

# THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN CONFRONTING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AT SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY



## AT SMU ACADEMIC INTEGRITY MATTERS!

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### The Responsibility Of The Faculty

Confronting academic dishonesty is the shared responsibility of both faculty and students, although faculty members are called upon to play a greater role in the process. Many students at the University, however, are becoming more and more concerned about academic dishonesty in their classes. Much of the information included in this guide has been contributed by students because of their desire to see cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty diminish and ultimately disappear.

### Guidelines For Faculty Members

- A. When a faculty member has reason to believe that a academic violation has occurred, he or she should gather all pertinent evidence such as tests, reports, computer programs, and other academic assignments, and identify any possible witnesses. During an exam the faculty member may remove any unauthorized materials and/or, if applicable, ask a student suspected of cheating to move to another desk, **but the student must be allowed to complete the exam in question. Also, because an accused student may refute the allegation or appeal a penalty decision, the student must be allowed to attend all classes and complete all assignments until due process procedures have concluded.**
- B. The faculty member should meet with the student(s) involved and discuss the alleged violation and any supporting evidence. In this meeting every effort should be made to preserve the teacher-student relationship. The student should be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations and to present evidence in his or her defense.
- C. **If the professor determines that a violation is likely, the student must be informed of his or her right to a hearing before the SMU Honor Council and the right to appeal any penalty decision the Honor Council may assess. This is an essential step.**
- D. Unless the faculty member dismisses the allegation, the student has two options.
  1. The student can choose not to dispute the facts upon which the charge is based **and**, in writing, waive his or her right to an Honor Council hearing by signing the Faculty Disposition form. Then the faculty member may assess one (or more) of the following penalties. These are the **recommended** penalties that an instructor may assess.
    - a. Written warning that further academic violations may result in a more severe penalty;
    - b. No credit or reduced credit for the paper, assignment, or test in question;
    - c. Retake of exam or re-submission of assignment;
    - d. Failing grade or reduced final grade for the course.

This action must be reported on a **Faculty Disposition** form (green form) provided by the Office of the Dean of Student Life, the Honor Council web site, or the chair of the academic department. Forward the completed form, which must include the signatures of both the student and faculty member, to the Office of the Dean of Student Life. Relevant documents (or copies of them) such as crib notes, exam papers, plagiarized materials, your course syllabus, or other supporting evidence should also be forwarded.

The *Faculty Disposition* will be placed in a confidential file. Generally no additional action will be taken; however, each *Faculty Disposition* is reviewed to determine if the circumstances warrant further action. If the student has been involved in other violations, if the instructor has recommended an additional penalty (such as suspension), or if the seriousness of the violation dictates it, the Assistant Dean will forward the matter to the Honor Council for possible further action. Certain types of misconduct, such as sending a person in to substitute for a student during that student's exam or altering academic records have often involved the penalty of suspension. **In cases such as these, or if the instructor wishes to recommend a penalty of suspension, the faculty member should contact the Office of the Dean of Student Life immediately.**

2. The student can choose to dispute the facts or decline to waive the hearing at which point the faculty member **must** refer the matter to the Honor Council. This referral must occur within **22 class days** from the discovery of an alleged violation. A student has the right to choose a hearing before the Honor Council. An *Honor Council Referral* form (pink form) may be obtained from the Office of the Dean of Student Life, the Honor Council web site or the chair of your department. The referral should include a detailed written summary of the allegation, the supporting evidence, and recommendation, if any, concerning penalties. Relevant documents (or copies of them) such as crib notes, exam papers, plagiarized materials, or other supporting evidence should also be forwarded. The faculty member should also mention the grade-related penalty, if any, that he or she assessed the student for the assignment or class.

The Honor Council will investigate the matter further and arrange for a formal hearing during which the accusing professor and the accused student will be asked for their statements, be questioned by the Honor Council, and will be allowed to question each other.

The Honor Council makes the necessary arrangements for a hearing, which, given the participants' differing schedules, may require some time. The accused student is advised by the Honor Council Vice President and may have in the hearing room their parents and one (1) moral support person who must be a member of the SMU community. Attorneys are never allowed in a disciplinary hearing process at any time. The time required of the faculty member varies depending upon the details and complexity of the case, but typically, the time commitment is small. The Honor Council President will conduct the hearing in accordance with standardized procedures and the Assistant Dean will always be in attendance to ensure the integrity of the process.

- E. **At SMU, the faculty member retains complete discretion regarding the grade assessed for the alleged violation. However, if the faculty member chooses to assess his or her own penalty AND refer the matter to the Honor Council, the faculty member should complete the *Faculty Disposition* form with the student and send it along with all other referral materials.**
- F. Whether the matter is resolved with the faculty member in a *Faculty Disposition* or through an Honor Council hearing, the student has the right to appeal the faculty member's sanction (but not grade) or the Honor Council's decision to the University Conduct Council. Refer to the flowchart of the discipline process in this document for additional details.
- G. All information concerning academic dishonesty accusations and dispositions is strictly confidential and should be treated accordingly.

## Why Are Such Procedures Necessary?

It is certainly reasonable to wonder why attention to these procedures is necessary when it is obvious, or at least appears to be obvious, that a student has cheated. One answer is rooted in the consistent judicial interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of due process of law. Unlike the considerable judicial deference afforded the highly subjective process of evaluating the quality of a student's performance on assignments, an allegation of academic dishonesty is an assertion that a person has violated a rule. Whether or not such an assertion is true is a fact to be established, not assumed, even when such an assumption seems quite reasonable.

Confronting impermissible behavior and stopping it is certainly appropriate. When a student is apparently "caught in the act," it makes academic dishonesty more difficult to deny, but many students persist in that denial. Some are amazingly contentious, despite compelling evidence against them. For example, a student facing probable suspension (a likely possibility for repeated violations) may feel he or she has nothing to lose in challenging the allegation, notwithstanding the evidence. A student may also wish to shift the focus from the evidence of his or her misconduct to any possible missteps by the University in dealing with the matter.

Courts are insistent that colleges and universities, at a minimum follow their own procedures. For Southern Methodist University, these procedures have been designed to protect the interests of students, the University, faculty, and administrators. Evidence that is sufficiently compelling to substantiate an accurate on-the-spot determination that a student is cheating should be equally compelling after the fact in a hearing should the student choose to dispute the allegations. Accordingly, it is essential to follow established procedures even if you think they are (and seem to be) unnecessary and burdensome steps being taken to arrive at the inevitable.

Such legalities may sometimes cause understandable frustrations, but they are realities under which we are obligated to function. As a practical matter, however, following the proper steps rarely prevents us from arriving at the appropriate outcome. Our goal is to do so in a manner that is beyond reproach. This, of course, requires a collaborative effort between all of us at the University who place a high value on academic integrity.

## The Student's Discipline Record

Records regarding academic dishonesty are maintained permanently in the Office of the Dean of Student Life. The minimum penalty the Honor Council may assess includes Deferred Suspension from SMU and an Honor Violation on the student's transcript, which remains three (3) years past the student's graduation date. Any penalty involving suspension from SMU would be permanently noted on the transcript. Disciplinary records, including those pertaining to academic dishonesty, may be released or disclosed to persons outside the University only with the consent of the student or in response to a court order or subpoena. Some governmental agencies, professional schools, and other entities will request that applicants grant them access to these records. The primary purpose of maintaining the records is to alert the Office of the Dean of Student Life to students who may be involved in repeated violations, which typically result in suspension from the University.

## The Rights Of The Student

A student who is accused of academic dishonesty is entitled to due process, which includes the right to know what evidence supports the charge as well as the right to a hearing. If the matter is resolved through a *Faculty Disposition* and neither the faculty member nor the student request an Honor Council hearing, such a hearing is not required. Under any circumstance, however, a student has the right to appeal a decision.

A decision rendered by the faculty member or the Honor Council may be appealed if the student gives written notice to the Dean of Student Life within four calendar days (excluding school holidays) of notification of the decision. (If a student wishes to appeal his or her grade, that process must be completed through the professor's academic department.)

## Ways Students Commit Academic Dishonesty

According to the Honor Code, academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, academic sabotage, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and impeding Honor Council investigations. The following list of various ways students engage in dishonest behavior was compiled by students with the desire to help faculty members confront such behavior more effectively. Students may commit academic dishonesty by:

1. Coughing and/or using hand signals during a test;
2. Concealing notes on hands, caps, shoes, or in pockets;
3. Writing in blue books prior to an examination;
4. Writing information on blackboards, desks, or keeping notes on the floor;
5. Obtaining copies of a test in advance, for example at an earlier exam periods offered by the faculty member or from a friend that works at the copy center (alphagraphics, images etc.);
6. Using a Camera Phone to take pictures of the test;
7. Leaving information in the bathroom;
8. Exchanging exams so that neighbors have identical test forms;
9. Having a substitute take a test and providing falsified identification for the substitute;
10. Fabricating data for lab assignments;
11. Changing a graded paper and requesting that it be regraded;
12. Failing to turn in a test and later suggesting the faculty member has lost it;
13. Stealing another student's graded test and writing one's own name on it;
14. Submitting computer programs written by another person;
15. Recording two answers, one on the test form, one on the answer sheet;
16. Marking an answer sheet to enable another student to see the answer;
17. Encircling two adjacent answers and claiming to have had the correct answer;
18. Stealing an exam for someone in another section or for placement in a test file;
19. Using a programmable calculator to store test information;
20. Taking another student's computer assignment printout from a computer lab;
21. Destroying or removing library materials to gain an academic advantage;
22. Transferring a computer file from one person's account to another;
23. Distracting teacher with a question so another student can copy;
24. Sharing information via hand-held computer or other electrical devices;
25. Purchasing papers from internet paper mills;
26. Storing answers in a programmable calculator;
27. Text messaging answers;
28. Recording answers on MP3 players;
29. Hiding notes inside transparent objects (i.e. pens, pencils, waterbottles)

## Tips For Combating Academic Dishonesty During Examinations

The following suggestions for preventing academic dishonesty during examinations were provided by faculty members and students. As you are also likely aware, academic dishonesty also occurs in labs and on homework assignments, research papers, and computer programs.

1. Enforce silence during the testing period;
2. Require proctors to remain in the testing room throughout the testing period and ask them to walk around;
3. Use a system for marking unanswered questions so that students may not easily fill in or alter answers later and submit them for regrading;
4. Require students to remove caps and hats during the testing period;
5. Require students to bring blue books at the beginning of the semester and distribute them yourself;
6. Separate students or assign seats;
7. Distribute different test forms and inform students of that practice;
8. Check photo identification at every test if the class is large and you do not recognize every student;
9. Change tests each semester;
10. Check desks and the surrounding area for unauthorized materials;
11. Require students to sign tests and check the signatures;
12. Photocopy completed exams (or a sample of them) for comparison with regrade requests and inform students of this practice;
13. Do not post answers to an exam prior to its completion;
14. Require students to place personal belongings at the front of the room before a test;
15. Require students to remove caps, hats, and sunglasses during testing;
16. Disallow hand-held computers, cell phones, or programmable calculators;

Many faculty members include a statement in their syllabi that stresses that academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Syllabi may also include test-taking rules such as "no baseball caps or hats," "no books," "ID required." Faculty members should then follow through by confronting students who violate the policies. A suggested general statement for syllabi follows.

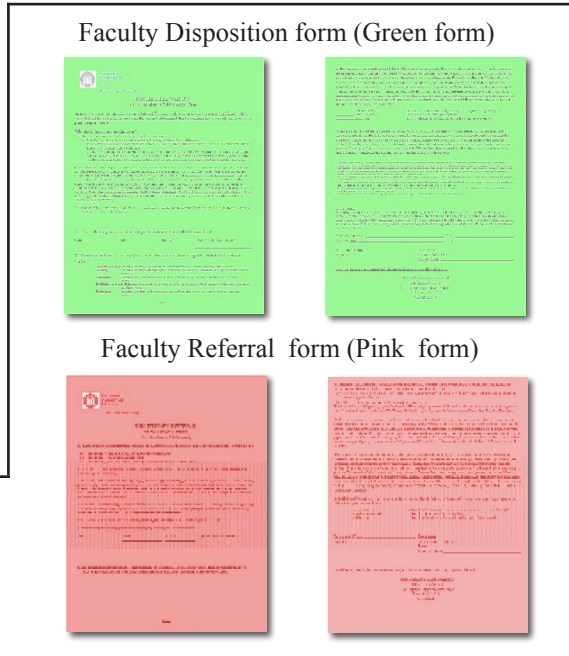
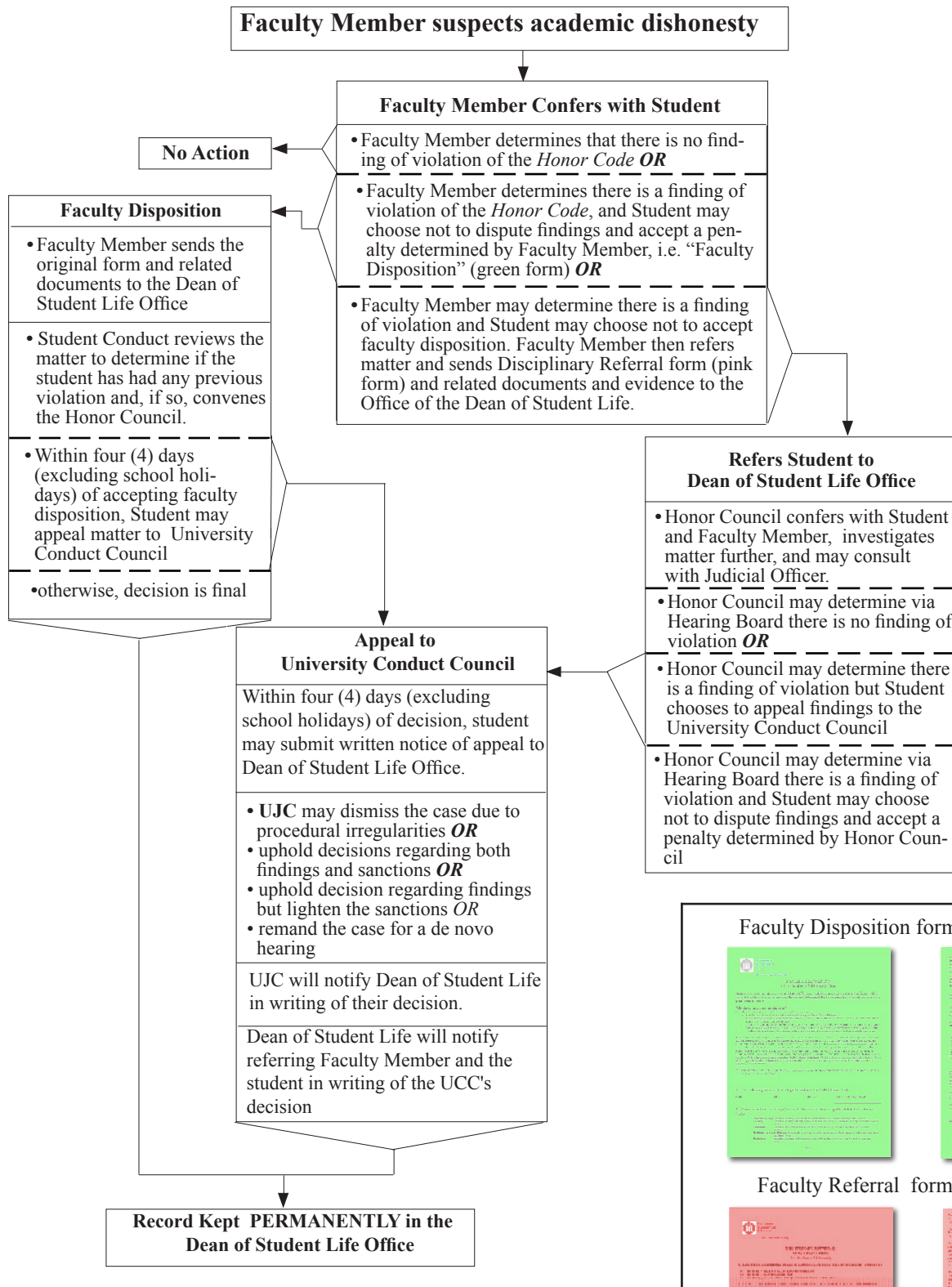
***Policy on Academic Dishonesty:*** *Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty (the SMU Honor Code) are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Honor Council web site at <http://www.smu.edu/honorcouncil>*

Such policy statements **should not** include predetermined outcomes, e.g., "Any cheating will result in an 'F' in the course." Statements like these are contrary to the discipline process, which includes appeal rights and other due process requirements. Policy statements may, however, reference possible penalties and the faculty member's typical recommendation in such matters, e.g., "An 'F' will be the recommended penalty in most cases of academic dishonesty."

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# The Discipline Process: Violations Involving Academic Dishonesty

Dean of Student Life Office  
Southern Methodist University



**Forms are available:**

- \* on-line at <http://www.smu.edu/honorcouncil>
- \* on-line at <http://www.smu.edu/cte>
- \* at the Dean of Student Life Office (302 Hughes-Trigg)
- \* through your departmental office