**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.

# 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/.](https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/) If you are not familiar with this document, please review it carefully.

# 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 honesty must be reported to the Academic Honesty Board.

**Most importantly, all first-year writing courses must include workshops on using, integrating, and documenting sources**. Students should participate in at least one in-class workshop per formal paper. These workshops should help students produce a composition that “attributes and cites all source material” (<http://writing.rochester.edu/undergraduate/goals-criteria.html)>, as well as 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.

# 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.

**Instructors should not submit student work into a plagiarism or AI detection program that stores or uses student work in any way.**

**Preparing for meeting with a program director**

To prepare for the meeting with a program director, please make a copy of the document in question and bring it and the assignment prompt to your meeting, or provide these materials electronically in advance. If you have other samples of the student’s writing (informal and formal), please also bring or share these in advance. These documents will help you and the director determine if the case is based in an educational issue or is an instance of academic dishonesty.

# Working through your situation with a program director

The director will guide you through the process of dealing with a potential instance of academic dishonesty, which involves four components.

* 1. Discuss the situation with a program director in the context of three possibilities:
     1. a case of academic dishonesty results from “failing to apply a known principle”[[1]](#footnote-1);
     2. an educational issue results from “failing to know the applicable principle”[[2]](#footnote-2);
     3. a combination of academic dishonesty and an educational issue.
  2. Develop an action plan for discussing the issue with the student.
  3. Discuss the situation with the student.
  4. Complete an educational plan or submit the appropriate form.
     1. For an educational issue, develop an educational plan with the student and encourage use of relevant resources (e.g, the instructor, writing tutors, reference librarians).
     2. For an apparent case of academic dishonesty, complete and submit one of the following forms:
* [Instructor Resolution Warning Letter](https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/instructors.html#warning)
* [Instructor Resolution with Penalty Form](https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/instructors.html#instructresolution)
* [Board Resolution Form](https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/instructors.html#boardres)

**Distinguishing between an educational and an academic dishonesty issue**

In order to distinguish between an educational issue and academic dishonesty, the student text of concern should be reviewed, guided by the following questions:

* Is there concrete evidence that the student’s text includes undocumented material (e.g., words, images, numerical information)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, including the student’s writing process and knowledge of documentation expectations, should figure into the judgment.

Here are some relevant questions:

* + Did the student understand the expectation to document from the syllabus, assignment, or other written course materials?
  + Has the student demonstrated the ability to cite words *and ideas* in previous papers or during in-class workshops?
  + If a non-written source has not been documented, has the student demonstrated an understanding of the need to document non-written sources (e.g., visuals, spoken texts, works of art)?
  + 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? See the following example from Howard’s website [(http://wrt-howard.syr.edu/Papers/Bowdoin2004/Patchwriting.html):](http://wrt-howard.syr.edu/Papers/Bowdoin2004/Patchwriting.htm))

# An Example of Patchwriting[[3]](#footnote-3)

**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.

* + If the issue involves an unfamiliar genre, does the student understand the need to document sources in this genre?

# Talking with your student

A program director will help you develop an approach for talking with your student. If at any point during your conversation with your student you would prefer to consult again with a program director before proceeding, please feel free to do so. You might say something like, “I appreciate your sharing this with me. Before I can determine how to proceed, I’ll need to consult with a program director.” Then set up a follow-up meeting with the student.

Conversations with students will depend on the individual situation, but they typically share common goals and points of focus:

* + - Begin conversation in a way that creates a comfortable environment, as the overall goal is to educate the student and prevent a repeat incident.
    - Talk with your student to better understand history with documenting sources and with research writing.
    - Bring the text in question to the student’s attention, leaving open the possibility for the student to first raise the issue of concern.
    - 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.***
    - Develop a follow-up plan to prevent a repeat incident:
      * For an educational issue, develop a plan with the student for learning and applying 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 practices around documenting sources,
      * For an incident of academic dishonesty, encourage the student to explain why they 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).
    - Make sure the student understands that they are responsible for properly documenting

sources, and that not doing so will lead to a formal charge of academic dishonesty,

* + - Emphasize that you (the instructor) and Writing and Speaking Center tutors are here to help the student learn and work through questions about documenting sources.

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.

# Submitting a resolution form

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

* + [Instructor Resolution Warning Letter](https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/instructors.html#warning)
  + [Instructor Resolution With Penalty Form](https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/instructors.html#instructresolution)
  + [Board Resolution Form](https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/instructors.html#boardres)

Please keep one copy of the form for yourself, submit one to the WSAP, and one to the Board of Academic Honesty. The 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.

1. Keller, Kolja. “Getting Clear on Academic Dishonesty and Asking About It.” Unpublished manuscript. 10/3/17. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Keller, Kolja. “Getting Clear on Academic Dishonesty and Asking About It.” Unpublished manuscript. 10/3/17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Howard, Rebecca Moore. "A Plagiarism *Pentimento*." *Journal of Teaching Writing*

   (Summer 1993). 233-245. [Excerpted from p. 237]. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)