

## **Academic Dishonesty Policy Review Committee Recommendations**

**July 16, 2010**

The Academic Dishonesty Policy Review Committee was formed by Dr. Rex F. Gandy, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs on March 3, 2010. The Committee was tasked with providing recommendations about the academic dishonesty policies and procedures currently utilized by Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

Members of the committee included Mr. Eduardo Castillo (graduate student), Mr. Mason Kroll (undergraduate student), Dr. Michelle Garcia (AgNRHS), Dr. Jim Norwine (A&S), Ms. Santa Barraza (A&S), Dr. Joon-Yeoul Oh (BA), Dr. Jaya Goswami (ED), Dr. Kim Jones (EN), Mr. Jose Guerra (UC), Mr. Frank Ureno (Student Affairs), Ms. Toni Alvarez (Student Affairs) and Dr. Stephan Nix (Dean). Dr. Jacki Thomas (Center for Teaching Effectiveness) and Dr. Maria Ayala-Schueneman (Library) were subsequently added to the committee. Mr. Rolando Garcia (CTE) also participated in committee meetings.

At the introductory meeting, Dr. Gandy welcomed the members, thanked them for their willingness to serve, and reviewed the committee's assignment. At the second meeting the committee discussed their perspectives and experiences related to academic dishonesty. Among the issues discussed were a review of the current process in place; who plays a role in handling academic dishonesty and how to better clarify the process; concern that some faculty are not aware of the resources available to them to help with these incidents; how student disciplinary records are handled; and what are some best practices to help deter academic dishonesty. The committee was also concerned about proactive measures that could be undertaken to increase student awareness about what constitutes academic dishonesty and the consequences of being detected.

Upon further deliberation, it was decided to formulate three sub-committees to address different topics. Thereafter, the sub-committees met and worked on their topics independently, and reported their progress when the main committee met. The three sub-committees formed and the areas they addressed:

**Subcommittee 1 Members:** Toni Alvarez, Jose Guerra, Santa Barraza, Eduardo Castillo

**Charge:** Examine the policies in the Student Handbook and the Graduate catalog and recommend changes to make the process consistent and clear in both documents.

**Subcommittee 2 Members:** Steve Nix, Joon-Yeoul Oh, Frank Ureno, Kim Jones

**Charge:** Include a mechanism that will ensure that there is a central repository for the cases of academic misconduct, so that repeat offenders will not go unnoticed.

**Subcommittee 3 Members:** Jaya Goswami, James Norwine, Maria Ayala-Schueneman, Jacqueline Thomas (input also received from Dr. Manuel Flores, Dept. of COM-TA, and Rolando R. Garza, Center for Teaching Effectiveness).

**Charge:** Offer recommendations on how to inform / guide faculty through the process (particularly newer less experienced faculty).

During their work, the committee reviewed information from a variety of sources including the university's Code of Conduct in the Student handbook, the Graduate Catalog, examples of the academic dishonesty policies of other universities, and also viewed a number of articles on the topic, as well as reviewed the websites of other universities.

Donald L. McCabe's article "Cheating in Academic Institutions: A Decade of Research" lists several factors which appear to influence student behavior as regards to cheating. Two critical factors included 1) the perception among students that more of their peers are cheating, making it more acceptable; 2) whether or not the institution is able to "...develop a shared understanding and acceptance of its academic integrity policies has a significant and substantive impact on student perception of their peers' behavior... Thus, programs aimed at distributing, explaining, and gaining student and faculty acceptance of academic integrity policies may be particularly useful." Page 222, McCabe, Treviño and Butterfield, Ethics and Behavior, 11(2), Copyright © 2001, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

The committee also discussed how many students appear to have poor research documentation skills. A recent study by Thomas S. Dee and Brian A. Jacobs, seemed to indicate that incidence of student plagiarism could be reduced through education about what constitutes plagiarism. "The overall results found that students who went through the tutorial were less likely to plagiarize and that the impact was greatest on those with lower SAT scores than on others..." ("Plagiarism Prevention Without Fear" Scott Jaschik, January 26, 2010, Inside Higher Education). The committee also discussed the

challenges sometimes faced by international students who are unfamiliar with American universities expectations regarding graduate level scholarly research techniques.

It was the committee's consensus, that just as it was important to strengthen the process for disciplining incidents of academic dishonesty, it would also be important to better inform faculty and students.

The following are the committee's recommendations:

**A. University Academic Dishonesty Policies and Procedures:**

The committee elected to refine the current procedures so as to clarify the process and avoid confusion. Other considerations were to further elaborate the due process steps to be followed for the benefit of the faculty, allowing some flexibility in the process for different types of cases that might occur, and better explaining the role of the academic deans in these matters.

Recommendations in this area include:

1. Revision of the wording in the Student Handbook to clarify the process for handling incidents of academic misconduct (See Attachment A – Code of Conduct Revisions)
2. Updating the Graduate Catalog to include similar wording and to make reference to the Code of Student Conduct / Student Handbook.
3. Including a flow chart explaining the key steps in the process as part of the materials handed out to the campus community and also available on the Dean of Students website.

**B. Storage of Academic Dishonesty Disciplinary Records / Retention Period**

The committee discussed a number of issues related to disciplinary records. It was noted that at the present, there is a policy in the student handbook stating that "the dean of the college also has the responsibility for maintaining all student records related to academic misconduct with a copy going to the Office of the Dean of Students" (page 38, A, 2009-10 Student Handbook). However, that does not always occur. This may be because cases are sometimes handled informally by faculty and might not always be documented, or because this process is not widely known among faculty and therefore the information is not forwarded.

One of the benefits of keeping track of academic dishonesty cases would be to help identify any second-time offenders. The committee was informed that the office of the Dean of Students now uses the services of Maxient, full-service web application provider that specializes in student conduct software. The software assists in the administration and management of disciplinary cases. It will now be easier to verify faculty requests about a student's prior involvement in academic dishonesty incidents.

The committee discussed the sensitivity of this information and the need to maintain high levels of confidentiality. There was also concern about the length of time for keeping these records. One suggestion was to have a process in place for a student being able to expunge his / her record for relatively minor infractions. After researching system policy, it was noted that the Record Retention Policy for the A&M System (Section 06.218.10) calls for keeping disciplinary records for five years after graduation or date of last attendance.

In the area of student academic dishonesty disciplinary records, the committee is recommending the following:

1. All cases of academic dishonesty must be reported by faculty. Some cases will go on for adjudication, depending on the severity and the merits of the case, and some will not. The results of a completed academic misconduct case are automatically sent to the Dean of the college and the Office of the Dean of Students.
2. All records relating to academic misconduct are confidential and will remain on file in the Office of the Dean of Students.
3. Academic misconduct records are retained for a period of five years after graduation or date of last attendance in accordance with the A&M System Record Retention Policy 06.218.10.
4. The university may establish a process for expunging a report from a student's record depending on the severity, level of review, etc. For

example a simple first case of copying a homework assignment that goes no further than some sort of mild penalty from the instructor might be removed under this process.

**C. Ideas for Increasing Faculty Awareness:**

The committee felt that it was important to provide as many resources and information to faculty so that they would feel comfortable addressing incidents that came to their attention. Among the recommendations:

**1. Workshop at New Faculty Investment Program/Orientation**

Develop a notebook for faculty to include the following information:

- a. TAMUK policy and procedures regarding academic dishonesty
- b. Review of plagiarism, cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty
- c. Examples of different types of plagiarism: Rolando Garza is the Distance Learning representative to the committee and can provide assistance with contacting the researchers to find out how to get access to the following tutorial:  
<http://campustechnology.com/articles/2010/02/02/plagiarism-deterred-through-information-not-threats.aspx>.
- d. Information on how to prevent or minimize academic dishonesty: resources, classroom strategies
- e. Information on the utilization of the Turnitin plagiarism detection software, instructions on how to use it, the advantages and disadvantages. An instructional tutorial is readily available from the software vendor.

**2. Interpersonal communication strategies**

Recommend helping interested faculty to further develop interpersonal communication strategies to be used when confronting student(s)

regarding academic dishonesty situations (suggestion of presentation by Dr. Edwin Rowley at workshop; handouts to be included in the notebook).

3. **Post information and resources on website**

Post additional information and resources on websites (to be updated regularly): Faculty Senate, Center for Teaching Effectiveness, departments, Colleges, Provost's Office, library, etc.

4. **Mandatory online course**

Recommend the creation of a mandatory online course on academic dishonesty (developed either by the university or the System) to be completed at least every three years by all faculty and by all first-year faculty. This requirement would be similar to other mandatory training required by the System.

5. **Library workshops**

Recommend that Library workshops on the topic of academic dishonesty continue to be offered during the semester.

6. **Monday Noon Seminars**

Monday Noon Seminars on aspects of academic dishonesty held by Center for Teaching Effectiveness

D. **Ideas for Students**

It was also deemed very important to provide students as much information and opportunities to learn about how to avoid plagiarism and other academic dishonesty infractions, especially using interactive means. The committee's recommendations include:

1. **Mandatory online course for students**

Recommend a mandatory online course on academic dishonesty (developed either by the university or the System) to be completed by all students (undergraduate, graduate, international, transfer) during their first semester at TAMUK. (Instructors should be able to check online whether or not students in their classes have passed the course.)

Students guilty of a minor, first offense would have to take and pass the online course again. If not completed within the given time, the student would be reported to the Dean of Students. (Instructors should be able to check how many times a student has taken the course; if it is more than the mandatory one time, it would signal a 'red flag' raised in another class. At that time, the instructor can pursue the matter further.)

**2. Student awareness marketing campaign**

A student marketing campaign conducted through the Office of the Dean of Students and other Student Affairs offices to increase student awareness, i.e., posters in areas frequented by students, skits/mock trials/peer group sessions in the residence halls and other venues, etc.

**3. Mandatory library workshops**

Provide mandatory library workshops for incoming freshmen on conducting research and avoiding academic dishonesty especially when tied in to their class assignments.

Through their research, the committee identified additional resources and website examples which could be used to help plan and develop the proposed recommendations:

<http://web.mit.edu/academicintegrity/handbook/handbook.pdf>

[http://students.berkeley.edu/files/osl/Student Judicial Affairs/Instructors%20Guide%20to%20addressing%20Academic%20Dishonesty.pdf](http://students.berkeley.edu/files/osl/Student_Judicial_Affairs/Instructors%20Guide%20to%20addressing%20Academic%20Dishonesty.pdf)

<http://students.berkeley.edu/osl/sja.asp?id=928>

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

In summary, academic integrity is at the heart of the reputation and credibility of an institution. In today's changing world, and with the technological tools available to today's student, it is easier than ever to cheat. It is also important to remember that not all students cheat. The committee hopes that these recommendations will serve to help level the playing field for the honest student and also contribute to the strong moral development of our students.