



College of Science Academic Misconduct Reporting Process

REASON FOR THE POLICY

Academic dishonesty relates to a social judgment. As is the case in any right versus wrong question, personal opinions vary greatly. Instructors will need to decide what they think misconduct means, based on the OSU guidelines, and where they set the boundaries of behavior. This document describes what instructors have to do after they have set their expectations and they observe behavior that crosses the line in their opinion.

POLICY SUMMARY

- If you assign an academic penalty to a student because you have detected academic misconduct, you need to use the university reporting system.
- Student misconduct reports are FERPA protected and cannot be shared without the student's permission.
- In the COS, teaching assistants should not report academic misconduct to the university system, the instructor should.
- Define your interpretation of misconduct in your syllabus very clearly, be specific.
- Use warnings when appropriate.
- Evidence based only on Turnitin reports is insufficient for filing a report.
- The instructor reports the incident, the college hearing officer decides the outcome.

PREVENTION

The two most common problems during exams are students interacting with each other or using a cellphone. If a proctor suspects that two students are sharing information, the proctor should move one of the students to a different seat in the room. If a proctor sees a student with a phone, the proctor should take the phone and bring it to the front of the room, to be picked up by the student at the end of the exam. One is not allowed to look at information on the phone. In both cases, do not accuse the student of misconduct, but simply state that you are trying to prevent the perception of misconduct.

Use of the reporting system is required for penalties of academic misconduct.

POLICY CONTENT

When the instructor on record for a course possesses sufficient evidence to know that an infraction that should lead to a penalty has occurred, this case of academic misconduct has to be addressed via the university system. The link to the reporting form can be found on the following page on the Office of Student Life website <https://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/faculty-info>. An instructor is allowed to give a warning without filing a report, but is not allowed to assign a penalty for academic dishonesty without going through the OSU system.

This is important. Our reporting system gives students a clear path to addressing the case and defending their actions. The judgment cannot lie in the hands of the instructor, who has set the rules and made the report. The judgment resides with the College Hearing Officer (CHO) in the Dean's Office in the college associated with the course. The CHO also sets the penalty if a student is found responsible for the academic misconduct.

Instructors sometimes explain to students that it is better for them to accept a penalty without going through the formal system. Students then accept a penalty because they are afraid that going through the system might lead to expulsion. In reality, many first offense cases just lead to small penalties. An instructor using the argument for not reporting an incident is actually intimidating the student; it is an act of coercion. In addition, by assigning a penalty for academic misconduct without reporting it, you risk creating an appealable/legal issue.

Of course, purely course-related penalties, like reduced points for late homework, are in the hands of the instructor. Such actions need to be described in the syllabus, though.

POLICY CONTENT – STUDENT MISCONDUCT RECORDS ARE FERPA PROTECTED

As always, a person is innocent (“not responsible” in the terminology used in the process) until proven guilty (“responsible” in the official terminology). The instructor is required to consult with the department head or designee before filing a case. An instructor should never inform other people that a student has been reported for academic misconduct. If other people have a need to know about the case, the department head or designee makes that decision and informs the relevant people. Keep in mind that student records, including reports, participation, or outcomes regarding allegations of academic misconduct, are private and can only be shared on a need-to-know basis. This is basic FERPA law. Only a few people are considered to have the status “need-to-know,” as that term specifically applies to people who need that information to do their job, as opposed to classification, job type or rank. It is

also beneficial for other faculty members to not know who has been reported for academic misconduct, as it shields them from bias and from student perception that they are biased because they have knowledge of previous reports of academic misconduct.

OSU does not share misconduct records, unless required by law. In some cases, students will sign a permission for release of information, in which case the record can be released. This plays a role when students apply to medical school or law school, in which case they themselves have to report if they were involved in a misconduct case. These schools do make a distinction between different levels of misconduct, though.

POLICY CONTENT – ROLE OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

The instructor on record is the person responsible for detecting academic dishonesty, although in many cases the actual observation is made by a teaching assistant. The instructor on record should report the case. If a teaching assistant detects a case of academic misconduct, the teaching assistant should contact the instructor immediately. At that point the instructor assumes all responsibility for the case. Teaching assistants help with course delivery and academic tasks can be delegated. All academic responsibilities rest with the instructor, however, and cannot be delegated. The College of Science requires that the instructor files the dishonesty report.

POLICY CONTENT – ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT SHOULD BE CLEARLY DEFINED IN THE SYLLABUS

There are several forms of academic misconduct, and OSU defines them here, <https://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/academicmisconduct>. Since the course syllabus states the official rules for the course, including this reference in a course syllabus is important. Since the university list is a general one, it does not cover a number of specific activities. Some examples are given at the end of this document. In general, your syllabus has to be precise and should not rely on a common sense argument. The following link contains some very useful information, <https://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/academicmisconduct-faculty>.

Faculty members often have an intuitive idea of what constitutes academic misconduct and think that it is common sense. Students often have quite a different understanding, which leads to problems. As a consequence, faculty members need to define clearly what they consider academic misconduct in their course. In addition, research shows that specifically warning students before each assignment/test about

specific behaviors that result in academic misconduct will reduce misconduct significantly.

An example is the following. If homework problems from a previous year from the textbook are assigned, the solutions will be out on the internet. If a student copies such a solution, and adds that it is copied from a specific source, and specifies that source, then this is not plagiarism according to the university guidelines. If this is not an acceptable procedure in your course, you need to state that in your syllabus, with instructions describing what you consider to be fair use of external resources. Keep in mind that we encourage students to go to help centers, and they could be given specific solutions there as well.

POLICY CONTENT – WARNINGS

It can be beneficial for an instructor to classify some cases of academic misconduct as minor, if this is appropriate for your course. That distinction does not have to be published, but is useful for dealing with the follow-up. In a case of a minor infraction, it is perfectly OK to call the student in and explain the observed misconduct to the student. These are prime teaching moments, since for minor infractions students quite often do not realize that they committed an act of academic misconduct. The student should then receive a warning that the behavior is not tolerated, and that a next infraction can have more severe consequences. It is important to make this classification ahead of time, so you can treat all students equally. If a second instance of the same academic misconduct is observed and reported, the instructor should mention that a warning had been given previously in the same course.

In some cases a warning prevents years of bad behavior. In other cases students simply move the bad behavior to the next class. In order to decide if warnings are appropriate for a course, the instructor will be guided by their personal belief which of those cases is dominant.

Particularly in cases involving plagiarism, starting with a warning is often a good idea. Students often believe they are doing the right thing, in particular if it something that in high school was considered acceptable. Also, they might be in other classes where the same behavior is not considered to be misconduct.

It is permissible to take preventative action during exams. For example, if you observe behavior that could be interpreted as cheating, make sure that a proctor stays close to the area of concern for a while. This often helps.

POLICY CONTENT – DETAILS ABOUT THE REPORTING PROCEDURES

Academic misconduct cases are reported to the CHO in the college that offers the course in which misconduct is observed. If the CHO is aware of other actions that need to be taken as required by the CHO's college, the CHO is the person to act on the information. Colleges that have specific student-conduct rules related to academic misconduct work with the office of student conduct to obtain the necessary information. Currently, the College of Science has no additional specific rules in place.

In the report the instructor should provide a clear explanation of the incident. The instructor should also provide a suggested penalty. Supporting documents should include the syllabus for the course if it is a course related incident. The instructor should provide all necessary information that will allow the CHO to make a judgment. The CHO will meet with the student to hear the student's explanation of the incident. The student is directed to possible advocacy groups for help. This process was created to be fair to all parties involved. The instructor on record is the reporter, the student is the accused, and the independent CHO is the judge.

Details of the process can be found in the Office of Student Life website here: <https://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/academicmisconduct-faculty>. After the judgment has been rendered, students have the option to appeal. The route for the appeal depends on the status of the student, graduate or undergraduate. The result of such an appeal is final. Instructors are not able to appeal a decision made by the CHO.

The first judgment the CHO has to make is to determine, based on substantial evidence, if the student is responsible for academic misconduct. If the student is found not responsible, both the student and the instructor are notified and the case is closed. The CHO will know if the student has prior cases, but not know any details. If there are prior cases, the CHO consults with the Office of Student Conduct after making the responsibility decision. At that point the Office of Student Conduct will either take over the case or leave it with the CHO. The CHO has the option to refer a case to the office of student conduct.

The next step for the CHO is to decide on an appropriate penalty. In many cases the penalty suggested by the instructor will be applied, but the CHO will select a penalty appropriate for the individual student, given the context of the violation and possible unintended consequences. The CHO's objective is to uphold the standards and also identify a penalty that is fair given the context of the violation. This may mean that similar acts may have slightly different penalties when the context warrants it. For example, a graduating senior in the last term copies a homework assignment. The

normal penalty of zero on the assignment would lower the grade in the course below the required level. The student would then have to retake the course, not be able to graduate, and possibly lose a job. Selecting a different penalty in such a case is certainly reasonable.

POLICY CONTENT – THE USE OF PLAGIARISM DETECTING SOFTWARE

Instructors are using Turnitin more and more for detecting plagiarism. There are two problems with this software. Tests have shown that Turnitin misses almost half of the sources that are used. Of course, the argument that a student should not get a penalty because a fellow student got away with it is not valid. Nevertheless, one should think about the consequences of this finding. A well-structured Google search finds more than 90% of all sources, as reported in the same study.

The problematic part is using Turnitin for answers that are just two or three sentences, either mathematics or English. Because of the large database searched, one will always find an almost identical copy on the internet. In particular, foreign students with a limited English vocabulary are often selected in error. Small sample tests have large numbers of false positives. Therefore, if you use plagiarism detection software to detect a case of dishonesty, the College of Science requires the instructor to have a meeting with the student before filing a report. The outcome of that meeting should be included in the report. This is also a case where careful curricular design, that takes into account the surplus of information available on the internet, will help.

POLICY CONTENT – EXAMPLES OF ISSUES THAT COULD BE CONSIDERED IN A SYLLABUS

Below are some examples of items to consider for inclusion in the syllabus. Again, common sense in these cases is not a sufficient criterion. The understanding of what acceptable behavior is may be culturally dependent. If you want to enforce your ideas of acceptable behavior, be clear about it and specify details.

- If clickers or similar devices are used in the classroom, using the device connected to another student's gradebook is probably academic misconduct, but not necessarily. Hence this needs to be specified in the syllabus.
- We often encourage students to work together on problems, but do instruct them to hand in their own unique solutions. The syllabus should define clearly what is meant by unique in this case.
- If at exams you instruct students to put their phones away, specify clearly what you mean. If you want them to put the phone in a backpack, say so. If you do not allow phones in pockets or in their hands while leaving the room, state that in the syllabus, so students can bring a backpack or leave their phone at home.

Also, students may not assume you mean “no smartwatches” if you only say “no phones,” so be specific about what you mean.

- Most students use the internet extensively. As a result, students might have seen different terminology or notations that apply to assigned problems. If you do not permit the students to use different terminology or notation in your class, that should be specified.
- Students use Chegg.com tutors as well as homework solutions. If you do not allow that, specify so in the syllabus. Similar for all the other equivalent internet resources.
- Students are aware of on-campus help rooms, and we often encourage students to go there. In your syllabus you should specify what is considered appropriate help. Most student use the help rooms to engage with the assigned problem for a while, even if in the end they provide an essentially copied version of the solution. If that is not acceptable, it should be specified in the syllabus.
- Instructors may want to specify that students are not permitted to share or publish course materials, such as quizzes, tests, etc. with others, including via internet sites, such as CourseHero or Quizlet. It is okay to tell students that you look for materials from your course on these sites and will report instances as Academic Misconduct – Assisting as well as a possible copyright violation.
- Specify restrictions you have for off-campus proctored exams. There have been cases where students tried to use fake proctors with contact information that sounds very legitimate. Check proctors carefully. If you decide to restrict proctors to centers at other universities or at community colleges, allow for exceptions. Examples are students on active duty who have no access to such centers.

POLICY HISTORY

Revision Date	Description
10.12.2018	Initial version by Henri Jansen
08.20.2019	Initial posting to CoS Policy and Processes website
01.06.2020	Revision by Henri Jansen.