

Cheating, Plagiarism and Other Scholastic Offences

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Help students accused of violating the policy on Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students or the policy on Scholastic Discipline for Graduate Students
- Help students avoid inadvertently committing scholastic or academic conduct offences.

Policies in the Calendars, Academic Policies, or in Administrative Policies and Procedures include:

- *Scholastic Discipline for Graduate Students*, (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf);
- *Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students*, (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf);
- *Academic Sanctions*, (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_sanctions.pdf);
- *Academic Integrity in Research Activities* (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section7/mapp70.pdf);
- *Copyrights* (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section7/mapp73.pdf);
- *Patents* (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section7/mapp74.pdf);
- and
- *Code of Behaviour for use of Computing Resources and Corporate Data* (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp113.pdf).

The University's policy on Computing Resources and Corporate Data – Policy 1.1.3 (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/policies_procedures/general.html) is also a valuable resource.

Many measures are in place to help prevent academic dishonesty. Course outlines are required to make reference to cheating and plagiarism. Examinations are proctored. Individuals taking exams are required to sign in and required to display a valid student ID card. Different versions of an exam may be alternated row by row.

Assignments done out of class time are subject to various forms of scrutiny. Faculty can often tell that an essay has been plagiarized, even if unsure of the exact source of pirated passages. Plagiarism software can be used to help determine how original - or unoriginal - a student's written work may be. A student who makes documentation errors runs the risk of being accused of not just making a mistake, but of violating the Scholastic Discipline policy.

Because the University places a high value on academic honesty, penalties for mistakes and violations are severe.

How technology helps detect cheating and plagiarism

The answer sheets (scantrons) used for most multiple choice exams are processed by a program called Scanexam, which includes a cheating analysis. The number of answer matches between any pair of exam papers can be compared with the expected number of answer

matches. Example: John (62 correct out of 100) and Barbara (67 correct out of 100) answer 89 questions exactly the same way. Scanexam looks at all the papers of all the students to see if having 89 identical answers is unusual for students scoring the way John and Barbara scored. If it is unusual, how unusual is it? If it would only occur one time in a million (or even less often) by chance alone, the instructor may conclude that John and Barbara cheated. The program does not prove cheating took place, but it does alert the instructor to that possibility. If students with an unusually high number of identical answers also sat near each other, or behaved in a way that was deemed suspicious by proctors during the exam, they are very likely to be accused of cheating.

Plagiarism detection software compares written work submitted to turnitin.com to an enormous data base and generates an originality report, showing matches for the passages or phrases in the written work. An originality report is sent to the instructor. The software detects paraphrases and short strings of characters, not simply verbatim copying. It is not limited to published works – its database includes all the work submitted to it, as well as work available on paper mills and other cheating websites. Whether the student whose work is rated low in originality is found guilty of cheating or plagiarism is up to the instructor. Western has a licence for Turnitin.com, and students are encouraged to visit the University's eLearning Toolkit to learn more about Turnitin: <http://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/find.html>

Guiding principles of the Scholastic Discipline and Academic Sanctions Policy

Transparency: a student alleged to have committed an offence has a right to be advised of the allegation and of the information supporting the allegation.

Clarity: the steps of the procedure do not overlap. The roles of each party are also made clear: what the Chair may or may not do; what the Course Dean may or may not do; etc.

Even-handedness: at every step, the student has the right to be heard, either in person or by submission of a letter.

Consistency: decisions are the responsibility of Departments and Faculties, not individual instructors. This helps to ensure consistency in decision-making and in penalties.

Timeliness: guidelines in the policy are intended to encourage Departments and Faculties to handle matters without undue delay.

Accountability: the student has a right to appeal decisions, including decisions on penalties, all the way to the administrative tribunal of the Senate Review Board Academic. So Departments and Faculties know that reasons and evidence supporting their decisions may have to be presented to SRBA.

Progressive steps: a student who violates the policy a second time may receive a more severe penalty.

What to do if accused of cheating, plagiarism, or other wrongdoing:

- You may feel angry at the person who accuses you, especially if you believe you are not guilty. Do what you can to master your angry feelings so you won't say anything you

regret later.

- Answer questions honestly. The instructor is obliged to investigate to try to determine the truth.
- Remember, if the instructor or undergraduate chair does not seem to take your side of the story seriously, you can appeal further. You have an advantage over everyone else, too. You know for sure what you did or didn't do. Make some detailed factual notes about what you recall doing as soon as you can. Start a file and keep all relevant material in it.
- You may feel frustrated because you cannot prove you did not do what you did not do. Remember, those making the allegation must have evidence good enough to satisfy other, impartial parties. If the evidence is not found to be good enough, your appeal will be successful.
- Consider the evidence against you. Evidence does not have to be conclusive. There is adequate evidence if a reasonable person can say: "On this evidence, cheating probably took place."

Lying or fabricating evidence may lead to a more severe punishment.

What may happen during the investigation:

- You may be asked to submit rough notes for the work, or to write an account of an event.
- You may be required to meet with the department chair, the associate dean, or others.
- If the alleged offence is contrary to law Campus Community Police Services may be notified.
- It may take the department or faculty some time to come to a decision. Whether you are guilty or not, the investigation process can be stressful. *Seek help. Talk to a personal or religious counsellor, family member or the ombudsperson.*

Penalties

Various factors may influence the decision on the penalty: the student's year and program, whether he or she has been honest and cooperative during the investigative process, and whether the offence is a first offence. Does the student appear genuinely sorry? Was the offence planned or the result of an impulse? Were other students compromised? Was the University compromised?

Mark penalties

Decision makers sometimes sanction the student by reducing the grade on the work involved in the cheating. These sanctions range from a small reduction, to a zero on the work involved, all the way up to a Failure in the course in which the offence took place.

In cases where the offence is deemed more serious, or the student already has an offence record, more serious penalties could include failure of the year (in professional programs); prohibiting further registration in courses offered by the department in which the offence occurred; suspension or expulsion.

Mark penalties do not result in a permanent notation on the student's



official transcript. A FAIL grade assigned because of a scholastic offence looks identical to other FAIL grades on the transcript.

Suspension and expulsion

Suspension and expulsion are reserved for repeat offenders and for particularly serious offences..

Appeals

Should you appeal (file a request for relief)?

A student found guilty of a scholastic offence has a right to appeal the decision, the penalty imposed, or both. Before investing time and effort in an appeal, many students want to know more about how the process works. They want to be able to assess the chances that their appeal will succeed.

It is particularly important to understand that the conclusion that a student committed a scholastic offence does not have to be supported by evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. In an exam writing situation, that means that a decision maker may conclude that cheating took place, even if it is possible that two people got some identical answers by chance. Evidence of an intention to deceive is also not required: thus, in a plagiarism situation, the decision maker may conclude that a student is guilty even though it is possible that the student just made a mistake.

Some reasons for considering an appeal:

- you are not guilty
- the penalty seems severe, even after reading the penalties section above
- there is relevant information which the decision maker did not have
- you will regret it later if you do not appeal now

Poor reasons for considering an appeal:

- you disagree with the relevant university policy
- you know other students who did what you did and who weren't caught
- friends or family members think you should appeal
- although you did what is claimed, you're not really that kind of person

Good reasons not to appeal:

- the penalty seems fair
- you want to put the matter behind you
- you are guilty
- the evidence against you is reasonably persuasive
- while not intending to deceive or cause harm, you acknowledge you should have known better, read the rules, and been more careful (i.e. ignorance of the rules is not an acceptable defense).

The penalty can be appealed if you have reason to think it is too severe. Remember, most penalties feel too severe. If the penalty is typical for the offense committed, then the appeal will most likely be unsuccessful.

An appeal of either the decision or the penalty must be initiated within



the deadline (usually three weeks if appealing to a Dean, and six weeks if appealing to the Senate Review Board Academic).

How offences are recorded

A FAIL grade assigned as a penalty is a final grade and remains on the record.

An Offence Record is kept in the relevant dean's office and is kept separate from the student's academic counseling file. The purpose is to ensure that those who reoffend may be considered for more severe penalties. Strict rules govern access to and use of offence records. Offense records are not transferred if a student attends a Western graduate or professional program; however, they are transferred between faculties within Western if the student transfers. They are made available outside Western only upon written request by the student or by court order.

What to do if you know or suspect someone else of cheating or other wrongdoing

Anyone who suspects someone of committing an offence has several choices:

- talk about your suspicions with the other person
- report your suspicions to the instructor/chair/dean
- remain uninvolved

Before deciding to remain uninvolved, consider who will benefit from or be harmed by your lack of action. Cheating undermines the value of *your education and your degree*.

How to avoid cheating and plagiarism and other offences

- Always tell the truth.
- Ask if you are not sure of something, such as whether to mention your incomplete year of study at another institution. Never assume that one course, or one instructor, or one university or school is exactly like another.
- Respect the rules, including the specific rules for a given course, lab, project, test or assignment.
- Disclose all the relevant details of your situation when asking for advice.
- Consider the possible consequences of your actions. Could someone be hurt or inconvenienced? What harm or damage might result? Are you prepared to pay the cost?
- Imagine how you would feel if everybody knew what you were thinking of doing. Picture it as a headline in the paper....

In tests and exams...

- Do not sit near friends or people you studied with.
- Shield your answer sheet or exam book so that others cannot see it.
- Take only explicitly authorized items into the exam: no notes, books or cell phones.
- If you discover something with you which is not authorized or allowed, raise your hand and tell the proctor right away.
- Do not gaze around the room. Do not talk to yourself. Avoid fidgeting.
- Do not communicate in any way with any other student.



Communicate only with the instructor or proctor.

- Arrive on time. Hand in all papers required.
- If you hear of anyone obtaining information about a test or exam in advance, tell the instructor.
- If exam procedures seem inadequate to you, let the instructor know what your concerns are.
- Report any unusual or suspicious behavior to the proctor or instructor.
- Assume you are being closely watched at all times, even if you must leave the room.

In essays, reports and other assignments...

- Do not work with a fellow student on an assignment unless authorized to do so. When doing group work, be very clear about what your instructor expects. Discuss this with the instructor in advance.
- Acknowledge all assistance received, including help from friends or others in terms of proofreading, suggestions or information. Follow the style guide recommended or approved by your instructor.
- Do not cite in your bibliography any sources you have not used for the assignment in question. Cite all sources appropriately, including your own previous work, internet sites, newspaper items, books and scholarly papers, radio or television broadcasts, and so on.
- Do not lend your work to other students unless you feel certain they will not use it dishonestly.
- Keep a photocopy of all assignments, essays, and reports you hand in to be graded. Keep rough copies and notes until your final grade is received. Notes and rough copies can constitute valuable evidence that your work is your own.
- If you submit an assignment by sliding it under an instructor's office door (not recommended), confirm the next day or as soon as you can that the assignment was received. Make a note of the actual time and date of submission.
- When in doubt about any practice, ask your instructor or other authority. Do not rely on friends, relatives or fellow-students for information about what is acceptable practice in a course or at the University.
- When material you read impresses you, be particularly careful to use your own words. Use quotation marks and cite sources whenever you use the words or ideas of another, even phrases only one or two words in length. Acknowledge all sources of information and inspiration.
- Remember, it is far better to get an honest FAIL or a late penalty than to be found guilty of a scholastic offence.

NOTE This guide was produced by the Office of the Ombudsperson www.uwo.ca/ombuds. It is not an official university document and is not intended to replace university policy. Frances Bauer wrote the original text in March 2003. This version: 04/2018

