

Faculty FAQs

What counts as “academic misconduct?”

“Academic misconduct” includes plagiarism, cheating, and possession of or use of any prohibited notes, reference resources, or data processing or other devices in any class or examination—anything that violates the integrity of a student’s academic work. FAS procedures do recognize that there is a range of seriousness of offense and offers some guidelines that might be considered in evaluating instances of academic misconduct: If the offense had not been detected, would it have had significant impact on the student’s course grade? Was there an attempt to subvert a primary degree requirement, such as plagiarizing a Ph.D. thesis? Was the offense spontaneous or premeditated and planned? Did the student act alone or were others knowingly involved? Was the offense an isolated incident or repeated?

“Behavioral misconduct” is distinct from “academic misconduct” and includes destruction, misuse, or theft of University resources; disruption of classes or other academic events, or University administrative operations; acts of violence; and sexual assault and harassment.

Why do students cheat? Doesn’t anyone around here teach them not to?

While we should always be open to the possibility that a student genuinely did not understand our expectations for the integrity of academic work, the College takes multiple approaches to assuring that they do. Students in the College are bound by an Honor Code and receive explicit instruction about academic integrity in the First-Year Cohort programming and in their Expository Writing course work. Faculty and recitation instructors in the College Core Curriculum also are directed to discuss academic integrity, and the Core Curriculum includes a Statement on Academic Integrity on course syllabi. Despite these efforts, some students still will be moved to commit infractions of academic integrity. It is therefore of vital importance that every faculty member help build a culture that fosters academic integrity by discussing our expectation in every class.

If I suspect a student of cheating during an exam, what should I do?

If you’re unsure, it may just be enough to make an announcement reminding everyone to keep their eyes on their own papers.

If your suspicion is pronounced, don’t hesitate to reseal the student. Take careful note of which other students were sitting nearby so you can gather their exams for comparison.

If you have made an announcement prohibiting the use of notes or electronic devices, don’t hesitate to confiscate them until the exam is finished.

Make contemporaneous notes of your observation and any action taken.

Plagiarism was rampant in my last big lecture class. How can I make sure it doesn't happen again?

Large lecture courses present special challenges, particularly if they do not have associated recitation sections where instructors can get to know students personally. To help prevent cheating and plagiarism, here are some simple steps you can try. First, be sure that you are explicitly discussing the assigned readings and course materials and are designing assignments that specifically engage with your discussion. If you assign *The Iliad*, only lecture on Greek history, and then assign a generic paper topic on “the hero in Homer” you’re inviting students to cheat.

Second, use frequent, short assignments that build to longer assignments over the semester. Use a v / v+ / v- grading system for the early assignments, and have the assignments increase in weight in the over-all course grade as the semester progresses. Consider giving a single paper prompt or a very restricted set of questions to the whole class, rather than letting students choose their own topics.

For exams, make two or three versions, each with the questions in a different order, so that students sitting adjacent to one another have different versions. Consider giving a pool of questions or the exam essay prompt to students in advance so that they will come to the exam feeling prepared and less inclined to cheat.

What books are available to help me learn how to stop students from cheating?

Lang, James M. *Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Building on the research of McCabe, et al. (see below), Lang recommends that the best way to combat academic misconduct is to create meaningful and engaging courses. His specific ideas are fostering students’ *intrinsic motivation* for learning, *assessing for mastery* rather than performance, *lowering the stakes* through the use of frequent assignments, and encouraging students’ *self-efficacy* as self-directed learners.

McCabe, Donald L., Kenneth D. Butterfield, and Lina K. Treviño. *Cheating in College: Why Students Do It and What Educators Can Do About It*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

The most comprehensive sociological treatment of its subject. Will be of interest to those seeking a quantitatively detailed, longitudinal study of academic misconduct by students and recommendations for institutional responses.

Walvoord, Barbara E., and Virginia Johnson Anderson. *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College*. [2nd edition.] San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

This practical guide, which first appeared in 1998, has been widely influential and provides the impetus for approaches such as Lang’s, above. It is remarkable for its holistic approach to course design, from the articulation of learning goals, to the design of assignments, their grading, and assessment for continuous course improvement. A highly valuable resource for faculty at all ranks.

I caught a student cheating. Can I fail him or her?

The short answer is no, not by yourself. In cases of substantial violations of academic integrity, FAS policy requires that you consult with your department or program's Director of Undergraduate Studies (for undergraduate students) or Department Chair or Program Director (for graduate students), who has to assent to the reduction in grade. This is an important procedural safeguard for students and faculty alike, and it is intended to assure that students are treated equitably. Any grade reduction should be proportional to the size and weight of the incident of academic misconduct among all requirements for the course and appropriate to the level at which the course is offered. That may sometimes mean failing the student for the course, but it often means failing the student only for the assignment. It's important that the reduction in grade be made fairly and in keeping with the expectations of your department or program.

I don't want the student thrown out of school. Do I have to report it?

Yes, you need to report any misconduct substantial enough to warrant a reduction in a student's grade to your Director of Undergraduate Studies or Department Chair or Program Director, who will report it in turn to the student's Dean. This is the only way we can track recidivists. Under FAS policy, undergraduate students will generally receive a disciplinary warning for a first offense.

I want the student thrown out of school. Will that happen?

Under FAS policy, the decision to suspend or dismiss a student lies with the Committee on Student Discipline; but if this is an undergraduate student's second offense, he or she will be suspended for at least a semester.

I don't want to get involved in a long, drawn-out hearing. How much time is this going to take?

Since CAS students are warned on their first offense that a second case of misconduct will result in suspension, we don't have a lot of repeat offenders; and for the few there are, a full hearing is typically not required. While we regrettably lose more than a single student annually, it's rare for the committee to hold more than one full hearing each year. In short, don't let this fear stop you from reporting misconduct.

Who can I talk to if I have questions about a student I suspect of academic misconduct?

Talk to your Director of Undergraduate Studies or Director of Graduate Studies. You can also contact the College's Associate Dean for Students or the Graduate School's Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs. For larger policy concerns, be in touch with the Chair of the Committee on Student Discipline

Is there a particular form for a Director of Undergraduate Studies to report academic misconduct?

There's no special form the letter of notification needs to take; and although FAS policy refers to two separate notifications (one to the student, one to the dean), a single letter can fulfill both purposes. While the notification can be sent to the student via e-mail, as can the copies to the faculty member and to the department chair or program director, it's best to write an actual letter and send it as a pdf attachment because you'll need to print the letter to accompany the hardcopy of the evidence that will be forwarded to the student's dean.

For the e-mail subject line, "Academic Misconduct in DEPT-UA 00" will serve, substituting the actual course designator.

The following sample text may be used as a model for letters of notification to students and their deans. It is intended only as a guide and may be freely modified to reflect the details of particular cases. Use the same letter for all students; but if the student is not in the College, substitute the equivalent Dean for Students of the school in which the student is enrolled.

Dear M—:

Professor Henry MacCracken has presented me with evidence that you committed a substantial violation of standards for the integrity of academic work this semester in his course PHIL-UA 40, Ethics. This evidence shows that you submitted a plagiarized paper containing unattributed close paraphrase and verbatim transcription of text found on the World-Wide Web. Pursuant to the procedures of the Faculty of Arts and Science, I have made an independent review of this evidence in my capacity as director of undergraduate studies for the Department of Philosophy. I am writing to report that I concur with Professor MacCracken in this matter and that I have affirmed his decision to award you a grade of "F" for this course.

Notice of this reduction in your grade and copies of the evidence of your academic misconduct are also being forwarded to Associate Dean James Matthews of the College of Arts and Science for further disciplinary action, which may include suspension or dismissal from the University. Complete information regarding the rules and procedures for the adjudication of disciplinary complaints, including your right to appellate review of such actions, is available on the website of the College of Arts and Science and from its Office of the Dean for Students.

Very truly yours,

cc: Dean Matthews
Prof. MacCracken
Prof. Departmentchair