ACADEMIC INTEGRITY in the College of Arts and Sciences

Faculty members should refer to the university catalog for Boston College’s policy on academic integrity. What follows are some suggestions for best practices in preventing cheating and plagiarism and in handling suspected violations, as well as a description of the process of handling such cases in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Prevention

It is recommended that every syllabus should include a statement about the importance of academic integrity and a reference to the university’s policy, which can be found online at http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html or the shortcut URL, http://www.bc.edu/integrity.

Please adhere to the university statements about penalties in your syllabus; avoid threats that are not accurate, such as “You will be expelled” or “I will kick you out of my course.”

Paper assignments should be specific to your course and narrow enough to prevent students from finding papers online at sites selling college papers.

Students should be clearly guided on the difference between collaboration and collusion, as well as on the limits of collaboration on assignments or projects that involve both group and individual work.

Exams should be proctored carefully, and if the room is spacious enough, students should sit with seats between them. Some departments regularly give at least two versions of an exam so that students who copy from an adjoining student’s paper will be detected when the exam is graded.

What to do if you suspect a violation

1) In cases of suspected plagiarism, a quick search of Google using key sentences from the paper set in quotation marks may uncover the source of plagiarism.

2) If you discover plagiarism, talk to the student to see if there is any explanation or confusion about how to cite. Explain what he or she did wrong and try to ascertain all the facts of the case. If classes are over and the holiday break or summer has begun, email the student of your concerns before taking further action.

3) If you or your teaching assistant notices suspicious behavior or an illicit study aid during an exam, take action as unobtrusively as possible, either asking the student to move to a different seat, confiscating the study aid, or silently gathering more evidence and confronting the student at the conclusion of the exam. What you do depends on the circumstances.
4) If you decide to impose a penalty greater than resubmission of the work or the chance to retake a test, you must report the offense to the class dean. This means that even if you simply give a zero on the paper or test, or if you wish to lower the final grade by any increment, the case should be heard by the Committee in order to give the student due process.

5) If you believe that a violation of academic integrity has occurred, send a letter to the student’s class dean describing the offense, along with all evidence, including copies of paper or test, source of the student’s plagiarism, or written testimony of teaching assistants in cheating cases if applicable. It is also useful if you include the course syllabus in your packet.

Be sure to include the grading penalty you propose. If the case is not heard before final grades in that semester are due, give the student an Incomplete.

5) Please note that while a case is pending, a student may not withdraw from or change status in the course.

6) Do not discuss the case by name with colleagues in the department, including the Chair. Use the student’s initials or a pseudonym if you consult a colleague.

**Process**

Once the dean receives your letter and the evidence, the dean writes the student informing him or her of the charge and requesting a reply within a week. The letter asks for a response even if the student admits the charges. The dean may also meet with the student.

The student’s written response, along with the dean’s letter and the faculty member’s letter and evidence, completes the case file. The case is then assigned to a subcommittee of the standing Committee on Academic Integrity of the College. This Committee is made up of eight A&S faculty members from diverse departments and four students selected by the Chair. Each of the four subcommittees is made up of two faculty members and a student. Cases are not assigned to a subcommittee that has a faculty member in the same department as the faculty member making the charge.

A subcommittee reads the case and decides whether the student has violated the academic integrity policy or not, or in some cases finds that there is insufficient evidence to charge the student with a violation. The entire Committee on Academic Integrity meets about three times a semester to discuss all cases; each subcommittee presents its cases and in complex cases may solicit the opinions of the entire Committee.

If the student is found to have violated the policy, the Committee recommends a grade penalty and an administrative penalty. Faculty members have the privilege of grading, but
are urged to consider strongly the grade recommendation of the Committee, which is in most cases an F in the course. Most first offenses merit an F in the course and a formal warning; if the offense is egregious, the student may receive probation, which is reportable to outside agencies and graduate schools. Subsequent offenses usually result in suspension or expulsion.

The dean writes the student a letter informing him or her of the outcome of the case and copies the faculty member.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call Assoc. Dean Clare Dunsford, Chair of the Academic Integrity Committee in Arts and Sciences.