Academic Honesty at Tulane: a Document for Faculty and Other Instructors

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As Tulane faculty, instructors, and teaching assistants, you may feel confident that you have conveyed to your students your expectations for academic integrity. Yet students’ understanding of your expectations and their willingness to meet them often fall short. During the past two years, we have received more than 120 allegations of academic dishonesty, and it is likely that these numbers are far lower than the actual incidence of dishonesty in exams and assignments. The following pages include information on our Code of Academic Conduct, some examples of the ways in which students use unauthorized material, and suggestions designed to reduce the incidence of academic dishonesty among our students. Keep in mind that students know more about how to cheat than we know about how to prevent them from doing so.

The Code is available through the Newcomb-Tulane College website: college.tulane.edu/code-of-academic-conduct

The Code applies to all undergraduate students at Tulane—in all schools. Newcomb-Tulane College is responsible for adjudicating all allegations of academic dishonesty by Tulane undergraduates, including those in the School of Continuing Studies.

Any information that students receive about the Code – before they arrive in the fall and during their orientation – is insufficient, as it does not relate to specific courses and assignments. Our students need reinforcement from you that the Code is important. Note on your syllabus that you will report suspected violations to the Honor Board and follow through.

Suggested wording of a syllabus statement in your undergraduate courses: "Students are required to act in accordance with The Code of Academic Conduct. Any suspected violations will be brought before the Newcomb-Tulane College Honor Board." Go further and discuss the expectations for honest behavior in your course. Remind students that they must cite all sources, including those from the Internet and explain how to do so.

When you permit collaboration on some assignments make certain that you have clarified the nature of and extent to which collaboration is permitted. If you assign take home exams, make clear (with written instructions) which materials, if any, students may consult during the exam. Many students will assume that “take home” equals “open book”. Some students are unaware that you may expect them to cite course texts, just as they are expected to cite the other works that they referred to.
What you define as dishonesty may not be regarded as such by all students.

**The special case of plagiarism**

Some students enter Tulane unprepared to make original arguments or critically analyze texts or data. They (may) think that paraphrasing material from sources they have read is adequate, so long as they list the source in the bibliography (and some do not even do that). While they learn about the writing process in their first-year writing course at Tulane, they cannot hear often enough that after reading and before writing they must engage in critical thinking. Deferring writing assignments until the last moment can drive out any thinking and the end result may be or appear to be plagiarized.

Do not overestimate your students’ understanding of what is required in a paper assignment. A few examples from recent cases brought to the Honor Board will illustrate the point. One student, having received AP credit for ENGL 1010, claimed not to know that she was required to put words taken directly from a source in quotation marks. Several students have been surprised to be charged with plagiarism for having taken virtually all of the material for a paper from other sources – with no quotation marks and no in text citations. Their response – “I wrote this paper”, confusing “wrote” with “moved someone else’s words to my computer file and then printed this content”. Many do not know that plagiarism can be easy to spot when the student has included with the plagiarized content the sources which the original author cited; their position is that the in text citations were included, and therefore there was no plagiarism. They did not understand that because they had not read these sources it was not honest to include them as if they had. One student, when confronted with the accusation that his paper was not original work, acknowledged that he knew nothing about the subject except for what had been covered in the course and therefore not capable of generating any original work.

**Enforcement**

*Do not take matters into your own hands* by assigning a grade penalty to a student for an assignment because you have found evidence of dishonesty. We have a procedure for reporting such behavior, and you are required to follow it. Taking matters into your own hands puts you at risk if the student disputes the grade; Tulane cannot support you if you have violated these approved procedures.

Students who are found guilty of violating the Code by the Honor Board incur a grade penalty, usually accompanied by a period of probation, and (always) notation to their permanent record at Tulane. If course instructors assign their own penalties for suspected dishonesty or ignore the dishonesty, these students in effect get a free pass in that course – no probation, no mark on the permanent record, and perhaps a passing grade. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about any part of the procedure. Keep in mind that the Dean’s office will send the accused student(s) a copy of the letter and supporting material that you provided.
Penalties
There is a narrow range of penalties that the Honor Board can assign for dishonesty within a course. Students found guilty ordinarily are removed from the course with a failing grade. Lesser offenses may result in a grade of zero on that assignment; more serious offenses may result in suspension from Tulane for a period of time. A second offense is likely to result in suspension or expulsion.

Discouraging Dishonesty
There are steps you can take to discourage dishonest behavior. This list is not exhaustive but captures a variety of infractions that I have encountered. If you have other suggestions please send them to me.

1) Do not use the same exam repeatedly, especially if the exam is multiple choice, true/false or short answer in format. You may think that the exam has never left the room but it is likely that you are wrong. Exams leave rooms. Technology, in the form of websites such as CourseHero, makes it easier than ever for more students to access these old exams. CourseHero is described in Wikipedia (another favorite site of students) in this way: "Course Hero collects study resources like old exams, problem sets, class notes and study guides from users who upload. Users upload documents in order to receive membership and access the other documents that are uploaded on the website." www.coursehero.com states that it has "the largest collection of study materials online. 20 million documents for over 4,300 colleges."

2) Ask questions that require students to demonstrate process – how they arrived at a specific (numerical) result; short essays or long short answers – making it is more difficult for a student to copy from another student’s exam.

3) If you are assigning papers in your course, assign some in-class writing as well, so that you can assess students’ writing ability in a monitored environment. This can help students’ writing and may help to identify plagiarized work.

4) Use alternate versions of multiple choice and true/false exams AND distribute the exams by row, so that you know that a student whom you have accused of cheating from a neighbor with a different test version actually had a neighbor with this different version. Otherwise you are bringing a case based only on the probability that the student cheated from another version, based upon the pattern of incorrect answers. There have been court cases brought (and lost) where the accusation was based upon the degree of match between a student’s answers and another version of the test, when there was no eyewitness testimony and the course instructor did not distribute the exams in a known way.

You can see if your course is included and if it is, you can see which materials students have uploaded for others to access.
5) **Require that students' desktops (and laps) be clear except for the exam, the bluebook (if used), and any other permitted material.** Unless explicitly allowed by the instructor, electronic devices (such as cell phones, notebooks, calculators, etc.) are not allowed to be out of backpacks or purses during quizzes and exams. These electronic devices must be packed away and turned off. Any student who is caught with one of these devices out will have his/her test taken and will be charged with the Honor Code violation of cheating.

If you have evidence that students were using electronic devices to cheat on an exam or assignment, that becomes a matter for the Honor Board. At that point you would contact me.

6) **If you permit the use of calculators during an exam,** keep in mind that students may use their calculators for more than computing during an exam. They may have formulas and other material stored there. One alternative is to let them bring in a single formula sheet that they have prepared. This will cut down on the temptation to cheat with the calculator. Course instructors may require the student to erase the memory, but this is time-consuming to verify before the exam begins and results in the loss of material that the honest student had stored but did not plan to access during the exam.

7) **Discuss plagiarism with your class.** Sometimes students do not understand that the work they turn in must reflect their own thinking. synthesis, analysis. Too often they read, take notes (sloppily) and then write. It is plagiarism, whether or not the intent was there.

8) **Do not leave exams unproctored.** You or a teaching assistant, not the other students trying to complete their own exams, should be on the lookout for any evidence of academic dishonesty.

9) **Establish a policy that does not permit students to leave the room during an exam and then return to complete their exam.** If they leave, they have completed the exam. Students who have a documented disability that permits accommodations in test taking may warrant an exception.

10) **If you ask students to purchase blue books,** have a mechanism to make certain the books they bring are blank. Some instructors ask students to exchange books but this assumes the students have not already written their names on them. Furthermore, some students prefer the larger books and will not want to trade with a student using a smaller book. Some instructors hand out exams individually after asking students to flip through the book. There may be other alternatives. Consider implementing this suggestion made by one Tulane faculty member: require each student to write and sign a pledge on their exam stating that they have not violated the College’s Honor Code during the writing of this exam/assignment.

**Web research paper source list**
If you type "buy an essay online" into a search engine you could get millions of matches. Some of these sites declare that the essays will escape plagiarism detecting software because they are written to order – for one student – and are not used again.

*Some examples of the ways these services address the plagiarism issue:*  
**www.bookwormlab.com** It is important to understand that **buying essays** is not a form of cheating and is certainly not illegal. No work will be plagiarized.

**http://essayslab.com**  **Confidentiality is among our priorities.** Once we hand over your work it is one hundred percent yours. No one will ever know you had any help with your project.

**www.marvelousessays.com**  **MarvelousEssays.com has a Zero Tolerance Plagiarism Policy**  
We guarantee that every paper provided by our company is totally plagiarism free so you can buy an essay without any doubts.

*Some of these companies and the writers they hire are located outside the U.S., where English is not a first language. For example:*  
**http://primeessays.com** All of our writers are college graduators and grand winners with variety of academic awards. This team is our professional contribution into development of acknowledgment on extended experience of working in various academic backgrounds.

*Others stress that it is never too late to order that paper:*  
**www.supremeessays.com**  **At SupremeEssays.com,** your order is completed faster than your thought about it. For regular orders we usually take 3 or more days whereas urgent orders are completed within just few hours.

**www.writingcentre.com**  **You can upload samples of your own writing, so your writer can emulate your vocabulary and style.** . . . Receive discounts with repeated orders.

Many sites will reveal the first paragraph or so of a paper, so it is still possible sometimes to identify plagiarism when students have purchased papers.

**What you can do about plagiarism**

While many cases of plagiarism are blatant and easy to document, other examples are in a gray area. There IS a distinction between a paper that shows conscious disregard for the standards of academic conduct and one that is careless in the use of in text citations but has made some attempt to provide documentation of sources. Plagiarism is more than carelessness; it is dishonesty. Only allegations of dishonesty should be brought to the Honor Board.

1) Reinforce the value of good writing – as a valuable life skill. Stress that good writing comes with practice. Steer students who have difficulty with their writing to the Writing Workshop in the Educational Resources and Counseling Center.

2) Where class size permits, require students to discuss their paper and their sources with you. If you suspect that the student did not write the paper, you may be able to provide stronger support for an allegation of plagiarism after attempting to discuss the paper’s content with the student. Students who purchase papers can also purchase drafts but they are likely to have limited acquaintance with the specific content and with the sources they have cited.
3) When you are able to document a case of plagiarism, bring it to the Honor Board. When students know that you will bring cases forward, this will have an impact on their behavior.

The process for reporting
The process for reporting a case in which academic dishonesty is suspected is described at length in the Code of Academic Conduct. What follows here is a very brief summary. Anyone suspecting a case of academic dishonesty should bring this to my attention: (martinez@tulane.edu or 865-5720). Anyone should feel free to discuss a case with me before bringing a formal charge forward, with the understanding, however, that the accuser is expected to bring the charge against the student(s) within 5 days of discovery.

Reporting a charge requires that the accuser prepare a letter summarizing the charge and the evidence. Please be advised that ALL evidence in support of the charge must be identified and supplied at this time. Evidence may include original copies of exams, answer keys, research papers and the sources from which they have allegedly been plagiarized (with both documents marked where the text was taken), statements from teaching assistants or other persons who witnessed cheating during an exam, etc. We will send a copy of everything that you provide to the accused student(s) along with my letter, a copy of the Code of Academic Conduct, and a list of faculty members available to serve as advisors to accused students.

Students with no prior convictions who have been accused of a violation that normally would carry upon conviction a penalty no more severe than a failing grade in the course and a period of probation are given the opportunity to plead guilty to the offense. If they do so, their penalty is a WF (withdrawn failing) grade in the course (which carries the same penalty as an “F”) and no probation. All students who are convicted of an Honor Code violation or plead guilty to a violation have this included in their permanent record. If a student does not plead guilty or is not given the opportunity to do so we will schedule a hearing. The accuser is expected to participate in the hearing.

The Code of Academic Conduct states: “When a violation of the Code of Academic is observed it is the duty of every member of the academic community who has evidence of the violation to take action. Students should take steps to uphold the code by reporting any suspected offense to the instructor or the Associate Dean of Newcomb-Tulane College” (p. 1). So, why don’t students report more often on in class cheating?

Unlike schools with more traditional honor code structures, exams at Tulane are proctored. It then becomes the responsibility of the course instructor or other proctor to monitor behavior during the exam. Student responses when asked whether they witnessed cheating in a class and if so, why they did not report it, tend to fall into two categories: 1) They cannot provide the necessary documentation for an allegation of cheating. They may see someone a few seats away with an open phone but cannot determine what the other student is doing or even know the name of the
other student. Furthermore, in paying unusual attention to the other
student he/she risks being accused of attempting to cheat. 2) They do not
want to call attention to themselves reporting on the behavior of fellow
students. If a student has to leave their own exam, walk across several
other students in a large lecture hall to get to the aisle, and then to the
front of the room to call the professor’s attention to cheating in the
student’s vicinity, they will not do it. It takes time away from their test and
sets them up for retaliation by fellow students. Faculty who walk around
the room, especially in large classes, and who have adequate assistance in
proctoring exams will have fewer instances of cheating and will send the
message that dishonesty will not be tolerated.