

Addressing Academic Dishonesty at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute²

Intellectual integrity is critical to the foundation of all academic work. Academic dishonesty, therefore, is considered a serious matter and will be addressed as such.

As defined in the current *Rensselaer Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities*, examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to: academic fraud, collaboration, copying, cribbing, fabrication, plagiarism, sabotage, and substitution. Additionally, *attempts* to commit academic dishonesty, or to *assist* in the commission or attempt of such an act, are also violations of the academic dishonesty policy.

If found in violation of the academic dishonesty policy, students may be subject to two types of penalties. The instructor administers an academic (grade) penalty, and the student may also enter the Institute judicial process and be subject to such additional sanctions as: warning, probation, suspension, expulsion, and alternative actions as defined in the current *Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities*.

Faculty Procedures for Responding

If there is reason to believe a student in your course may have been involved in academic dishonesty proceed as follows:

1. Contact the student(s) and schedule a meeting to discuss the allegations. This meeting should occur within 10 Institute business days of having discovered the possible dishonesty.
- 2) When meeting with a student, review the circumstances and evidence related to the suspicion of academic dishonesty and allow him or her the opportunity to provide his or her perspective on the situation. Take notes during the meeting to document important information.
- 3) After reviewing the situation, speaking to any witnesses, etc., make a determination as to the guilt or innocence of the accused student.
- 4) If it is concluded that a student has violated the Institute academic dishonesty policy, it is the professor's responsibility to determine the academic (grade) portion of the penalty (i.e. failure of the course, a significant reduction of the final grade, etc.) and to communicate this decision to the student in writing. This communication should occur within five Institute business days of having met with the student. Included in this written notification should be information regarding the student's option to appeal the grade decision and of the procedure/time limit in which to do so.
- 5) This written decision is copied to the Senior Judicial Administrator in the Dean of Students Office, along with a brief summary of the case facts and a copy of any supporting documentation (i.e. exams/assignments involving cheating, crib sheets, witness statements, etc.).
- 6) A copy of the incident of academic dishonesty will be kept on file in the Dean of Students Office as a record of the incident and as a way to monitor repeat/multiple offenses.

² This protocol has been in practice for a number of years and was officially documented in 1992 and approved by the Faculty Senate, Student Senate, Dean of Students Office, and the President in 1993. References to the Dean of the Faculty were changed to refer to the Provost in 2001.

If such records are not forwarded to the Dean of Students Office and such files are not centrally maintained, it is feasible that a student could participate in multiple acts of cheating with each professor being under the assumption that his or her course is the student's first offense.

- 7) In addition to the grade penalty, faculty members can also request that additional action be taken against a student they have found in violation of academic integrity standards. Such requests should be attached to the above-mentioned documentation when it is sent to the Senior Judicial Administrator. He or she will then review the material for possible judicial action and will proceed in accordance with Institute protocol. The Senior Judicial Administrator will also review prior academic dishonesty case files (located in the Dean of Students Office) to determine if said student is a "repeat offender".

Appeals

Decisions regarding grades have always been the responsibility and jurisdiction of the course professor, and the school in which the academic dishonesty occurred, as there is no one in a better position to make this determination. Any appeal of this grade decision is likewise under the same authority. Therefore, a student can submit a written appeal of the grade portion of his or her penalty to the Department Chair within five Institute business days of being notified of the professor's decision. If the course professor is the Department Chair or Dean of the School or there are other circumstances that could create the perception of "bias", steps must be taken to avoid conflicts of interest and to utilize the other appropriate individuals for the appeal process.

- 1) The Department Chair (or designee) will then make a determination based on the facts/circumstances of the case and the appropriateness of the original sanction. This determination should be made and communicated to the student and the professor within 10 Institute business days of receiving the appeal. Included in this written notification should be information regarding the student's option to appeal the grade decision and of the procedure/time limit in which to do so.
- 2) If the student or professor believes he or she has grounds for appealing the decision of the Department Chair (i.e., new evidence), both parties have the option to submit a written appeal to the Dean of the School within five Institute business days of receiving the decision. The Dean will then render a decision based on the facts/circumstances of the case and the appropriateness of the sanction. This determination should be made and communicated to the student and the professor within 10 Institute business days of receiving the appeal.
- 3) The decision of the Dean of the School may be subject to final determination by the Provost, with good cause and at the written request of either party involved, within five Institute business days of notification of the Dean of the School's decision. The Provost is unconstrained in the procedure he or she chooses to employ in the context of such a review. The Provost is the final level of appeal and his/her decision stands as final for both the student(s) and professor involved. The Provost will render a decision based on the circumstances of the case and the appropriateness of the sanction. This determination should be made and communicated to the student and the professor within 10 Institute business days of receiving the appeal.

- 4) Students found in violation of the academic dishonesty policy are prohibited from dropping a course in order to avoid the academic penalty. Instructors should, therefore, notify the Registrar's Office and Academic Advising about students who are not permitted to drop a course for this reason.
- 5) If an appeal takes place, the *final* decision should also be copied to the Senior Judicial Administrator, in the Dean of Students Office, if it differs from the original case outcome.

Non-Grade Appeals

Non-academic sanctions imposed via the Dean of Students Office are appealed through the Institute judicial system (as outlined in *The Rensselaer Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities*) and are not the responsibility of the professor, though he or she may be called as a witness.

Academic and Non-Academic Decisions

In the unlikely event that the verdict of guilt or innocence differs between the academic process and the judicial process, the academic dishonesty case may be forwarded to the President for final resolution. The President is unconstrained in the procedure he or she chooses to employ in the context of such a review and academic (grade) and non-academic decisions are subject to change based on his/her final determination.

Procedural Timelines

The designated procedural timelines should be adhered to unless there are extenuating circumstances and an agreement, to extend the process, is reached between the parties involved. However, expedience is important in such matters and the entire process (including appeals) should be concluded within one semester at most.

Policy on Conflicting Exams

The following is the long-standing policy on the resolution of conflicting exams.

Students who have conflicts between two or more exams given at the same time will resolve the matter of who will give the make-up exam in the following manner:

1. The lower level course has precedence over an upper level course. For example, if a student has conflict between a 2000 and 4000 level course, the instructor in the 4000 level course must give a makeup exam.
2. If both courses are the same level (i.e. both are 2000 level courses) the student should approach each instructor to determine if one of the instructors will give a makeup-exam.
3. If both instructors refuse to give a makeup exam when requested under the circumstances of item # 2, the student should see the department scheduler. It will be that scheduler's responsibility to call his/her counterpart in the other department to determine who should give the makeup exam.
4. If the two schedulers cannot reach a compromise, the scheduler originally approached by the student should call the Associate Dean in his/her school and ask that Dean to flip a coin and the loser of the toss will have to give a make-up exam.