



**Virtual Academic Integrity Laboratory (VAIL)
Student Resource Guide:**

**Academic Integrity and Dishonesty Policies:
What Every Student Needs to Know**

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***Disclaimer:** This guide is for informational purposes only. No responsibility is accepted for the performance of any of the products listed.*

Introduction

This guide includes the following topics:

Why Should I Care About Academic Integrity?	2
What Can Happen to Me if I Commit an Act of Academic Dishonesty?	2
What Does It Mean if a Faculty Member Tells Me I Plagiarized?	3
This Sounds Pretty Serious. How Do I Avoid Getting Being Accused?	3
What About Group Work?	4
Conflicts of Opinion	4
Must I Report Others?	5

Why Should I Care About Academic Integrity?

Universities thrive on the free exchange of ideas. It has often been said that “ideas are to a university what money is to a bank.” As a result, scrupulous honesty is necessary in the exchange of ideas and we must acknowledge the ideas we use of others. Academic integrity is at the heart of the institution and closely tied to its reputation. It is everyone’s responsibility and privilege to develop new ideas and use others’ ideas with proper attribution. For an education to be meaningful, it must be one obtained legitimately. Learning to think critically and gaining skills is a continual process and maintaining academic integrity on the journey is the hallmark of a quality education.

What Can Happen to Me if I Commit an Act of Academic Dishonesty?

How institutions handle academic dishonesty varies.

- **Faculty.** If there is evidence that you have plagiarized or cheated, you will likely be approached by your faculty member and you will likely be asked to explain your behavior.
- **Faculty Sanctions.** You might receive a failing grade on an assignment or for the class itself. Or the opportunity to re-do the work with a small penalty.

- **Judicial Boards.** Depending on your institution's policy or honor code, you may be required to go before a group of your peers (some type of student panel) and present your version of the situation.
- **Board Sanctions.** If you are found guilty you may receive a penalty such as a notation in your academic record, suspension, or expulsion, depending on the severity of the academic dishonesty and whether it was your first offense.

To know exactly what the penalties are for your institution, get to know your campus policy. Ask questions, be informed.

What Does It Mean if a Faculty Member Tells Me I Plagiarized?

Suspicion

If a faculty member approaches you about your work and asserts it is plagiarized, s/he believes you used someone else's ideas without giving that person proper attribution. As we stated earlier, giving attribution indicates respect for other's ideas, shows a knowledge of the importance of acknowledging others and is crucial for measuring student performance.

Evidence

The faculty member probably has some evidence that you did not submit your own work through finding identical text on the Web or in a paper source.

Process

Typically, the faculty member will speak with you, present his/her concerns, and ask you for an explanation. If s/he is not satisfied with your response, you will likely receive a failing grade or zero on the assignment. Further, the faculty member may also present his/her evidence to the administration for formal action against you.

This Sounds Pretty Serious. How Do I Avoid Getting Being Accused?

1. **Consider what you hope to gain from your education.** If you seek to develop life skills and enrich your education, you probably are on the right road to avoiding academic dishonesty. Remember, you only hurt yourself when you cheat. You "cheat" yourself out of learning, miss the purpose of the assignment, and probably won't feel you've gained all that you might from your course.

2. **Be careful, get information, review your institution's policy and be sure you understand how to properly attribute ideas to others within and at the end of a paper or project.** There are resources here on the VAIL site, at your university library, writing center, and other sites at your university where you can learn how to ensure you understand how to avoid cheating and plagiarism.
3. **Avoid excuses.** Here are many different reasons students give for plagiarism and cheating: lack of time, the need to attain high grades, procrastination. The list goes on. None of them is very good nor is it worthwhile to risk being suspended or expelled, especially if you hope to go to graduate school.

So, be informed, be knowledgeable about your policy and learn how to properly cite your sources. The peace of mind you gain is well worth it.

What About Group Work?

I'm often a member of an assigned group for my class. How do I ensure I don't get accused of cheating with anyone on the final project we turn in?

- Be sure to review your faculty member's guidelines for group work carefully. If you have concerns, be sure to ask your faculty member for clarification. This is an excellent chance to get to know your professor and will likely help everyone in the class who probably has the same questions you do.
- Examine the criteria that will be used to evaluate the project.
- Many times a group project includes drafts handed in by individual members. If this is the case, you will have a chance to demonstrate your work individually as well as with the group as a whole.

If you do your work carefully, in all likelihood you have nothing to worry about. Of course, if you witness a group member plagiarizing, you should let your faculty member know to ensure you are not accused of dishonest behavior also.

Conflicts of Opinion

What if I am accused of cheating, but I don't agree I did cheat?

If your faculty member approaches you, you should have an opportunity to present your side of the story, this is quite likely and the norm at most institutions. It will be up to the faculty member to decide if s/he believes you

did not cheat. It may be s/he believes you did, in this case you will likely be given several opportunities to present your side of the case before any sanction is imposed.

If you cheated but did so inadvertently, you may not be able to avoid some form of sanction. However, if you truly did not cheat, and can present a convincing case, you will have ample opportunity to present your views before any action is taken. Everyone would like to see you succeed and truly hopes you did not cheat. So, most universities give students many chances to present their side of the story and demonstrate their honesty and tend to give the student the benefit of the doubt, especially if it is the first time. If you and your faculty member cannot come to an agreeable place of resolution, the matter may have to be heard by an academic administrator or a student or faculty board.

Must I Report Others?

I have heard that reporting instances where I have observed other students plagiarizing or cheating may be expected. I am not comfortable with this; why should I turn in someone else? Isn't it their problem?

No one wants to tell on anyone else. There is a strong cultural norm against telling on someone else. However, yes, many institutions consider it the responsibility of students to report their observances of academic dishonesty. In some institutions you may report it anonymously.

Many institutions consider it an important civic duty on campus to encourage integrity and report dishonesty. Although this is hard to believe, you are doing the class, yourself, and perhaps the accused student a favor. Maintaining fairness in the classroom is impossible if some may cheat while others do their own work. Stopping the practice is important and reporting it is one way you can contribute to maintaining an honest learning environment for everyone.