



## Penn Student Perspectives on Preventive Academic Integrity Measures

Compiled by the University Honor Council of the University of Pennsylvania

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Contact: [universityhonorcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:universityhonorcouncil@gmail.com)

Co-Chairs: Christopher D'Urso (C '18/Fels '18) and Crystal Lu (NU '17)

### I. Executive Summary of Recommendations

1. **Vigilance as Fairness:** *Enforcing the provisions of the Code is essential to cultivating a fair and scholarly environment. Professors should be more consistent and vigilant in their enforcement of the Code and referral of cases to the Office of Student Conduct.*
2. **Syllabi Clarity & Grey Areas:** *The rules for assignments and the class at-large, especially in regard to grey areas, and the consequences of a violation of the Code should be prominently featured on the syllabus with as much clarity and specificity as possible.*
  - 2.1. *Grey Areas: Tests Banks and Collaboration*
3. **Exam Environment:** *Exam environments should be constructed to encourage integrity and promote fair and equitable evaluation.*
  - 3.1. *Sign the Code*
  - 3.2. *Different Exam Types*
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  - 3.4. *Fair Enforcement of Time Parameters*
  - 3.5. *Number of Test Proctors, Vigilance of Test Proctors*
  - 3.6. *Unauthorized Use of Outside Material*
4. **Exam Reuse:** *Exam reuse, even across multiple years, can promote unfairness in the testing environment.*
5. **Exam Reevaluations:** *The regrading of examinations should have safeguards to prevent tampering with examinations and ensure the integrity and consistency of the process.*
6. **Late Assignment Submission:** *Being able to submit assignments with progressive grade penalties rather than having a hard deadline can reduce cheating and plagiarism.*

### II. Packet Overview

This packet was compiled by the University Honor Council in response to student feedback. For more information on the Council, please reference the last page of this packet. By and large, students respect the Code of Academic Integrity (“the Code”), but sometimes, due to any number of factors, a violation does occur. This violation affects not only the student who committed it, but also the students around them and the community at-large.

While as a premier educational institution we should, and we do, hold students to very high standards, there are some measures that the Faculty can take to prevent or detect violations of the Code. This is not in the spirit of “babysitting” the students who falter, but rather in the spirit of cultivating an environment of fairness for all students and helping students not only learn the material but also become accustomed to participating in true scholarship.

### **III. Recommendations**

**1. *Vigilance as Fairness:*** *Enforcing the provisions of the Code is essential to cultivating a fair and scholarly environment. Professors should be more consistent and vigilant in their enforcement of the Code and referral of cases to the Office of Student Conduct.*

Students understand that a professor is not a hall monitor, and therefore that professors are not exclusively occupied with catching students and detecting violations of the Code. The community also understands, however, the cheating and violations of the Code do nonetheless occur. In 2012, “more than two-thirds of college students reported that they had engaged in some form of academic dishonesty in the past year.”<sup>1</sup> Despite some professors’ wariness, consistent enforcement is crucial to mitigating these issues. Of course, in many ways, enforcement is deterrence, but faculty can sometimes underestimate the degree to which enforcement is crucial to fairness and the community. This is particularly true in the case of curved classes.

Imagine a course in which homework is assigned and collaboration is not allowed. However, many students collaborate, and the Professor does not notice or take active step to detect collaboration. The students who collaborated all receive nearly perfect scores on their homework while those who completed the homework independently received what would have been around average scores. In a curved class, this sets up a dynamic where, by rewarding the students who collaborated, those who completed the assignment honestly are given a lower grade than they would have received had all students not collaborated.

Even in a non-curved environment, failure to detect violations of the Code erodes at students’ perceptions of the procedural and distributive fairness of the course. If the Professor does not penalize one violator, it devalues the quality work that other students produce. The University as well as this Council make a great effort to stress the importance of academic integrity. Professors above all understand this importance and should reinforce it by actively enforcing the rules set out. The University as well as Academic Departments offer a variety of resources to help in their efforts, such as “TurnItIn” plagiarism software as well as open access to the Office of Student Conduct staff.

**2. *Syllabi Clarity & Grey Areas:*** *The rules for assignments and the class at-large, especially in regard to grey areas, and the consequences of a violation of the Code should be prominently featured on the syllabus with as much clarity and specificity as is possible.*

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<sup>1</sup> McCabe, Donald L., Kenneth D. Butterfield, and Linda Klebe. Treviño. "A Journey and a Commitment to Action." *Cheating in College: Why Students Do It and What Educators Can Do about It*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012. 2. Print.

The syllabus defines the parameters of a course as well as the expectations placed on students. As a result, it is crucial that syllabi not only mention the Code, but that its implications for the course in question are explained clearly in the text and are orally reviewed.

According to student feedback, oftentimes syllabi merely mention that violations will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct or that violations will result in a failing grade (though some do not even include this information). Faculty should be more specific in what constitutes a violation. This is particularly true in regard to grey areas of academic integrity (discussed below).

In many cases, it may seem obvious what a violation would look like, but students come from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds with varied experiences where many lack the intuition that more experienced students and scholars have developed.

Such specificity is also important considering the many courses and expectations students often juggle. Collaboration standards, citation standards, and other standards can vary widely across courses and assignments. Students often must juggle the professor- and assignment-specific integrity standards when shifting between different types of assignments and different courses' work. In light of this, the more explicit a professor can be the easier it will be to manage these expectations.

Additionally, many students have remarked that Professors often gloss over the Code of Academic integrity sections on their syllabi in their oral review. Taking time to orally review the information and highlight this information is incredibly helpful for student understanding and also creates a dialogue that allows students to ask questions about the subject now or in the future. This oral review highlights its importance to both the course and the academic community.

## **2.1 Grey Areas: Tests Banks and Collaboration**

As discussed above, even the most clear-cut of issues can be confusing for some students depending on the context and the student's background. However, some issues are pervasively confusing to the student population, and, as a result, we recommend that these specifically be addressed both orally and in syllabi.

One subject is that of **test banks**. Organizations (e.g. clubs, fraternities/sororities, etc.) are often in possession of previous years' tests that were at the time made public, but are not made available to everyone currently in the class. This means that some students have access to significantly more preparation materials than others. Such an issue should be explicitly addressed to eliminate any confusion. For example, say that the Professor for the course in the Fall of 2015 offered practice exams from Spring of 2015 and Fall of 2014 for students' preparation. In the Spring of 2016, the Professor might choose to offer only the exams from Spring of 2015 and Fall of 2015. Students who can somehow gain access to the Fall of 2014 exam may have a significant advantage, especially if questions are often recycled.

The problem of test banks is often much worse than this. Some organizations maintain banks with exams allegedly dating back to the 1990's. Despite this fact, Professors often do not mention whether students may use these previously provided exams. Since these exams were

once made publically available, students often do not see issue with using them. In addition, their use may not violate the Code unless specifically prohibited by the Professor.

Another grey area that ought to be explicitly addressed is that of **collaboration**. In many courses, it is unclear whether collaboration is permitted and, if it is, for what particular assignments or evaluations and to what extent. Some Professors do not address collaboration at all--others say, for example, collaboration is allowed, but do not specify for what and to what extent. Specificity in collaboration standards removes confusion and reduces inadvertent violations of the Code.

### **3. *Exam Environment: Exam environments should be constructed to encourage integrity and promote fair and equitable evaluation.***

Perhaps one of the most significant ways faculty can affect academic integrity outcomes is through the way in which they craft the exam environment. Below are a few recommendations for cultivating an exam environment that promotes integrity, many of which are drawn from the practices of some existing faculty.

#### **3.1 *Sign the Code***

Many but not all professors have students sign the Code of Academic Integrity directly before an exam. Research has shown that similar priming has encouraged many forms of prosocial behavior, including reduced cheating. Signing this Code is something that is of little cost to the student with potentially invaluable rewards. If the signing of code prevents even one student from making a bad choice, it is worth it.

#### **3.2 *Different Exam Types***

It is critical that multiple versions of an exam are distributed in a deliberate order on exam day. Additionally, the fact that there are multiple exams should be emphasized the day of the exam. Despite any difficulties the different types may cause cheaters, just knowing that there are multiple versions of the exam can reduce cheating.

#### **3.3 *Mobile Phone Collection***

Many professors neglect to instruct their proctors to collect mobile phones when students leave to go to the bathroom. Access to the internet should be limited to the greatest extent possible, and one of the measures necessary for this is to ensure students turn in their mobile phone with an instructor or TA before going to the bathroom.

#### **3.4 *Fair Enforcement of Time Parameters***

Pervasive within student feedback is the fact that time limits on exams and in-class assessments are not equitably enforced. Many students make an effort to finish before the time

has been called and make choices accordingly. However, many students say that TA's sometimes give a grace period of thirty seconds or a minute or, even when students use more time than allotted, fail to report the violation. Everyone should have the same time to complete an assessment, and this time should be enforced to promote fairness inside and outside the classroom. To further accomplish this goal, proctors could have students pass exams to the end of their row in lieu of having them walk with their exam to the front of the examination room. This would ensure all exams are collected at roughly the same time. Additionally, this would prevent the formation of long lines at the front of the room where students may have the ability to talk while still holding their exams. This latter scenario may provide students the opportunity to change answers and should thus be avoided by having students pass exams to the aisle.

### **3.5 *Number of Test Proctors, Vigilance of Test Proctors***

One other crucial part of the test environment is proctoring. Proctors are necessary to detect violations, and sometimes the proctor to student ratio in an exam environment prevents effective enforcement. One student reported having 3 sections of a lecture in one lecture hall for an exam, with only one Professor and one TA to supervise the hall. This does not help promote fairness in the testing environment. Additionally, it is crucial that the proctors be alert. Some proctors spend much of the testing time on a computer or phone rather than looking around the room to ensure test procedures are being followed. These proctors should be reminded of what their responsibilities are and the importance of their function.

### **3.6 *Unauthorized Use of Outside Material***

Preventing access to unauthorized material in exams is critical. Abuse of allowed note sheets is especially problematic, whether through the practices of bringing more sheets of notes than allowed or creating flaps on pre-existing note sheets for the addition of extra material. Fairness in the use of note-sheets can be promoted by having students briefly show their sheet to the proctor and requiring that sheets be handed in with the test. In the case of written exams using "blue-books," Professors have also reported students bringing with them blue-books which they previously filled with notes to use during the exam while escaping detection. Blue books for examinations should thus be stamped or otherwise uniquely marked to prevent this.

## **4. *Exam Reuse: Exam reuse, even across multiple years, can promote unfairness in the testing environment.***

This packet mentioned earlier that the use of test banks should be explicitly addressed, and we expect that most professors would ban their use. However, some professors still nonetheless reuse exams from previous years. This means that those who do choose to take advantage of banks of previous tests will be able to leverage this advantage very easily. Exam content should be varied as much as possible so long as it remains a relatively fair evaluation across years.

**5. Exam Reevaluations:** *The regrading of examinations should have safeguards to prevent tampering with examinations and ensure the integrity and consistency of the process.*

Professors already have in place some safeguards to prevent alterations of exams that are being submitted for reevaluation. However, the most common step, requiring that exams be written in pen, is not sufficient as an answer could be scratched or crossed out, and then resubmitted with a correct answer below. One way to maintain the integrity of regrades is through scanning exams and returning them electronically so that the Professor retains the hard copy of the original exam. Alternatively, if scanning exams is not feasible for a class due to large enrollment, Professors may institute a policy whereby exams are not physically returned to students. If students have any concerns regarding their grade, they can inspect the exam and request a regrade in the presence of the Professor or a Teaching Assistant during office hours. This will minimize the likelihood that a student will be able to change answers after the fact.

**6. Late Assignment Submission:** *Being able to submit assignments with progressive grade penalties rather than having a hard deadline can reduce cheating and plagiarism.*

Many students who unfortunately commit a violation of the Code when completing an assignment or writing an essay do so out of desperation. It may be 2AM the night before it is due, and they know they will fail the assignment if they do not turn it in on time. This puts incredible pressure on them. While we should be demanding of our students, creating a system as many faculty have that allows late submissions with progressive grade penalties reduces these incentives to cheat. Students are subject to many stresses in their lives inside and outside of school. These should be acknowledged; harsh penalties such as an automatic failure on an assignment are not appropriate or in the spirit of promoting academic integrity.

#### **IV. About the Council**

The University Honor Council of the University of Pennsylvania (UHC) is a Provost-chartered undergraduate student body that promotes academic integrity and honorable conduct in the Penn community. Working closely with the Office of Student Conduct, we run several initiatives to this end. Moreover, members of the UHC send representatives to sit on academic integrity and student conduct hearings.

The UHC actively interacts with all parts of the University community to promote academic integrity and ethical conduct. We educate fellow students via various campaigns and presentations, meet with University administrators and professors, and cultivate connections with other Universities and their alike bodies to draw on their valuable insights. We are independent from all other student groups and receive funding and support through the Office of the Provost.

You can contact the UHC at [universityhonorcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:universityhonorcouncil@gmail.com)

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