http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/csshe/cjhe

PART ONE

Definitions Of Plagiarism In Policies Governing Student Behaviour

Most Ontario universities have adopted general policies at the undergraduate level designed to cover a range of behaviours. Such policies are variously referred to as policies on academic dishonesty, policies on academic integrity, policies on student behaviour, or policies on the rights and responsibilities of students. In some instances, policies on academic dishonesty are integrated into policies on human rights. In at least one instance, the policy is broadened to cover all academic members of the institution – students at all levels, faculty and researchers. The context within which an institution chooses to situate its policy on academic dishonesty signals specific rhetorical strategies, such as: the intention to emphasize this issue as part of a broader one; by contrast, to single it out for specific attention; or to establish a constructive dialogue about ethical behaviour rather than a punitive one about misconduct and its consequences.

All policies examined include definitions of a wide range of behaviours covered by the policy. Restricting our examination to the definition of plagiarism employed in all policies provides useful insight into the approach taken towards the task of definition and the degree of consistency which obtains across Ontario institutions.

The most common practice is to begin with a general statement defining academic integrity, followed by definitions, with examples, of specific breaches. Virtually all include disclaimers (in various types of wording) such as the following from the Queen's University policy: "As it is not possible to cover every circumstance of academic dishonesty or plagiarism, this list should be considered only as a guide[2]." Despite the disclaimer, many of the policies provide lists of dizzying length, as though the definition were nevertheless attempting to achieve the completeness which the disclaimer acknowledges as impossible.

On the specific issue of plagiarism, as on that of the broader varieties of academic misconduct, there is no serious disagreement or inconsistency about definition among Ontario's universities. Regardless of the vocabulary of the definition, plagiarism is conceived of as the representation of words or ideas from another source as the author's own, without adequate indication of the act of borrowing (quotation marks, indentation, etc.) and without proper attribution (documentation of source according to the standards of the academic discipline). The inclusion of "words or ideas" (or some similar phrase) is crucial to establishing the widest possible responsibility for authors to acknowledge their sources.

On the important issue of whether or not plagiarism must be committed knowingly for the act to constitute an offence, there is less consistency. The policy of the University of

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[2] Queen's University, "Policy on Academic Dishonesty" (1989). Viewed on May 23, 2007 at: http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/senate/policies/acaddish.html. As of June, 2007, the Queen's University Policy on Academic Dishonesty is under review.

Guelph is at one end of the spectrum: "Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt[3]." McMaster University and the University of Toronto take a similar stand, and express it in nearly identical language in their policies: "Wherever in this Policy an offence is described as depending on 'knowingly', the offence is deemed to have been committed if the person ought reasonably to have known." (McMaster) "Wherever in this Code an offence is described as depending on 'knowing', the offence shall likewise be deemed to have been committed if the person ought reasonably to have known." (Toronto)[4] Some policies are simply silent on this issue. Such silence may open up the argument of ignorance about the definition of plagiarism as a possible defence on the part of a student.

Two definitional issues illustrate the complexity of applying a basic definition of plagiarism in the modern university. The first concerns "the work of others" as it moves beyond simply "words or ideas". In the multi-faculty university, "the work of others" needs to be understood to include such things as visual images, musical ideas and all aspects of performance art. The difficulty of extending the concept of plagiarism in this way in an artistic environment that is increasingly self-referential is clear. The Ontario College of Art and Design, which must concern itself with these matters, handles the problem this way in its policy statement:

> …plagiarism occurs when a student takes and uses another person's writings, inventions, data, ideas, arguments, calculations, images, designs, or productions and offers it as his/her own work without appropriate attribution or credit. This applies to all forms of student work, including but not limited to: design projects, art projects, computer reports and software, literary compositions, phrasing, diagrams, performances, installations, constructions, photographs, films, audio tapes and videotapes.
> Thus, the act of copying, reproducing or paraphrasing portions of another's published or unpublished material and representing these as original, personal material, by not acknowledging the appropriate source or by not using appropriate academic documentation, is unacceptable academic behaviour[5].

The lengthy itemization of types of artistic production and the explicit reference to "published or unpublished material" indicate the complexity of the problem in an artistic and performance context. The OCAD policy goes on to refer students to the Deans of

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[3] University of Guelph, "Undergraduate Degree Regulations and Procedures: Academic Misconduct" (2007-2008). Viewed on May 23, 2007, at:
http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconductoffen.shtml.
[4] McMaster University, "Academic Integrity Policy" (2006), viewed on May 23, 2007, at:
http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/AcademicIntegrity.pdf; University of Toronto, "Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters" (1995). Viewed on May 23, 2007, at:
http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.html#_Toc469656991.
[5] Ontario College of Art and Design, "Code of Student Conduct" (1994, updated 1997 and 2004). Viewed on May 23, 2007, at:
http://www.ocad.ca/Assets/PDF_MEDIA/Ontario+College+of+Art+$!26+Design/about/policies/Student+Code+of+Conduct.pdf.

individual Faculties for clarification, suggesting perhaps that the application of the definition may vary in different artistic contexts.

The second definitional issue concerns the rise of the internet and the nature of information sharing on the world wide web. Many of the Ontario policies acknowledge "computer codes" as a form of text included in the definition of plagiarism. Only a few (Guelph, Ryerson, Ottawa, Carleton, Trent and York), however, explicitly cite internet resources as sources requiring appropriate documentation. In light of issues identified by Hughes and McCabe about the ways in which the internet is changing students' perceptions of the ownership of intellectual property, this omission may need to be corrected as policies are reviewed. (See also section five of this working paper.)

Even a cursory scan of the definitional sections of these policy documents establishes one overwhelming impression. However clear their intentions to take the high ground and situate the discussion of academic dishonesty within a framework of responsibility and student integrity, the detailed language of most documents establishes instead a highly legalistic atmosphere that undermines those intentions. It is clear from a survey of the definitions of plagiarism alone that much of the advice concerning wording has been legal, and that an overriding concern is to establish a legally sound framework for proceeding successfully against offenders where charges of plagiarism need to be pursued. Sound legal wording is an important consideration, but the primary intent of the policies can get lost in the process.

The primary goal of effective policies, and particularly of their definitional sections, should be to provide clear, unambiguous information to those governed by the policy so that they can avoid committing an offence. The secondary goal should be to enable institutions to proceed effectively against those who have nevertheless offended. Whether these two goals are compatible within a single document is an open question. The University of Ottawa is among institutions that have attempted to answer this question, by providing near the very beginning of its official policy, a link to a less formal, more informative document for student use. Its official policy opens as follows:

> Academic fraud is an act by a student that may result in a false academic evaluation of that student or of another student. Without limiting the generality of this definition, academic fraud occurs when a student commits any of the following offences:
>
> a) commits plagiarism or cheating of any kind; (to obtain more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, consult our Web site at http://www.uottawa.ca/plagiarism.pdf)[6].

The link takes readers directly to a three-page, large-print, user-friendly, "plainspeak" pamphlet (relevant to the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Faculty of Social Sciences

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[6] University of Ottawa, "Academic Fraud" (2003-2005). Viewed on May 23, 2007, at: http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/info/regist/crs/0305/home_5_ENG.htm.

in this case) which is unburdened by legal considerations and clearly directed at the student who seeks practical advice. It provides one or two succinct definitions, a few pertinent examples, and references to further resources for handling more complex questions of accreditation and attribution. Many universities doubtless have such resources, but few guide the student so quickly and effectively away from the discouraging world of legal qualification to the helpful one of clear advice.

Recommendations

The members of OCAV should be encouraged to examine the question of consistency of definition with respect to the question of "knowing" or deliberate commission of an offence. Does the inconsistency noted in this paper create a problem of equity across the province, one which, for example, might disadvantage a student seeking to transfer from one institution to another or to transfer credits from one institution to another? If so, are there actions which could be taken over time to correct such inequity?

In reviewing their policies on academic dishonesty, institutions should be encouraged to give explicit consideration to including internet sources of all types within their definitions.

Universities should consider highlighting user-friendly guides to responsible academic behaviour within their formal policies, in order to fulfill the primary goal of student education and minimize the numbing effects of legally precise policy language.

PART TWO

Penalties for Academic Dishonesty: Cheating and Plagiarism

One of the more controversial aspects of any policy on academic honesty is the section dealing with penalties. To help focus our discussion, let us agree that there ought to be a clear "preference for educational and rehabilitative sanctions rather than punitive action."[7] Implementing positive measures that help promote a culture and practice of academic honesty is more effective in promoting widespread adherence to the policy than the threat of serious penalties. Universities must certainly play an active role in educating students about the nature and importance of academic honesty and in ensuring that the student's academic environment is itself conducive to putting these ideals into practice.

> Education and remediation are key to promoting an environment in which academic integrity will flourish. It should not be possible for a student to claim that he/she was not warned about the University's academic misconduct regulations, what constitutes academic misconduct and the potential consequences of transgressing.[8]

However, even if universities do all that can reasonably be expected by way of enacting positive measures to promote the practice of academic honesty, inexcusable violations will occur. In these instances, some punitive action must be taken and the severity of the penalty must reflect the seriousness of the violation.

> Where a breach of academic integrity is suspected, the university must treat the matter with a level of seriousness which reflects the importance attached to academic honesty at all universities.[9]

In this section we shall examine the various policies governing penalties for academic misconduct at universities across Ontario and determine the extent to which there is consensus regarding the level of seriousness with which breaches of academic honesty must be treated. Throughout, our focus will be on the two most common forms of academic dishonesty; namely, cheating and plagiarism.

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[7] Carleton University, "Academic Integrity Policy" (2005). Viewed on May 26, 2007, at: http://www.carleton.ca/studentaffairs/academic_integrity/docs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_Final_June2006.pdf

[8] University of Guelph, "Undergraduate Degree Regulations and Procedures: Academic Misconduct" (2007-2008). Viewed on May 27, 2007, at:
http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconducteduc.shtml

[9] University of Ontario Institute of Technology, "Academic Integrity Student Guide." Viewed on May 29, 2007, at:
http://www.uoit.ca/assets/Section~specific/Current~students/Learning~technologies/Policies/PDF/Student_Academic_Integrity_Guide.pdf

As noted in the previous section, there is a strong consensus among universities as to what constitutes cheating and plagiarism on an assignment, test, and exam. However, the consensus does not appear nearly as strong when it comes to determining the appropriate level of seriousness with which these breaches of academic integrity should be dealt. Given that specific instances of plagiarism and cheating can vary according to severity, it is not surprising to find that all universities employ a range of increasingly severe penalties. There is general agreement on the upper part of the range, which is reserved for the more egregious violations, with suspension, expulsion, and loss of degree topping most lists. There is also a general agreement that repeat instances deserve more severe sanctions than first time offenses, though there is less agreement as to what this entails. Some universities require a minimum penalty of suspension for a second offense, but many simply say that a second offense shall receive a more serious penalty. However, where we find the strongest indication that serious discrepancies exist among universities is at the lower end of the penalty range. Here we find significant variance in what universities endorse as the minimum penalty that should accompany an instance of cheating or plagiarism.

The majority of universities allow for the possibility of a less serious penalty than an automatic failing grade on a test, exam, or assignment to accompany a first charge of plagiarism or cheating. These penalties include giving a reprimand (oral or written) or assigning a remediation program. Eight universities allow for the submission of a make-up assignment or the rewriting an essay or report as a potential penalty for academic dishonesty, and the majority does not require an accompanying grade penalty.

Guelph is one of the few universities to offer explicit guidelines for assigning penalties. Though the guidelines do not attempt to delineate sharply between minor and major violations of academic honesty, the significance of the difference is clear and different penalties are recommended for each. In the case of a minor violation, the minimum penalty is the submission of a new assignment without requiring a grade penalty, the maximum penalty is a grade of zero ("0") on the work in question, and the recommended penalty is a loss of marks. The recommended penalty for a second minor violation is a "0" on the work in question, with a loss of grades and suspension being the respective minimum and maximum penalties. In the case of a major violation of academic honesty, the minimum and recommended penalty is a "0" in the course and the maximum penalty is suspension from the University. The recommended penalty for a second major violation is suspension.

Like Guelph, Trent appears to regard a loss of marks as the usual penalty and reserves the penalty of "0" on an assignment, test, or exam for the more serious violations. Trent's policy allows an instructor to determine if academic dishonesty has occurred, and if so, whether a "reduction of the earned mark on an assignment (including a test or examination) is appropriate."[10] The instructor is free to determine the number of marks deducted based on his or her assessment of the severity of the violation of academic

[10] Trent University Academic Calendar (2005-2006). Viewed on May 28, 2007 at http://www.trentu.ca/admin/ro/calendar/2006-07/uc1.html

honesty up to the point of assigning a grade of "0". In those instances when "the instructor believes that academic dishonesty has occurred that would warrant a grade of "0" on an assignment (including a test or examination) because of the severity of the academic dishonesty, the instructor will report the matter to the Chair."[11] It is the Chair who then investigates and determines whether a grade of "0" is warranted. The intention here appears to be to ensure that a grade penalty of "0" is assigned only to work that involves significant cheating or plagiarizing.

Simply stating that the recommended penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a reduction in marks is vague and no indication is given as to how seriously various instances of cheating and plagiarism are to be penalized. If left solely to the discretion of instructors, there is apt to be considerable variation in how similar cases are penalized, even within the same department. The result can be a system that lacks the level of consistency to satisfy basic conditions of fairness. Without providing further guidelines for applying this penalty, some mechanism must be in place to ensure that it is applied with appropriate consistency.

To ensure consistency and fairness, some universities centralize the process of assigning penalties. At Brock, for example, penalties are assigned through the Office of the Dean. York requires that all penalties be reviewed by a Faculty committee. While these measures effectively address the issue of consistency in deducting marks, there is still the matter of vagueness in the policy. Is it the position of the University that even minor violations are deserving of a significant reduction in marks? How significant a deduction in marks should students expect to receive for relatively minor breaches of academic honesty?

The policies at many universities are silent on the issue. However, several universities have policies that make it clear that students should expect to receive serious penalties even for relatively minor violations of academic honesty. McMaster, for example, allows for a reduction in marks as a penalty for academic dishonesty, but recommends a grade of "0" on the offending assignment, test, or exam as the usual penalty. The University of Toronto includes the submission of a make-up assignment in the list of penalties for cheating and plagiarism but has guidelines that recommend a penalty of "not less than twice the value of the exam, work or test."[12] Ottawa requires that any reduction in marks for academic dishonesty must result in a failing grade. Waterloo has recently revised its minimum penalty from requiring an automatic failing grade to requiring a "0" in the course element and a 5 mark deduction on the final course grade.[13] Ryerson, Lakehead, and the Royal Military College each specify that a grade of "0" in the course element is the minimum penalty that can be assigned for cheating and plagiarism.

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[11] ibid.

[12] University of Toronto, "Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters" (1995), Appendix "C", "Relation of Offences and Sanctions" (#1). Viewed on May 28, 2007, at:
http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.html

[13] The policy revision takes effect on September 1, 2007.

It would appear that there are considerable differences among some universities as to how seriously we should penalize the less severe violations of cheating and plagiarism. Whereas some universities reserve the penalty of assigning "0" on course work for the more serious instances of cheating or plagiarism, others require or recommend this penalty even for relatively minor offenses. For repeat offenses, the differences can be equally significant, ranging from a recommended penalty of "0" on the work in question at one university to a required disciplinary period of suspension of not less than one term at another.

Of course, one must be careful not to assume too much about the actual practices at various universities from a review of their policies on assigning penalties. Though a policy at University A, which requires or recommends a grade of "0" for any instance of plagiarism may appear far stricter than the policy at University B, which recommends only a grade reduction, the normal practice at University A may be such that only the more serious violations are in fact penalized and instructors deal with the so-called "minor" violations informally. The practical reality may be that those violations of academic honesty that are actually given a grade of "0" at University A receive a significant reduction in marks at University B. Therefore, the two may not be so far apart as it initially seemed regarding how they actually penalize cheating and plagiarism.

Alternatively, the practice at University A may be such that formal charges of academic dishonesty are often laid against what University B views as lesser offenses that deserve only a loss of a few marks or a chance to re-submit without a grade penalty. In this case, the two universities differ significantly in their practice of penalizing students found guilty of violations of academic honesty. The appearance is that University B views these relatively minor infractions of academic honesty much less seriously than does University A.

Setting aside speculative considerations regarding actual practices at universities, there are significant philosophical differences between policies that reserve the penalty of "0" for the more serious and extensive acts of academic dishonesty and ones that require or recommend a grade of "0" as the minimum penalty for any instance of cheating or plagiarism. As universities come under increasing public scrutiny, these differences raise challenging issues. Universities are the principal public institution for promoting and upholding the principles of academic honesty. Yet, there does not seem to be a strong consensus among universities as to how seriously violations ought to be penalized.

To focus more sharply on the issue, consider the case of Joe Student, who is doing well in a course and works hard on his ten-page essay assignment. Joe decides to copy a few sentences (fifty words in total) from an external source and insert it into his essay without citation. The instructor assigned the essay a grade of A- before she discovered that it contained plagiarized material. At most, the instructor believes that the plagiarized material made a marginal difference in the grade and that Joe would have received no less than a B+ had he not plagiarized. Joe has no prior record of academic misconduct, and he was not unduly affected in his judgment by any unusual circumstance.

We shall assume that Mr. Student's university has done its job in creating an environment that educates students about the basic tenets of its policy on academic honesty. Mr. Student, in other words, cannot reasonably plead ignorance of the policy as an excuse. We shall further assume that it has been determined at a hearing that Joe's misconduct cannot be attributed to an innocent mistake or unintentional act on his part. We shall assume, in other words, that Joe Student's action is deemed inexcusable and that he has been found guilty of plagiarism.

In this case, we have only one real consideration. What is the appropriate penalty to assign this level of plagiarism? Should we view the seriousness of this infraction as something that deserves a grade of "0" as the penalty? Or should we view it less seriously, as something requiring only a reprimand or reduction in marks? If the latter, would a reduction in the 10-20 marks range be deemed appropriate, excessive, or lenient?

Those who would recommend a grade reduction as the appropriate penalty to assign Mr. Student might argue that an automatic assignment of a grade of "0" for the essay is much too severe. Mr. Student, it might be argued, completed most of his assignment without cheating, and it would be excessively punitive to dismiss all his hard work just because a very small fraction of his assignment involved plagiarized material. According to this line of argument, Joe Student deserves to be penalized for his academic dishonesty, but he should receive some credit for the fact that most of the essay represents his own work. The question then becomes, how severe should the grade reduction be, given the particulars of the case?

Those who would recommend a minimum penalty of "0" might argue that in order to receive a grade, an assignment, test, or exam must meet a high standard of academic honesty. Work submitted that fails to meet this standard would not be accepted for purposes of evaluation. On this view, any student found guilty of cheating or plagiarism would receive, at a minimum, a grade of "0". In the case of Joe Student, the fact that most of the work in his essay was his own would not matter. The fact that he was found guilty of plagiarism means that he did not meet the required standard of academic honesty for having his work accepted.

To get to the heart of the issue, we need to see if a consensus is possible as to the seriousness of Joe Student's breach of academic honesty and the penalty that best reflects this seriousness. This ultimately requires a dialogue within and among universities. If there is a consensus that it is appropriate that Joe Student should receive a grade of "0" on his essay, how much less serious would Mr. Student's plagiarism have to be in order to lose this consensus? If there is no consensus, how much more serious would Joe Student's plagiarism have to be in order for a consensus to emerge?

In the example of Joe Student, we assumed that his university did all that could reasonably be expected by way of enacting positive measures to promote the understanding and practice of academic honesty. Mr. Student could not use ignorance as an excuse or claim that "he was not warned about the University's academic misconduct regulations, what constitutes academic misconduct and the potential consequences of

transgressing." We further assumed that Mr. Student could not present a convincing argument demonstrating that his failure to reference was an innocent oversight on his part. These are important assumptions, and it is not difficult to imagine circumstances where some these assumptions would not hold and where a charge plagiarism would not be deemed warranted. Under such circumstances, it might still be deemed appropriate to deduct marks or require a resubmission. However, we are only interested in the particular case where the charge of plagiarism was deemed warranted and where Mr. Student was found guilty of a relatively minor act of plagiarism.

As we have seen, several universities have policies that require that Mr. Student receive a grade of "0" for his essay. Requiring a grade of "0" as the minimum penalty makes clear that the standard of academic honesty for having work accepted for credit toward a course is quite high, and it sends a clear message to students that all violations, even those that may seem relatively minor, are viewed seriously and will have serious consequences. There is no ambiguity as to the grade penalty a student's work will receive if he or she is found guilty of cheating or plagiarism, and there will be no question about relatively minor violations being exceptions.

However, since it is a consensus we are interested in, it is not necessary that each university accepts the grade of "0" as the required minimum charge. Some universities might find a slightly more flexible position, like that adopted by McMaster University, a more acceptable or realistic policy objective. According to the McMaster guidelines, "The first time an undergraduate student is found guilty of academic dishonesty, the penalty is generally either a letter or a grade reduction or a zero on the assignment in question, but is most often a zero."[14] In essence, the McMaster policy allows for a reduction of marks as the penalty for cheating or plagiarism but recommends that the penalty should usually be a grade of "0" on the course element.

Of course, adopting a policy that recommends a grade of "0" on an assignment, test, or exam as the usual penalty for first-time instances of academic dishonesty requires that attention be given to ensuring consistency in determining how exceptions are determined and how severely they are expected to be penalized. But this is no obstacle and is perhaps necessary in order to ensure that the recommended penalty is always seriously considered as the one most appropriate. As we have seen, Brock and York already have procedures in place that can effectively deal with these concerns and ensure that the recommended penalty is always seriously considered.

The main point here is that a university that requires the grade of "0" as the minimum penalty for academic dishonesty and a university that recommends the grade of "0" as the usual grade penalty for academic dishonesty can share a strong consensus as to how seriously even first-time minor violations ought to be penalized. Though there will be some areas of disagreement, the basis is there for a much greater area of agreement than currently exists as to when a grade of "0" is the appropriate penalty for cheating or

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[14] McMaster University, "Academic Integrity Policy" (2006). Viewed on May 29, 2007, at: http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/AcademicIntegrity.pdf

plagiarism. It may well be, for example, that Joe Student would have received a grade of "0" at both universities. The immediate issue, however, is whether there can be a consensus among universities that their respective policies on academic honesty should, at a minimum, recommend that the grade penalty of "0" as the usual penalty that should accompany a charge of cheating or plagiarism. If this is possible, there is a basis for a meaningful consensus.

It is a recommendation of this paper that universities seriously consider requiring that a grade penalty of "0" must accompany any charge of cheating or plagiarism. Those universities that find they cannot embrace this policy should seriously consider whether they can accept a policy whose guidelines stipulate that the usual grade penalty to accompany a first-time charge of plagiarism or cheating, including relatively minor infractions, is a "0". As has been suggested, a strong consensus could exist among universities even if they were split in their choices between these two penalty guidelines. Certainly a consensus among universities that the usual penalty for cheating and plagiarism is a grade of "0" on the work in question would be a significant improvement over the current situation.

We have seen that there is a strong consensus among universities that a second violation of academic dishonesty should receive a more serious penalty. (This requires an effective system of recording violations of academic honesty across a university and flagging repeat offenses.) However, it is frequently left unspecified what a minimum required or recommended penalty for a second violation should entail. It is recommended that the minimum penalty for a second violation of academic honesty should be suspension for a period of at least one term. Again, penalty guidelines that allow for a lesser penalty but recommend suspension for a period of at least one term as the usual penalty capture much of the spirit of the aforementioned required penalty and can form the basis for a strong consensus.

Universities are our society's principal institutions for cultivating and promoting a serious appreciation of the value and importance of academic honesty. It is important that, as much as possible, they speak with one voice regarding the seriousness with which instances of academic dishonesty are treated and penalized. While a general consensus here does not require identical penalties for plagiarism, it does require a certain agreement about the seriousness with which any violation of academic honesty must be treated and penalized. Universities certainly should not promote the view that a little bit of cheating here and there is a relatively minor matter that does not deserve serious consequences. Such a view would not only be inconsistent with its own ideals and mission, it would be harmful for society.

Recommendations

Universities need to develop a much stronger consensus regarding the appropriate penalties for academic dishonesty. Current differences in how instances of plagiarism and cheating are penalized at various universities appear highly uneven. In order to make clear the seriousness of even minor violations of academic honesty in a manner consistent

with the importance all universities must attach to academic honesty, universities should adopt a policy that either requires or strongly recommends that the minimum penalty for instances of cheating and plagiarism is a grade of "0" on the work in question.

For a second violation of academic dishonesty, the required or recommended minimum penalty ought to be a period of disciplinary suspension of at least one term.

PART THREE

Being Proactive

Increasingly, universities have been emphasizing the importance of proactive measures to reduce instances of academic misconduct. As we have seen from the previous section, universities could hardly justify assigning serious penalties for violations of academic honesty if they did not take proactive measures aimed at educating students about their policies. These measures include instructors making clear their expectations regarding academic honesty in relation to their specific course, identifying areas that cause students the most problems (for example, paraphrasing), changing tests, exams and assignments, etc.

To the above list universities should add a strategy that aims to educate students before they get to universities. One frequently hears complaints from faculty that students entering university directly from high school simply do not realize what academic honesty requires in relation to tests, exams, and assignments, and this is sometimes used as an excuse for leniency in laying charges and assigning penalties. These complaints are usually based on anecdotal evidence, and it is beyond the scope of this work to investigate just how well the high schools are doing in this regard. However, with increasing attention being paid to the topic of academic honesty in the media, it would be wise for universities and the high schools to engage in a dialogue about their respective positions. Universities should make clear what understanding regarding academic honesty they would like to see among students entering university from high school. For example, universities should make clear what their expectations are for these students concerning their understanding of plagiarism. Ideally, students entering university from high school should already know that all universities attach the utmost importance to academic honesty and that they treat all violations very seriously.

What we shall briefly consider here is another type of strategy that is aimed at specific students who have been identified as being in particular need of receiving remedial help. Students who have been charged with academic misconduct are a prime example. Rather than apply only punitive measures in response to instances of academic dishonesty, we should allow that students who have been charged with academic dishonesty may be required to take remedial programs. These programs should not be thought of as punitive measures. They are to be offered because certain students have been identified as needing additional tutorial work regarding academic honesty. The objective here is to keep students who have been charged from re-offending and placing their education in serious jeopardy. Currently, Carleton, UOIT, Ryerson, and York employ academic integrity tutorials, though it is not clear that all allow the tutorial to be assigned in the absence of a charge of academic dishonesty.

However, as some of these universities have indicated, it is not only students who have been charged with academic dishonesty who may be identified as being at risk and who could benefit from these remedial programs. Students who are interviewed by their instructors because of a suspicion of academic misconduct, but not charged, can also be

students in need of a remedial program. These are students whose work landed them in a grey area. There are clearly some problems with their work but the evidence does not quite support a charge of academic dishonesty. Rather than wait until the student does engage in academic misconduct, it would be preferable to be able to assign the tutorial and provide additional help to keep the student from being charged in another course.

Of course, in order to assign a remedial program to a student who has not been charged with an offense, we must be especially careful not to treat the remedial program as a sanction. It is not to be assigned so that a student who is "skating on the edge" of academic dishonesty can receive a penalty without being charged. The sole justification for the tutorial must be remedial.

Recommendations

Universities should work closely with the high schools and make clear what level of understanding regarding academic honesty they would like to see high school students possess before they start university.

Universities should have remedial programs in place for students who have been identified as being at risk of violating some of the basic tenets of academic honesty.

PART FOUR

Transcript Notation And Public Reporting Requirements

Transcript Notation

From an Ontario-wide perspective, the question of the recording of instances of academic dishonesty on a student's transcript is an important one, since a notation on the official transcript is the only means by which a record of academic dishonesty can be guaranteed to be available to another institution. Whether or not such a record *should* be available outside of the original institution is, of course, a separate question, one that relates to the purpose of discipline in these cases: is it intended to be a deterrent, or to be punitive beyond the confines of the original instance of academic dishonesty? However this question may be answered, inconsistency of practice among Ontario institutions could give rise to violations of natural justice. Students applying from two different institutions to transfer or to enter graduate or professional programs could be severely disadvantaged if, for example, both had committed a similar offence at their home institutions, but only one was obliged to present a transcript which recorded the disciplinary history behind the academic result.

Most Ontario universities employ some version of a two-tier system of recording offences. The first is a confidential file internal to the university (or, in some cases, internal to the Faculty of study) which records confirmed cases of academic dishonesty only for the purpose of verifying possible subsequent offences. The second is a notation on the official transcript for more serious instances, usually multiple infractions which have resulted in a penalty of failure in a course, suspension, expulsion or rescinding of the degree.

The transcript notation of a breach of the policy may be separate from the transcript notation of the academic consequences of that breach. For example, the transcript may show that a student has failed a course, or even received "0" in a course, without showing that the reason for the failure (or the "0") was an infraction of the policy. Likewise, even notations of withdrawal or suspension would need to be identified as disciplinary actions, to distinguish them from academic decisions on the part of the student or institutional consequences for poor academic performance. Notations of expulsion or rescinding of a degree presumably require no further annotation.

Many Ontario institutions employing a separate code on the transcript that specifies academic dishonesty as the cause for a particular entry make provision in their policies for expunging that code (though not the academic record itself) after some specified time period. The specified time period, where expunging the record in this way is possible, varies from institution to institution.

In most instances, completion of degree requirements is the trigger which allows for expunging of the record. Even here, however, there is inconsistency from institution to institution. Some automatically clear the student's record at this point (e.g. Nipissing,

Guelph, Brock); others require application from the student to initiate the process, which appears to be automatic (e.g. Trent, Carleton); some require petition from the student, which may or may not be granted, depending on the circumstances (e.g. Ryerson). Where institutions allow the record to be expunged without the completion of degree requirements, the required period before a student may petition to have the record of academic dishonesty expunged varies from three to eight years from the last registration, with most institutions favouring three or five years.

For the most serious penalties, suspension, expulsion, or rescinding of the degree, the policies of twelve Ontario institutions suggest that the transcript notation of academic dishonesty is permanent. It is impossible to be precise, even on this issue, because one of these twelve universities allows for the possibility of appeal to the President in even the most serious of cases, one allows for records of suspension and expulsion, but not of rescinding of the degree, to be expunged, while others employ language that suggests that permanence is the norm, but not necessarily universally applied. The most revealing statistic is that the policies of eight Ontario universities remain silent on this important issue, which suggests that quite significant inconsistencies of practice may obtain in this important area.

Taking a broader view, however, it is clear from a survey of the policies that Ontario universities employ the same general philosophy in handling the issue of transcript notations of academic offences, and that that philosophy is founded on compassion for the individual student. The overriding concern, evident in the two-tier system of record-keeping and in the possibility of expunging the student record in many instances, is that application of the policy should not unduly stigmatize students for a single offence, or for infractions which may have been the result of genuine error or misunderstanding. Furthermore, extreme severity in this area would be an undue discouragement to students who have reformed their behaviour after being punished under such a policy. The Queen's University website provides the clearest statement of this principle. "The Senate Committee on Academic Procedures felt that to leave these notations on the transcript indefinitely would be unduly harsh since students would have no means of subsequently demonstrating their rectitude[15]."

Recommendation

On the recommendation of OCAV, OURA should be asked to conduct a thorough review of the transcript notation of infractions under policies of academic dishonesty at Ontario universities to determine whether any serious inconsistencies exist and, if they do, whether they might be addressed on a province-wide basis.

Public Reporting Requirements

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[15] Queen's University Website, "Policy on Transcript Terminology for Students Withdrawing from Queen's University," 1995. Viewed on May 11, 2007, at:
(http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/senate/policies/transcrp.html).

The public reporting of statistics and of the disposition of cases under a university's policy on academic dishonesty can serve a similar purpose for two different constituencies. It can publicize the nature and extent of infractions which are handled under the policy internally, for the institution itself, and externally, for the broader public. Externally, such reporting might serve as a type of performance indicator for the institution, demonstrating the seriousness with which it treats instances of academic dishonesty among its students.

As with any such indicator, its real value is found in comparisons, both over time and across institutions. An individual institution can use the statistics generated over time to determine whether academic dishonesty is on the rise or waning, and thus judge whether its policies and procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty are effective. The Ontario system could use system-wide reporting to provide objective commentary about the extent of academic dishonesty (in response, for example, to media reports about "epidemics" of cheating) and provide historical data to help interpret current trends. Institution-to-institution comparisons, while potentially a very sensitive issue, should not be discounted only because they would be controversial. In the best case, they might demonstrate a general consistency of student behaviour that would establish a useful base for analysis and action. In the more difficult case of significant discrepancies among individual institutions, they would prompt necessary discussion of the genuine comparability of existing policies and reporting methods, and could identify best practices from which individual institutions might benefit. In any case, the importance currently attached to public disclosure and public accountability suggests that universities should not obstruct the release of such information, except where it violates privacy and confidentiality.

Nine Ontario institutions already require an annual report on cases of academic dishonesty to their Senate or equivalent body. Since there is no indication that such reports should be confidential, they are presumably already available to members of the public who request them or know how to find them on a university's website. Locating them, however, is not an easy task for the uninitiated. Of the eleven institutions that do not require an annual report, one or two nevertheless provide one on an *ad hoc* basis. Again, these reports are difficult, if not impossible, to find on the websites.

The trend, then, seems to be towards reporting and disclosure, but there is no uniformity of format that would make meaningful comparisons possible. There is a risk involved in this state of ad hocery. Casual readers of such reports might draw unfounded comparisons, particularly if they simply read the statistics without some knowledge of the differences in policy, implementation and practice which underlie them. COU may wish to consider whether an initiative similar to CUDO, the Common University Dataset for Ontario, might be undertaken with respect to the reporting of statistics relating to cases of academic dishonesty.

Recommendation

If COU believes that some system-wide coherence of statistical reporting of cases of academic dishonesty would be useful, it should refer the issue to OCAV for detailed study.

PART FIVE

Collaborative Learning And The Internet: Adjusting To Diverse Student Attitudes

Hughes and McCabe note two factors in emerging student behaviour that have a significant bearing on the ways in which academic dishonesty is defined and policy infractions are punished:

> 1) the emergence of collaborative learning models as a teaching strategy in secondary and post-secondary institutions;
> 2) the differing attitudes towards questions of intellectual property, authorship and originality in collectivist (often non-Western) cultures and traditions[16].

To these we would add a third, related issue:

> 3) the revolutionary effect on student thinking of the world wide web's ideal of free, universally accessible information, often anonymously or collectively generated (e.g. Wikipedia).

Singly or in combination, these three factors are lending credibility to a student conception of research results as communally constructed and communally "owned." Such an attitude is completely at odds with academe's credo of the intellectual pedigree of an idea as individually identifiable and scrupulously recorded through the mechanisms of citations and bibliographies.

Faculty are not immune to these influences. Since the emergence of computer technology, many faculty members in the province have probably, at some point, captured a piece of information from the world wide web for a Power Point slide, without providing a full citation for the source in their presentation. The seduction of cut-and-paste lecture preparation can be hard to resist. Students, however, can easily fail to distinguish between what is apparently allowable (the obvious importing of a graph or a visual from the web without appropriate documentation on the part of the instructor) and what is not (the use of similar material, unattributed, in a student essay or assignment.)

Some (though certainly not all) instances of student academic dishonesty may therefore be the result of cultural assumptions that have not been identified or openly challenged. It is no longer possible for universities to assume that the principles of Western intellectual culture and of previous generations of scholars regarding intellectual property and the ownership of ideas have been uniformly instilled in all their students prior to their arrival at university. In such an environment, peer assumptions about what is acceptable behaviour and the unconscious example of instructors can have far more influence on student actions than formal definitions and statements of policy.

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[16] See Hughes and McCabe, "Academic Misconduct Within Higher Education in Canada," p.15 and "Understanding Academic Misconduct," p.5.

With respect to these two issues (collaborative learning practices and the world wide web as a source), academic dishonesty policies at Ontario universities vary widely. The policies of nine institutions make no explicit mention of either of these issues. Two universities (Trent and Ottawa) make explicit mention of the internet as a source that must be properly acknowledged, but not of the issue of the guidelines applying to information generated by collaborative projects. Five universities (Queen's, Brock, McMaster, RMC, WLU) explicitly address the issue of collaboration in their policies, but not that of internet sources. Only four (Guelph, Carleton, Ryerson, York) deal explicitly with both. Although the definitions of all Ontario universities are broadly enough worded to include these matters implicitly within the purview of the policies, the varying degrees of silence on these specific issues could leave room for students to contest a decision under the policy, for the reasons outlined above.

The York University policy offers one example of brief statements that acknowledge these issues clearly and directly. Its definition of cheating includes: "Submitting work prepared in collaboration with another or other member(s) of a class, when collaborative work on a project has not been authorized by the instructor." Its definition of plagiarism clearly states: "Any use of the work of others, whether published, unpublished or posted electronically, attributed or anonymous, must include proper acknowledgement[17]."

Recommendation

Universities should examine the emerging attitudes towards information gathering and information sharing in their student populations and address those attitudes directly in setting forth their expectations for student learning strategies and standards of scholarship; faculty should be particularly mindful of the potential effect of their own example when preparing classroom presentations and materials for their students.

OCAV should consider the issues of differing cultural traditions, collaborative learning strategies and the effect of internet information on student assumptions, and, through the Vice-Presidents Academic, should offer advice to Ontario universities on ways to address these issues in relevant policy statements and informational programs.

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[17] York University Senate Policy on Academic Honesty (2005). Viewed on May 22, 2007, at: http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=69

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Part One

1.   The members of OCAV should be encouraged to examine the question of consistency of definition with respect to the question of "knowing" or deliberate commission of an offence. Does the inconsistency noted in this paper create a problem of equity across the province, one which, for example, might disadvantage a student seeking to transfer from one institution to another or to transfer credits from one institution to another? If so, are there actions which could be taken over time to correct such inequity?

2.   In reviewing their policies on academic dishonesty, institutions should be encouraged to give explicit consideration to including internet sources of all types within their definitions.

3.   Universities should consider highlighting user-friendly guides to responsible academic behaviour within their formal policies, in order to fulfill the primary goal of student education and minimize the numbing effects of legally precise policy language.

Part Two

4.   Universities need to develop a much stronger consensus regarding the appropriate penalties for academic dishonesty. Current differences in how instances of plagiarism and cheating are charge at various universities appear highly uneven and extreme.

5.   In order to make clear the seriousness of even minor violations of academic honesty in a manner consistent with the importance all universities must attach to academic honesty, universities should seriously consider adopt a policy that either requires or strongly recommends that the minimum penalty for instances of cheating and plagiarism is a grade of "0" on the work in question.

6.   For a second violation of academic dishonesty the required or recommended minimum penalty out to be a disciplinary suspension for a minimum of one term.

Part Three

7.   Universities should work closely with the high schools and make clear what level of understanding regarding academic honesty they would like to see high school students possess before they start university.

8.   Universities should have remedial programs in place for students who have been identified as being at risk of violating some of the basic tenets of academic honesty and thereby placing their education in jeopardy.

Part Four

9.   On the recommendation of OCAV, OURA should be asked to conduct a thorough review of the transcript notation of infractions under policies of academic dishonesty at Ontario universities to determine whether any serious inconsistencies exist and, if they do, whether they might be addressed on a province-wide basis.

10.   If COU believes that some system-wide coherence of statistical reporting of cases of academic dishonesty would be useful, it should refer the issue to OCAV for detailed study.

Part Five

11.   Universities should examine the emerging attitudes towards information gathering and information sharing in their student populations and address those attitudes directly in setting forth their expectations for student learning strategies and standards of scholarship; faculty should be particularly mindful of the potential effect of their own example when preparing classroom presentations and materials for their students.

12   OCAV should consider the issues of differing cultural traditions, collaborative learning strategies and the effect of internet information on student assumptions, and, through the Vice-Presidents Academic, should offer advice to Ontario universities on ways to address these issues in relevant policy statements and informational programs.