

Guidelines for Dealing with Suspected Cases of Academic Dishonesty

This document presents the College's definitions of academic honesty and dishonesty, and explains the Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program's policies and procedures for dealing with suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

I. Academic Honesty in the College

The College at the University of Rochester discusses the importance of honesty and describes honesty violations, policies, and procedures: <https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/>. If you are not familiar with this document, please review it carefully.

II. General WSA Program Policies Regarding Academic Honesty and Dishonesty

All syllabi should include a statement on the importance of Academic Honesty, as well as a statement about academic dishonesty. The College's Academic Honesty Policy provides statements that you might use, as does the "Academic Honesty" section of WSA Program's Instructor Handbook. Students should understand that there will be penalties, that the expectation of honesty applies to all writing (informal writing, rough drafts, as well as final drafts), and that instances of academic dishonesty must be reported to the Academic Honesty Board.

Most importantly, all first-year writing courses must include workshops on using, integrating, and documenting sources. Ideally, students should participate in at least one workshop early in the semester, one in the middle, and one toward the end. These workshops should help them understand their choices around including and documenting information from print and electronic sources, and include time for students to work with their own writing.

Typically, WSA Program instructors encounter Academic Dishonesty in the form of plagiarism (sometimes accompanied by fabrication), the subject of the rest of this document.

III. What To Do If You Suspect Academic Dishonesty

The WSA Program requires instructors and coordinators to bring all possible WSAP-related honesty violations to the attention of the Director or Associate Director *prior to discussing the issue with a student*. This includes (but is not limited to) suspected cases of plagiarism or fabrication on placement materials, applications, informal writing assignments, rough drafts, and final drafts.

Please make a copy of the document in question and bring it and the assignment prompt to your meeting with a program director or provide these materials electronically in advance. If you have other samples of the student's writing (informal and formal), please also bring these.

Dealing with a potential instance of academic dishonesty involves four steps:

1. Determine whether or not the instance in question constitutes an instance of academic dishonesty or suggests an educational issue,
2. Develop an action plan for discussing the issue with the student,
3. Discuss the situation with the student, and
4. In an apparent case of academic dishonesty, complete and submit one of three forms:
 - Instructor Resolution Warning Letter (See [here for instructions](#) on use),

- Instructor Resolution With Penalty Form (See [here for instructions](#) on use), or
- Board Resolution Form (See [here for instructions](#) on use).

Step 1: Determining if it is plagiarism or an educational issue

If academic dishonesty is suspected, the instructor should contact a program director. The director will learn as much as possible about the situation from the instructor and possibly review samples of the student's in-class and out-of-class writing in order to compare it to the text in question. The aim here is to determine whether there seem to be significant differences between the writing samples known to be composed by the student and the possibly plagiarized text.

Because WRT 103 or WRT 105/E/A is a student's first instructional writing course at the University, directors and instructors must be especially aware of the possibility that an apparently plagiarized text might not be a matter of cheating, but rather an educational issue. A student might be aware, for example, of the need to document others' words, but perhaps not know that others' ideas also need to be documented. Alternatively, a student might know that words and ideas need to be documented, but not clear about how to actually enact this knowledge.

In order to distinguish between an educational issue and academic dishonesty, the text ought to be reviewed for the following:

- Is there concrete evidence that the student's text includes undocumented *text* from an outside source? This *often* constitutes plagiarism.
- Is there concrete evidence that the student's text includes undocumented *ideas* from an outside source? Highly abstract or complex terminology not addressed in class or in readings often signals a stolen idea. If this is the case, the instructor might discuss the paper with the student and casually ask for clarification or expansion of some of the unusually sophisticated ideas. This discussion can naturally lead the student to indicate whether or not the work emerges from his/her own ideas. If the student is unfamiliar with the ideas in his/her paper, then plagiarism is likely, and it is reasonable to ask the student why he/she isn't knowledgeable about the ideas in the paper. This often leads to the student admitting to plagiarism.
- Does the student signal that words or ideas belong to another—even if incorrectly or extremely abstractly, such as through indentation alone? If yes, then this is likely an educational issue.
- Is the text a rough draft or informal piece of writing? If yes, did the instructor make it clear that these kinds of texts need to indicate clearly (even if informally) which ideas are the student's and which are another's? This is quite important, as some folks will cut and paste information from a range of sources during the drafting process, with the full intent of documenting everything correctly in the final draft.

A judgment of academic dishonesty cannot be determined by reviewing the text alone. A history of the student writer and, most importantly, his/her writing process should figure into the judgment.

Key questions follow:

- Has the student demonstrated the ability to cite words *and* ideas in previous papers or during in-class workshops?
- Did the student write research papers in high school? If so, what did he/she learn about

documentation? (Frequently, students understand the need to document others' words, *but have not learned the need to document others' ideas.*)

- What was the student's writing process for this essay?
- Did the student turn in required first or second drafts?
- Is the student unfamiliar with the U.S. cultural view that text and ideas are property, or with cultural expectations around documentation of words and ideas? These are potential areas of difficulty for some international students, as well as ESOL students who have not been in the U.S. educational system for very long.
- Is this an issue of what Rebecca Moore Howard calls "patchwriting," that is, the process of importing or copying text in order to acquire some degree of proficiency in a new discourse or language area (most likely an issue for EAPP students or those particularly unfamiliar with academic discourse)? See the following example from Howard's website (<http://wrt-howard.syr.edu/Papers/Bowdoin2004/Patchwriting.htm>):

An Example of Patchwriting¹

Passage from R.L. Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*:

The world of the Ancient Near East, however, was familiar with myth of a rather different kind, myth as the spoken word which accompanied the performance of certain all-important religious rituals (11).

Passage from a student writing about R.L. Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*:

Davidson explains ritual myths as concepts that are illustrated through spoken words but are also accompanied by the performance of religious ceremonies.

Step 2 & 3. Talking with your Student

How to proceed in the case of an educational issue:

A Program director will help you develop a "script" for talking with the student about the possible honesty violation. The goals of this script are as follows:

- Talk with the student to better understand his/her history with documenting sources and with research writing,
- Develop a plan with the student to help him/her learn and apply the concepts and conventions around documenting source material; this plan should involve follow-up discussions during which the student can share and get feedback on his/her choices around documenting sources,
- Make sure the student understands that he/she is responsible for properly documenting sources, and that not doing so will lead to a formal charge of academic dishonesty, and
- Emphasize that you (the instructor) and Writing Center tutors are here to help the student learn and work through questions about documenting sources.

How to proceed in the case of academic dishonesty:

¹ Howard, Rebecca Moore. "A Plagiarism *Pentimento*." *Journal of Teaching Writing* (Summer 1993). 233-245. [Excerpted from p. 237].

A WSAP program director will help you prepare the appropriate incident form and develop a “script” for talking with the student about the academic honesty concern. The goals of this script are as follows:

- Create a comfortable environment, as the overall goal is to educate the student so that
- he/she will not again choose to be dishonest.
- Bring the text in question to the student’s attention, leaving open the possibility for the student to first mention that he/she cheated.
- Discuss and share the Academic Honesty Policy at the University of Rochester; *show the student where the policy is on the University of Rochester website.*
- Encourage the student to explain why he/she chose to cheat. Often, cheating results from a bad decision in a moment of panic. Depending on the student’s state of mind, either at this first or at the second meeting, share resources that help manage stress and time-management problems (CETL, UCC, CCAS, adviser). Be sure to explain viable alternatives to cheating, such as contacting the instructor for an extension or for help and possibly receiving a lower-than-desired grade (not nearly as bad as being found guilty of academic dishonesty).

- Follow the process corresponding to the selected resolution:
 - Instructor Resolution Warning Letter (See [here for instructions](#) on use)
 - Instructor Resolution With Penalty (See [here for instructions](#) on use)
 - Board Resolution (See [here for instructions](#) on use)

- At the end of your meeting with your student, remember to set up the follow-up meeting, and be sure to let your student know that he/she is absolutely still welcome in class and should continue to attend and complete all assignments.

NOTE: If after discussing the situation with the student, you discover some new information that changes the situation or makes it less clear, do not feel that you need to continue with the plan worked out with the program director. Instead, thank the student for meeting, set a time to meet again to provide the student with information on how to proceed, and consult with a program director to determine the next steps.

Step 4. Submitting a resolution form

In a case of apparent academic honesty, submit one of three forms:

- Instructor Resolution Warning Letter (See [here for instructions](#) on use),
- Instructor Resolution With Penalty Form (See [here for instructions](#) on use), or
- Board Resolution Form (See [here for instructions](#) on use).

Please keep one copy of the form for yourself, submit one to WSAP, and one to the Board of Academic Honesty. WSAP can submit the form to the BAH for you at your request.

Special Circumstances

How to handle an end-of-semester incident when grades need to be submitted

If plagiarism is suspected at the end of the semester when there is no time to address the issue

prior to submitting grades, then an “N” should be submitted for the student writer of the questionable text. The instructor should then contact the student as soon as possible to address the issue.

How to handle a second (or third, etc.) offense

If a student plagiarizes a second (or third) time, follow the same procedure as when it occurs the first time. The Academic Honesty Board will address any additional penalties associated with multiple offenses.