June 15, 2007

Dear MBA Students and Faculty,

This Spring semester, four academic integrity cases were brought before the Smeal Honor Committee. Three cases went into full review while the fourth was cleared upon investigation. One of the reviewed cases included an Executive MBA incident. Executive MBA students and faculty took part in an Academic Integrity (AI) training exercise on main campus this Spring and were able to support the case review.

MBA Case 1:
Upon careful investigation and review, it was determined that the student in question made an oversight with regard to the non-citation of a definition. As the student had otherwise fully cited information in the deliverable, the student was formally warned to properly cite in the future.

MBA Case 2:
In depth investigation and review found the student in question to have committed moderate plagiarism. The student received an "F" in the course for committing a 1st offense moderate plagiarism. This sanction is in line with the University's Academic Sanctioning Guidelines.

MBA Case 3:
This potential violation involved the appearance of impropriety. Concern was raised over a student who was typing in class while solutions were being reviewed by the professor. In cooperation with the professor, the AI investigation confirmed the originality of the student's submitted work. The student was fully cleared.

Executive MBA Case 1:
A student admitted to having deliberately submitted/uploaded a blank file on the evening that a final paper was due. Upon review, the Honor Committee held to the professor's given sanction of a failing grade for the assignment. In addition, the student volunteered to share his/her experience in a public forum as a living and educational case.

Finally, two undergraduate students in the same class committed plagiarism on an assignment. Both cases were uncontested, so they did not go into AI review. The professor consulted the university sanctioning guidelines and lowered each student's final course grade by two letter grades.

Key Learning
With your input and feedback we will continue the commitment to improve our Honor Code system. In the spirit of ongoing learning and dialogue, we would like to highlight several important takeaways from these experiences.

1) We cannot assume that all incoming MBA students have a common or consistent understanding of what it means to plagiarize. Smeal students come from diverse backgrounds in terms of culture, language, work and academic experience. In order to maintain the academic integrity standards of the Smeal Honor Code, we have a shared

responsibility to explicitly state the expectations and requirements for delivering original works. Accordingly, we are have compiled a set of working guidelines so that students can review standard citation requirements. The topic will be introduced at MBA Orientation and the guide will remain online as a reference tool. The guide includes examples and consequences of violations along with a self-test for students to ensure their familiarity with correct citation standards. We welcome student and professor feedback on the guide along with your suggestions for other useful tools that support our Honor Code objectives. Beyond the plagiarism guide, we are happy to assist students in accessing additional resources if they need further help with citation standards.

2) Situational awareness is paramount.   As integrity-driven leaders, we must be mindful of our actions and respect the perceptions of our colleagues. As such, Our Honor Code includes a statement about the appearance of impropriety, and we are all responsible to manage ourselves accordingly.

3) Clarity in assignment requirements and deadlines is important in creating a community of trust. If students are unclear on project guidelines and deadlines, then students should seek clarification from the professor. Likewise, professors can minimize confusion by setting clear standards for submitting timely assignments. For example, if students are required to hand in assignments *before* class then the drop boxes on ANGEL can be managed accordingly. Professors who need help with ANGEL are invited to contact Mike Hofherr (mbh153@psu.edu) for assistance.

4) We are all part of a learning environment with a system of standards. The Honor Code is less about being *perfect* and more about taking ownership and accountability when we do make mistakes or when we are at risk of making a mistake.

5) In closing, it is important to remember that our process is designed to clear students who did nothing wrong, as much as it is designed to impose sanctions on those who do violate the Academic Honor Code.

We invite you to reflect on these learning opportunities, and if you would like to share your thoughts with use please do so by contacting any of us by e-mail. Once again, we thank all of you for your ongoing commitment to honor and academic excellence in the Smeal community.

Sincerely,

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