

Smeal Honor Code

Graduate Programs Disclosure Notice – Fall 2010 & Spring 2011

In the Fall semester of 2010 and the Spring Semester of 2011, there were three academic integrity incidents within the Smeal Graduate Community of Masters and PhD students. The case details are summarized below.

Please note that all academic integrity case records are maintained in a centralized file at the Office of Judicial Affairs.

Case 1

During a final exam, a student became concerned that a fellow student was using the Internet to complete an examination.

The professor notified the class prior to the final examination that the exam would be open-book, open-book, and ANGEL would be accessible during the course of the exam. The professor was notified of a possible violation of this rule and immediately took action to address the situation. After inadvertently addressing the wrong student, the professor addressed the correct student who was suspected of violating the exam rules. The student stated that the sources were downloaded prior to the exam and were a part of their classroom notes. The professor reminded the student again of the rules of the examination period and allowed the student to continue the examination.

After the exam, the professor took special notice in grading this particular exam and found that there were no significant difference from fellow peer answers, and determined that there was no evidence that a violation was committed. The professor and Dean Sheehan also had a follow-on conversation with the student who made the initial observations and the student in concern. In these further conversations, no evidence was discovered that demonstrated an integrity violation had occurred.

It was determined that the professor's actions were sufficient and that no further evidence existed to suggest a violation had been committed.

Key Learning:

While, it was fair to use notes downloaded at a prior date; a situation such as this raises the appearance of impropriety. Clarifying with the professor in advance whether the downloaded notes could be used would have avoided the situation and avoided creating the appearance of impropriety.

Case 2

In the Executive MBA program, a student approached Dean Sheehan with a concern that a fellow student was working on a final exam during class time past the cutoff time when the take home exam was due. The professor in the class also had evidence suggesting that the student had worked on the exam past the due date while claiming that computer errors had prevented the student from submitting the exam on time. Based on the evidence, a Review Board was constituted; the student denied working on the exam past the due date and maintained that a computer virus had prevented the submission of the exam on time. In reviewing the allegation with the students involved and the professor, the Review Board found evidence that further violations of the Honor Code had been committed including plagiarism. The Review Board adjourned its meeting to ask the student for documentation that would help determine whether additional violations had occurred; in addition, the evidence suggested to the Review Board that the student involved had lied about whether the student had worked on the exam after the deadline. After several private conversations between the student and Dean Sheehan, the student did admit to all the original allegations and admitted to lying during the first Review Board. The Review Board had determined to fail the student in the course and possibly refer the case to Judicial Affairs for a sanction of XF. The student decided to withdraw from the program immediately and will not receive a degree from Penn State Smeal.

Key Learning:

The student's conduct clearly violated the rules of the course; the student substantially compounded the problem by lying about the allegations. If the student had been honest about the allegations, the Review Board might have

been more lenient. When you make a mistake, it is always best to admit it and try to figure out how to be better in the future.

Case 3

A professor was concerned that the written assignments of two students were very similar. The assignments were individual written assignments. Based on the similarity of the papers, the matter was referred to a Review Board. One of the students admitted to using the other student's paper as a template; the student whose paper was used as a template had no knowledge that it would be used in this way. The student using the other student's paper as a template admitted that it violated the rules of the course. The student received a failing grade on the assignment and a reduced course grade.

Key Learning:

Although it is sometimes permissible to see how other students have constructed an assignment, it is never acceptable to copy someone else's work as a template for your own. Even if you substitute your own words, the similarities may still be great enough that it constitutes plagiarism.

Sincerely,

Jim Thomas (j2t@psu.edu)
Dean
Smeal College of Business

Dennis Sheehan (dps6@psu.edu)
Associate Dean, MBA Programs
Smeal College of Business

Vernis Welmon (vmw1@psu.edu)
Associate Dean, Diversity and Community
Smeal College of Business

Paari Rajendran (pxr179@psu.edu)
Graduate Assistant, Honor and Integrity Initiatives
Smeal College of Business

Chad Handley (crh5263@psu.edu)
V.P of Academic Affairs
Smeal College of Business