

To: EPCC

From: Mark E. Gammon, Chair, Task Force on Academic Integrity
John Bolen, Registrar & Associate Academic Dean

Subject: Task Force Recommendations

Date: August 15, 2008

The Academic Dean requested last spring that we convene a group *ad hoc* to review the college's policies on academic integrity and plagiarism. The task force presented a report to the dean in May; this report contains several recommendations, including changes to policy language in the catalog, that are the purview of EPCC.

The report is attached, and the task force requests that EPCC review the proposals and act on them as appropriate, especially the proposed catalog language in the second recommendation.

The members of the task force were:

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Liz Grimsbo
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Report of the Task Force on Academic Integrity May 2008

Prologue

During the spring semester of 2008, the Dean for Academic Affairs charged this task force with the responsibility of reviewing current policies about plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty and making recommendations to address the issue.

The sense of the committee is that Simpson College does have a significant problem, especially with plagiarism. A combination of societal influences, the easy temptation of the Internet, unclear and inconsistently applied policies, and academic culture contribute to this problem. Clearly, the first two influences are beyond our control; however, we recommend immediate short-term measures to mitigate the problem now, and we suggest a long-term assessment in order to influence our academic culture as we move into the future.

We identified the following problems to address immediately:

- Our students often claim to be uncertain about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Students also do not recognize the seriousness of the issue. While the committee agreed that students' lack of understanding is, in fact, a contributing factor, we also agreed that when confronted with evidence of academic dishonesty, students may claim ignorance to mitigate the severity of the consequences.
- With faculty discretion at the core of current policies, the consequences for plagiarism are inconsistent, and students get mixed messages about the severity of the act.
- For various reasons, faculty under-report incidents of academic dishonesty, meaning no accurate central record of violations can be kept.

To address these problems, the committee emphasized three strategic priorities:

- Education and accountability: Students need to be made aware of what constitutes plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty, in order to reduce the number of "mistakes" and to ensure accountability.
- Consistency: Policies about academic integrity need to be applied consistently in order to communicate the seriousness of the issue and make the stakes of intentional academic dishonesty higher.
- Consequences: Clearly defined and consistently applied consequences are necessary, as both a statement of the seriousness of the issue and a deterrent.

The committee agrees that while the faculty as a whole takes academic integrity seriously, there is widespread disagreement about how best to address the problem. Our immediate recommendations are designed to preserve faculty discretion in addressing particular incidents, but also to act in line with the strategic priorities listed

above. To be clear, however, the sense of the committee was that these recommendations are relatively noncontroversial measures to address the problem immediately, and that further assessment and discussion are essential for the long term.

Immediate Recommendations

1. Adapt or develop an online tutorial and quiz for all students to complete.

We recommend that all students be required to complete a tutorial and quiz, with a passing grade, in lieu of the fall semester “swipe in” to verify residency. This online mechanism would serve an educational function in making sure that all students have reason to be aware of what plagiarism is, as well as the potential consequences. Also, a passing grade on the quiz confirms that all incidents of plagiarism thereafter are “knowing”.

2. Change catalog language about academic dishonesty to provide more clarity for students and instructors. Other statements about academic honesty in other documents (such as the faculty handbook) should be brought in line with the proposed catalog language.

Current language

The penalty for any form of substantiated (Substantiated dishonesty is that in which the instructor has firm evidence.) academic dishonesty, such as cheating or plagiarism or collaboration is:

1. failure of the course
or
2. failure in the paper, project, test etc. where dishonesty occurred
or
3. the requirement that the work be redone with a suitably substituted assignment

In all cases, the penalty should reflect how knowing, intentional, and serious the instructor judges the academic dishonesty to be. Cases of serious and knowing academic dishonesty must be reported to the student’s academic advisor and the Dean for Academic Affairs.

In the case of repeated instances of serious academic dishonesty, a student may be suspended by the academic dean for academic cause. If a student wishes to appeal the charge of substantiated academic dishonesty, he or she shall request a hearing before the appeal committee.

The appeal committee shall consist of a chairperson appointed by the Dean for Academic Affairs, the past year’s EPCC chairperson, a professor nominated by the instructor concerned, and a professor nominated by the student. The chairperson of

the appeal committee shall be appointed at the beginning of each academic year and serve for all cases that are appealed during that year. The instructor shall present the case to the committee. The committee's decision shall be final.

If a student is strongly suspected of academic dishonesty, such as cheating or plagiarism, or collaborating in academic dishonesty and the instructor does not have firm evidence, the instructor will give the student a warning and may set up a meeting with the department chairperson and the student to discuss the issue. The student may be required to retake the examination or paper or whatever the instrument may be for another grade. Successive instances of suspected cheating will be referred by the department chairperson to the Office for Academic Affairs with appropriate recommendations for additional action.

Proposed language

The penalty for any form of academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration) substantiated by evidence is:

1. failure of the course;
2. failure of the assignment; *or*
3. the requirement that the work be redone with a substituted assignment.

The instructor may choose from the above options to reflect how knowing, intentional, or serious he or she judges the incident to be. *All cases of substantiated academic dishonesty must be reported to the student's academic advisor and the Dean for Academic Affairs.*

Upon the second report of substantiated academic dishonesty, the Dean for Academic Affairs will convene the Academic Council to recommend appropriate punishment, which may include suspension, expulsion, or academic probation.

If a student wishes to appeal a charge of substantiated academic dishonesty, he or she may request a hearing before the Academic Appeals Committee. The student(s) shall present to the Registrar of the College a written appeal stating clearly what is being appealed and the rationale. The instructor shall present the evidence to the committee. The Committee's decision shall be final.

In cases of suspected academic dishonesty that cannot be substantiated by firm evidence, the instructor may give the student a warning and may require the student to redo the assignment. In a case where academic dishonesty is strongly suspected but cannot be substantiated, the instructor will issue a formal warning, *along with a report to the academic advisor and the Dean for Academic Affairs.* Repeated instances of suspected academic dishonesty may lead to appropriate disciplinary action, including suspension, expulsion, or academic probation, at the discretion of the academic dean.

3. Recommend that all syllabi include a standard statement about academic integrity and plagiarism. The wording of such a statement should be worked out in consultation with the academic dean. One possibility:

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

In all endeavors, Simpson College expects its students to adhere to the strictest standards of honesty and integrity. In keeping with the College's mission to develop the student's critical intellectual skills, while fostering personal integrity and moral responsibility, each student is expected to abide by the Simpson College rules for academic integrity. Academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) any form of cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, misreporting any absence as college-sponsored or college-sanctioned, submitting a paper written in whole or in part by someone else, or submitting a paper that was previously submitted in whole or in substantial part for another class without prior permission. If the student has any questions about whether any action would constitute academic dishonesty, it is imperative that the he or she consult the instructor before taking the action. For further guidance on these rules and their sanctions, please see pages 72-73 of the college catalog.

Planning a strategy for the future

The college should undergo a formal assessment of academic integrity on campus.

While the measures above should help to educate students about plagiarism and academic honesty and encourage a more consistent approach to the issue, these are small steps that likely will have minimal effect absent a change in campus culture. To this end, we recommend that Simpson undergo a process of intentional assessment of academic integrity issues on campus in order to formulate a long-term strategy.

The task force recommends that we purchase the Assessment Guide available from the Center for Academic Integrity:

http://www.academicintegrity.org/assessment_guide/index.php

Using the tools in this guide, we recommend that the campus undertake a conversation about academic integrity and explore different approaches to the problem and determine the best approach to move Simpson into the future.

We believe that the best approaches to academic integrity are to be found on campuses where there is a campus culture of honor supported by student-run honor or judicial boards and where the faculty refuses to tolerate dishonesty by endorsing relatively strong punishments. We also understand, however, that such systems require the support and input of the entire campus community.

Note that twice in the recent past committees of faculty and staff have recommended an approach to the problem of academic dishonesty. (See the reports of the Civility and Civic Responsibility Task Force (May 2001) and the Action Group

For Personal and Social Responsibility (April 2007).) Both of these reports emphasized the need for consistency, communication, and accountability in cultivating a campus culture of civility and honor. The second report, reflecting on the lack of action after the work of the prior task force, emphasized the need for “a demonstration of institutional will and committed leadership,” as well as “a period of intentional and conscious focus” on these issues. This report also suggested that this “period of intentionality must involve a certain stubbornness. The college’s culture will not change overnight, and as with any attempt to intentionally shape the character of our community, it will no doubt meet with apathy, cynicism, and the resigned belief that we and our students are what we are, rather than what we make of ourselves.” The action group concluded that “absent strong leadership driving an institutional will to change,” little change is forthcoming.

Therefore, with regard to the work of this committee, that the community undertake a formal and intentional assessment of academic dishonesty on campus and how best to produce students of character is not an afterthought, but rather the heart of our recommendation.

Submitted by the Ad Hoc Task Force on Academic Integrity:

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