

Simon Fraser University
Academic Honesty and Integrity Task Force
Draft Report: Promoting Academic Integrity at SFU

Released June 6, 2003

INTRODUCTION

The Task Force on Academic Honesty and Integrity has the following terms of reference:

- Examine current practices in the University for informing students of the significance and meaning of academic integrity, academic honesty and dishonesty, and the consequences of violating policy in this area.
- Examine software and other computer-aided means for detecting plagiarism.
- Examine processes and practices for ensuring that examinations and assignments are conducted in a fair manner that strikes an appropriate balance among security, fair play, and cost.
- Consult widely within the SFU community.
- Recommend ways that practice, processes, and policy with respect to enhancing academic honesty can be improved.

The Task Force has consulted broadly within the university community and is encouraged by the support we have received. Everyone we talked to offered insight into issues concerning academic honesty and integrity and suggested ways of improving the situation. Although the problems are complex and some issues elicit strong differences of opinion, there is substantial agreement on the following:

1. Academic honesty and integrity are essential to the educational, scholarly, and research missions of the university. All members of the university community must be held accountable for their actions and breaches of academic honesty and integrity must be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.
2. The university – as an institution and a community – has an obligation to eliminate opportunities for academic dishonesty and to ensure a fair, consistent process for investigating suspected offences and dealing with confirmed offenders.
3. Education and support services are essential to strengthening and maintaining a strong culture of academic honesty and integrity.

Two of our many meetings with members of the university community demonstrate a need to balance concerns with accountability, detection, and deterrence with education and support. One meeting was with student representatives from an undergraduate student society who were deeply concerned with suspected instances of cheating on exams and assignments by some of their classmates. The students we met with expressed the indignation of SFU students who want the integrity of their degrees protected. They want opportunities for cheating eliminated and offenders to be caught and punished. Without contradicting the need for deterrence and punitive measures, others are more circumspect. One undergraduate teaching assistant asked to address the Task Force in order to point out that many students who plagiarize are not deliberately cheating. From

her experience, they plagiarize because they lack an academic writing skill: the ability to cite and reference the work of others. She expressed a concern of many when she argued that the university must offer resources so that students can, as she put it, “overcome gaps in their academic skill set.”

The more the Task Force has learned, the more we are convinced that merely insisting upon academic honesty and integrity is not enough. Protecting the integrity of SFU degrees and the reputation of the university requires vigilance in reducing opportunities for academic dishonesty and in detecting suspected cases as well as due diligence in disciplinary procedures and consistency in penalties. At the same time, the university has a responsibility to ensure that everyone is aware of their obligations and has the education and support necessary to achieve the high standards to which they are held. The need for education and support is most obvious for students who are new to academic culture and unfamiliar with the conventions of academic discourse.

This focus on education and support does not negate the need for students to take responsibility for their actions; rather, it reinforces the university’s responsibility to ensure that students have the capacity to fulfill their obligations. Responsibility for strengthening and maintaining a culture of academic honesty and integrity must be shared among faculty, students, administrators, and the various units that support teaching and learning. The consensus that informs this report and the level of commitment expressed by those we have consulted are grounds for optimism that SFU can do more than react to an existing problem; it can establish itself as a leader in promoting academic honesty and integrity.

Serious attention to this issue is necessary not because the problem at SFU is greater than at other universities, but because academic dishonesty is endemic and a threat to all institutions of higher education. Research in the United States suggests that cheating is a common problem from elementary school through to university and that the problem has steadily increased over the last three decades. An on-going 2002/2003 study of academic integrity in Canadian universities indicates that academic honesty is also a serious concern across this country. Integrity surveys conducted at SFU as part of this Canadian study confirm the need to further deter academic dishonesty and to adopt measures to promote and build a strong culture of academic integrity. (Survey results are available on the Task Force website at <http://www.sfu.ca/integritytaskforce>.)

Why should promoting academic integrity be a priority? SFU must promote academic integrity because it is a core value of any university and a key to maintaining public trust. The public and university community demand high moral standards and ethical behaviour from faculty, staff, and students alike. As many institutions have experienced, any perceived failure of this trust results in condemnation from the media and the public. Without a reputation for integrity, the scholarship, scientific discoveries, advances in research, knowledge, and innovations as well as the expertise of our faculty and the quality of our graduates would be in question.

Academic integrity is also essential if the university is to meet its commitment to “engage all our communities in building a robust and ethical society” (*SFU Values and Commitment*, <http://www.sfu.ca/pres/vandc.html>). In the words of SFU President, Michael Stevenson,

A democratic society requires leadership and conviction, but also a willingness to confront authority and a skepticism about certainty and orthodoxy. It requires acculturation in tolerance and respect for difference; it requires positive values on dialogue and communication, and it requires a commitment to live in society and to compromise individual benefits to collective interests. (March 2001 presentation to the Vancouver Institute, <http://www.sfu.ca/pres/president/speeches/20012.html>.)

Academic integrity is essential for such a mission.

A few high profile cases of academic dishonesty can cast doubt on an institution’s commitment to academic integrity. To protect its reputation and to ensure that the high quality of its education and its scholars, researchers, and graduates is fully appreciated, Simon Fraser University must build a strong culture of academic integrity that is apparent within and beyond the institution. A first step has been to engage in an open, consultative process to determine the nature of the issues and to establish a community consensus on how to address them.

This draft report provides a summary of Task Force findings and preliminary recommendations for promoting academic honesty and integrity at SFU. Now we need your confirmation that we have identified the major issues and made recommendations that are reasonable and will be endorsed by the university community. Please take the time to read and respond. You can submit comments to the Task Force via email (academic-honesty@sfu.ca), or you can attend one of the public forums to be held September 2003. Contact information for Task Force members is available on our website at <http://www.sfu.ca/integritytaskforce> and information on public forums will be posted when available.

MAJOR ISSUES

A fundamental principle is that members of the university community must take personal responsibility for academic honesty and integrity. Without this individual commitment, measures implemented by the university will have little effect. Personal responsibility is supported by four other areas of concern – education, support, deterrence, and resources – that create the context in which academic honesty and integrity can flourish.

Responsibility

The entire university community must share responsibility for creating and maintaining a strong culture of academic honesty and integrity at SFU. Given the factors influencing cheating, an honour code that places the responsibility entirely on students would not be appropriate. While students remain responsible for their actions, faculty must take

responsibility for educating students and the administration must ensure students receive adequate support for their efforts to develop necessary skills and understanding. Given differing expectations across the university on such issues as what counts as acceptable help or how much collaboration is allowed on assignments, university policies must clarify what counts as academic dishonesty and ensure students are aware of their responsibilities in maintaining academic honesty. Faculty, staff, and administrators are also responsible to maintain high standards of academic honesty and integrity and to be appropriate role models for both undergraduate and graduate students. Academic honesty and integrity issues for graduate students are largely related to their research and relationships with their supervisors. Most problems can be avoided when relationships are supportive and issues relating to intellectual property and authorship are clarified.

Education

Education is necessary for those students who arrive at university unsure of the meaning of “academic integrity” or “plagiarism” and confused by bibliographic and discipline-specific conventions. These students are afraid of accidentally engaging in academic dishonesty; they want to learn about academic integrity and what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. For some students, cheating has become a habit, and they need education because, in their pursuit of grades, they have lost sight of the value of learning. The following comment from the first-year student survey echoes what we heard and read from a number of sources:

The reason . . . many students engage in cheating activities with the intention of getting credit for work that they did not do or for learning material that they do not know is that they place higher value on the numbers on their transcript than on what they actually learned. For many students, education is not a goal in itself, but rather a pathway to a high paying job/prestige or whatever. As such, it should be completed with minimal effort. Often this leads to crossing lines of academic honesty.

These students need instruction that helps them experience the intrinsic satisfaction of learning and that broadens their understanding of the value of higher education.

Simon Fraser University has many dedicated teachers who need no encouragement to give their best to their students. But the reality is that research is more highly valued in tenure and promotion than teaching and extrinsic incentives for putting the time into teaching are few. There are also disincentives for faculty to spend the many hours required to deal with cases of academic dishonesty. The requirement for all departments to develop guidelines by the end of 2003 for assessing teaching as part of tenure, promotion, and salary review is a positive step toward raising the profile and prestige of teaching. In the face of increasing class sizes and curricular reform, such encouragement is required.

Support

Some students describe academic dishonesty as a response to desperation. Students report that they are tempted to cheat when they lack the means necessary to meet their expectations for success – whether that be passing an assignment or receiving an “A” for

a course. Competition and the pressure for grades are not excuses for cheating, but they are factors influencing behaviour. Students report that they are less likely to cheat when adequate help is available in terms of access to faculty and teaching assistants and when other support mechanisms such as review sessions for tests and exams are in place.

Students may also struggle because of poor study skills and inexperience with academic writing. While most people who gain admission to university have developed strategies for getting good grades in high school or college, they may not have developed the study or writing skills necessary for learning at university. Transition courses and more support services, including an Academic Literacy Centre, are needed to boost confidence, fill gaps in skill sets, and moderate the factors that tempt students to resort to academic dishonesty. Such resources help to create a level playing field for all students.

Plagiarism, the most prevalent form of academic dishonesty, requires special attention. Recent research indicates that plagiarism is a complex concept and that traditional methods of dealing with it leave students with notions of academic discourse that contradict the ways in which academics work and write.

Those involved in teaching may also require support. Resources on academic honesty and integrity should be available to all instructors, teaching assistants, and tutor markers to ensure they are equipped to provide students with the instruction they need in order to understand what is expected of them and why. As role models for students, faculty members also require up-to-date information about Canadian Copyright Law to avoid unintentional breaches of copyright in their course materials. The special needs of international students in adapting to this academic culture must also be addressed.

Deterrence

High profile cases of academic dishonesty have led some members of the university community to assume SFU should adopt a zero tolerance policy. Such a policy is inappropriate as long as students are likely to act out of ignorance rather than with intent. The university community should also reduce, as much as is reasonably possible, the sources of desperation that foster academic dishonesty and ensure that factors motivating students and opportunities for acting upon whatever motivates them to engage in cheating behaviours are minimized. A number of issues also require clarification such as what counts as plagiarism, when collaboration is allowed, and what sort of tutoring is permitted. Some issues may need to be clarified course by course. A coordinated effort is also required to ensure that the treatment of students who are accused of academic dishonesty and the penalties they receive are consistent across the university. Other important aspects of deterrence include ensuring that everyone understands the policies concerning academic honesty, that teaching assistants, tutor markers, instructors, chairs, and directors adhere to those policies, and that reporting mechanisms for substantiated first-time offences are put in place so that repeat offenders can be dealt with appropriately.

Resources

Members of the Task Force are convinced that at SFU, as at most other institutions of higher learning, academic dishonesty is a serious issue – particularly at the undergraduate level and specifically for first-year students. Creating and maintaining a culture of academic integrity requires commitment from everyone involved. Students, staff, faculty, sessional instructors, teaching assistants, tutor markers, and administrators all have a role to play. Fortunately, SFU is blessed with many individuals and groups who are willing and eager to participate and to share their expertise. Despite this enthusiasm, the Task Force has heard repeated concerns about the time required to address this issue. Adequate compliance is unlikely unless responsibilities can be met without significant increases in existing workloads. Consequently, the following recommendations take into account the need to avoid further increases to the workloads of busy people – students and faculty alike.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A growing number of Canadian Universities actively promote academic integrity. Active promotion is essential to creating a culture of academic honesty and integrity at SFU. Effective promotion is more than good public relations, it involves proactive measures to encourage academic integrity at all levels, demonstrate the administration's commitment to creating a culture of academic integrity, and make that commitment evident to the university community and to the public.

I. Promote Academic Honesty and Integrity

Comments on the student surveys indicate that many undergraduate students enter SFU unsure what academic integrity means or why it is important. Anyone who routinely deals with students accused of academic dishonesty has heard the defense that a student was unaware of doing anything wrong. Some students who admit to cheating have explained their actions in terms of a cost-benefit analysis in which they weigh perceived risks against rewards. Their assessment of risk is too often tied to their perception that cheating is not taken seriously. Other students are unaware of the standards for academic honesty or lack the skills necessary to achieve these standards. Faculty can play a vital role to ensure students develop understanding and skills. To make certain that students are aware of what counts as academic dishonesty and to assure them that the university takes academic integrity very seriously, SFU must actively promote academic honesty and integrity not just to students, but throughout the university community. Several students have suggested that academic honesty and integrity should be discussed at the beginning of every course and again before every test and assignment.

Recommendation 1:

Create a university statement on academic honesty and integrity and give academic integrity a presence on the SFU Home page. Any review of the University's Mission Statement should include a stronger statement concerning academic integrity.

Recommendation 2:

Include a section on academic honesty and integrity in all orientation sessions for chairs and directors, students, faculty, teaching assistants, and tutor markers. Ensure relevant information is available for others, including departmental assistants, student advisors, and undergraduate and graduate secretaries.

Whenever people from different backgrounds engage in discussions of academic integrity, differences of opinion are expressed. While consistency is a goal, local variations are inevitable in terms of such issues as collaboration on assignments, the use of tutors, and grading practices. What is essential is that students know the instructor's expectations for each course they take.

Recommendation 3:

Require an academic honesty statement in all course outlines. Ideally, this statement should include course-specific expectations concerning individual and group work, appropriate use of tutors, acknowledgments for help received (if allowed), acceptable bibliographic conventions, and potential penalties. Course outlines should also explain the instructor's grading practices for that course. If not provided on the course outline, instructions for all assignments that will be graded should include clear guidelines for all of these issues.

A major concern in promoting academic honesty is providing a level playing field with equal treatment and opportunities for all. One contentious issue is the availability of old exams. The Task Force is aware that old exams – in some cases even those that have not been officially released by instructors – are being collected and distributed by various official and unofficial student groups to their associates. The most equitable way to deal with the problem would be for instructors to make their old exams available through official channels, as is the practice of at least one department.

Recommendation 4:

Every department should be encouraged to make all old exams available to students. If a department lacks the resources to administer such a service, then the exams could be forwarded to the Academic Literacy Centre (see Recommendation 15).

A wealth of material has been developed on ways to encourage academic honesty and integrity, and instructors and teaching assistants should have easy access to such resources in order to promote these qualities. Other materials should be developed in house to address the needs of SFU faculty and students, and workshops and courses on issues designed to enable students to understand and maintain academic honesty and integrity should be readily available and well advertised.

Recommendation 5:

Provide faculty, sessional instructors, teaching assistants, and tutor markers with easily accessible materials they can use to encourage academic honesty

among students. This “toolkit’ of ideas should include suggestions to help faculty make their exams and assignments honesty friendly. These materials could be available on a website that includes generic statements that can be adapted for use in specific courses, discussions around prepared cases, an evolving Q&A section, tips for what to do in various situations, articles on the topic, information on web-based and face-to-face workshops and courses, and links to other sites.

The major issues for SFU graduate students are relations with their supervisors (see Recommendation 11) and clarification of intellectual property. Many potential problems can be avoided if an appropriate contract is negotiated before research begins. Issues to consider include the following:

- Is the supervisor paying the student to do research? If so, both parties need to agree on what part of the research can be used in a thesis or dissertation and who owns the data if the student does not complete the degree. Such an agreement can protect the faculty member as well as the student by ensuring continued control of the data after the student leaves.
- If the research project is a group effort, what is the student’s contribution and how will data from specific parties be acknowledged?
- What are the expectations for publishing? When is joint authorship required? What determines the order in which authors’ names appear?
- Does the research involve human subjects? At what point must all necessary approvals be obtained?
- Is the research confidential? If so, how will the student be able to meet the university requirements for publication and a public defense? (At SFU, a thesis or dissertation can be held for one year before becoming available in the library, but during that year, the document is still available on request in a secretary’s office and the defense is public.)
- What is the supervisor’s policy on the use of editors? Is copy editing allowed? What sort of help is prohibited?

Recommendation 6:

Revise the Sample Template for Agreement between Graduate Student and Supervisor in the Graduate Student Handbook to expand the section on intellectual property and to specifically address issues such as authorship and confidential research.

Librarians and others have raised concerns with instructors’ use of copy-righted material in their courses. Good role models are essential to promote academic honesty and integrity. The university should ensure that instructors are aware of current Canadian copyright law and are provided reasonable assistance in obtaining copyright for course materials.

Recommendation 7:

Ensure information on copyright law and infringements is readily available to all faculty and sessional instructors and that resources are available to provide advice and assistance.

The Code of Faculty Ethics and Responsibilities (A30.01) has not been substantially revised for many years. The current policy focuses on what faculty should do, but makes no mention of the consequences for unethical behaviour or failure to fulfill responsibilities. It also lacks an interpretation clause explaining the procedure to follow when parties to the policy disagree on its intended meaning. Issues relating to graduate student supervision are also not included in the existing policy.

Recommendation 8:

The Administration and Faculty Association should revise the faculty ethics policy (A30.01 Code of Faculty Ethics and Responsibilities) to include sanctions and to cover more issues such as authorship, intellectual property, copyright, and ownership of data.

While promoting academic honesty and integrity requires support from across the university, coordinating an on-going effort requires that someone be designated and assume responsibility for this role. Someone must ensure issues of academic integrity are adequately addressed at orientations, coordinate with various units on campus to improve support for students and faculty, ensure resources for students and instructors are readily available on a website, raise the profile of academic integrity at SFU by organizing an annual Academic Integrity Week, periodic conferences, or other activities, monitor progress, and so on.

Recommendation 9:

Create a position such as Director of Academic Integrity to ensure academic honesty and integrity is actively promoted. Responsibilities of this position should include working with appropriate units and individuals to create resources for teaching and learning on this topic and assessing the University's progress in creating a strong culture of academic honesty and integrity. The person in this position should work closely with individuals who seek and act upon opportunities to present seminars or lead discussions on academic honesty and integrity at orientations, symposia, workshops, and events at all three SFU campuses.

Recommendation 10:

Establish an Academic Integrity Advisory Committee comprised of faculty, students, and staff. This committee should work closely with the person responsible for promoting academic integrity. Among its duties, it should periodically collect information and/or conduct surveys to review progress toward creating a strong culture of academic integrity as SFU.

II. Provide Support for Students

Students, faculty, and administrators have pointed to the importance of the relationship between students and faculty as a vital aspect of education and a deterrent to academic dishonesty. In the words of students,

It is important for students to feel that they have other recourses to follow. The pressure to succeed in university is huge, as it should be, but I think that people without a well developed support structure, emotional and academic, are the ones who are most prone to cheating. (SFU Integrity Survey)

Make sure that extra help is always available so that if a person is stuck, they can go get help, rather than resorting to cheating, and make the tests and assignments achievable if work is put in. . . . If people see results come with hard work, what reason would they have to cheat? (SFU Integrity Survey)

Supportive relationships and support services are particularly important for students making the transition from high school or college to university and to create a level playing field for international students and recent immigrants negotiating much more than a new academic culture. Members of the university community have raised concerns that some first-year and introductory courses have large enrolments with few, if any, teaching assistants.

Recommendation 11:

Review class size and teaching assistant allocations for first-year and introductory courses to ensure students have reasonable access to instructors and teaching assistants.

Supportive relationships are also important to graduate students. Effective relationships have been described in terms of mentors and apprentices, with helping students conceptualize their research viewed as an important part of the supervisory process. PhD supervision has also been characterized as the process of converting a student into a colleague.

Recommendation 12:

At the graduate level, review supervisory loads and practices to ensure graduate students have good access to their supervisors and establish guidelines for supervisor/graduate student relations.

Not all the assistance available to students need be face to face. Web resources and self-test tutorials can meet some of the needs relating to academic honesty and integrity.

Recommendation 13:

Establish an academic integrity website for students containing self-instructional components including a plagiarism self-test, an evolving Q&A section, tips for what to do in various situations, and links to other sites.

Comments on the integrity surveys and the experience of SFU faculty and teaching assistants indicate that for a significant number of students, academic dishonesty is a strategy to deal with a gap in their skill set. Despite receiving high grades in high school, many students rely on memorization and lack the study skills necessary to learn in a meaningful way. These students are not used to the level of personal responsibility

required at university and need significant scaffolding to develop the skills and understanding necessary to benefit from their education.

Of all the forms of academic dishonesty, plagiarism is generally considered the most prevalent and problematic. Since the early 1990's a great deal has been written about plagiarism and its causes with the majority of recent work focusing on the type of plagiarism in which a student writer relies too heavily on the language of an original source. From this perspective, plagiarism is a pedagogical and developmental issue rather than as a form of intentional academic dishonesty. Avoiding plagiarism requires that students already be familiar with the conventions of academic discourse. To avoid plagiarism, students must be able to distinguish among the multiple sources referenced in what they are reading – that is, to distinguish between a particular author's position and those that author uses to support or refute other views on an issue. They must understand the value of multiple viewpoints and perspectives for creating knowledge and developing understanding. They must also be able to integrate multiple sources in their own writing and understand the purpose of referencing conventions within the context of academic discourse. Paraphrasing and summarizing require not only understanding what one has read, but having sufficient knowledge of the academic discipline, appropriate vocabulary, and the facility with language to restate ideas accurately in other words.

Some students arrive at university with these abilities, but many do not. Developing these abilities necessary to avoid unintentional plagiarism can be particularly challenging for those learning an additional language, even if they are advanced learners who meet language requirements. If we view this form of plagiarism not as a literacy problem *per se*, but rather as a problem of *academic* literacy, then the university must ensure that students have access to appropriate instructional resources. The introduction of mandatory breadth and writing intensive courses will likely increase this need.

Many universities offer transition courses for first-year and transfer students that teach students what a university education entails, promote the value of academic integrity, and help them develop the necessary study skills. By addressing the fundamentals of academic literacy, such a course could provide a bridge to writing intensive and breadth courses as well as an introduction to Western academic culture for some international students. Under certain circumstances, the University Board on Student Discipline might offer students the opportunity to take (and pass) such a course in lieu of other remedies. In general, such courses should be part of a student's regular course load and taught by experienced and committed teachers.

Recommendation 14:

Establish a noncompulsory credit course (or courses) to help students make the transition from high school or college to university and to promote academic literacy. The intent of this course is to develop appropriate study skills, provide a basic understanding of the university culture and academic integrity, and enable participants to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to avoid academic dishonesty in all its forms, including plagiarism.

Even if such a course were mandatory for all students (which the Task Force is not recommending), students would still need a place to go for continued support. Learners require repeated opportunities to develop academic literacy, not just in mandatory breadth and writing intensive courses, but throughout their education. For students to fully develop their skills and understanding, many students will require assistance, and to be effective, this assistance should be readily available when students perceive the need for it. Some students, especially those working in a second or other language, report being afraid to work with a tutor or show their work in progress to their teaching assistants or professors for fear of being accused of academic dishonesty. Students need somewhere to go for help that is sanctioned by the university and that provides help from people who are not involved in evaluation. A university-wide Academic Literacy Centre is an essential resource that can help ensure students develop academic literacy. Fostering the development of academic literacy will help to significantly reduce instances of the plagiarism committed unintentionally by students lacking sufficient understanding of the conventions of academic discourse.

Recommendation 15:

Establish a university-wide, centrally-located Academic Literacy Centre for the Burnaby campus that offers training and on-going supervision to peer tutors. Satellite services for the other campuses should also be developed.

The staff of this Centre should work closely with other centres and programs involved in related activities (for instance, the Centre for Writing Intensive Learning, the Health, Counselling and Career Centre, the International Teaching Assistant Seminars, and discipline-specific initiatives such as the peer-tutoring program in Business Administration). This Centre could also maintain a registry for old exams (see Recommendation 4).

III. Promote Teaching

Faculty members play the most significant role in promoting academic honesty and integrity, but the current reward system with its emphasis on research provides few incentives for faculty to give even more attention to their teaching. Establishing criteria for assessing teaching as part of tenure, promotion, and salary review is a positive step toward raising the profile and prestige of teaching. Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that this initiative meets its goal and to consider other means of recognizing the importance of teaching and of creating a better balance between the rewards for research and teaching.

Recommendation 16:

Review the reward system for faculty to determine ways to reward teaching excellence.

Recommendation 17:

Require all faculty members to submit teaching dossiers for tenure, promotion, and salary review and provide support for their development. These dossiers should contain a section in which faculty indicate how they

encourage academic honesty and integrity in courses and graduate supervision.

IV. Simplify and Clarify the Process for Dealing with Academic Misconduct

Instructors have expressed frustration with the disciplinary process in terms of understanding the procedures and what counts as adequate evidence as well as the time required to take a case forward to the University Board of Student Discipline. Faculty, students, and staff have also expressed concern with lack of consistency in terms of the way suspected cases are handled and the nature of the remedies. Increased consistency in the application of disciplinary procedures is an important component of creating a level playing field for students. Some members of the university community have also expressed concern with the practice of automatically removing notations for suspensions from students' records. With respect to the process for dealing with cases of academic misconduct, the Task Force has identified a number of grey areas that require clarification. In this regard, while specific guidelines for use of tutors and acceptable collaboration or group work may vary by discipline, instructor, and course (see Recommendation 3), the policy should provide general advice on these issues. The policy should also take into account the challenges students face in developing academic literacy and address the pedagogical and developmental issues involved in some instances of plagiarism.

Recommendation 18:

Revise policies T10.02 and T10.03. These revisions should ensure language and procedures are stated as clearly as possible. It should also address the nature of adequate evidence and provide guidelines for gathering, assessing, and presenting evidence as well as guidelines and/or mechanisms for ensuring that penalties are consistent across the institution. Other considerations include the length of time disciplinary notations remain on student records and extending the range of possible remedies to include creative sanctions or ameliorative measures such as education in lieu of punishment and restorative justice. The policies should also include clear language about the appropriate use of tutors, account for the role of the academic misconduct resource person (see Recommendation 19), and address the conflict created in the existing policy where a Chair or Director is expected to both advise the instructor and recommend any punishment beyond that of failing an assignment. An incident-report form is also recommended to clarify, simplify, and expedite the process for dealing with incidents of academic dishonesty. For all substantiated cases – even those involving nothing more than a warning to the student – a copy of this form should be retained in the department and another forwarded to the Office of the Registrar. When the Registrar receives more than one incident-report form about a student, the case should be referred to the University Board on Student Discipline.

Reasons students give for cheating include, "The profits from cheating easily exceed the downfalls" and "The benefits outweigh the risks." Advertising summary results of the University Board on Student Discipline (UBSD) and the Senate Committee on Disciplinary Appeals (SCODA) would help disabuse students of the notion that they can cheat with impunity. Publicizing the general nature of each offence and the penalty would make the campus community more aware of what actions have been taken and of the likely penalties for various acts of academic dishonesty. Doing so is important to dispel myths such as any act of plagiarism will lead to suspension and only the cases of repeat offenders will be dealt with by the UBSD.

Recommendation 19:

Publish the summary results of UBSD and SCODA hearings in one or more easily-accessed venues and advertise their availability to the university community.

Despite their importance, many people do not take the time to read policies and procedures. A short handbook or a fact sheet should be provided to all instructors, teaching assistants and tutor markers to ensure that if they need it, they have ready access to an explanation in plain language that describes their responsibilities concerning cases of suspected academic dishonesty and the appropriate procedures for dealing with such cases.

Recommendation 20:

Create a handbook or fact sheet on disciplinary procedures to supplement policies T 10.01, T10.02, and T10.03 that details the step-by-step process for charging students with misconduct. This document should provide a resource for faculty, TA/TMs, and sessional instructors, detailing responsibilities and the chain of command throughout the disciplinary process.

From consultations and survey results, it appears that significant numbers of suspected cases of academic dishonesty are not dealt with despite faculty members' concern with academic honesty and integrity. The major reason is lack of evidence followed by lack of time to pursue the case. To ensure consistency in dealing with suspected cases of academic dishonesty, faculty require a dedicated resource person to facilitate the process.

Recommendation 21:

Create a position such as Academic Misconduct Officer. Proposed responsibilities for this position include participating in all of the above (recommendations 19-21), assisting instructors and Chairs or Directors, and ensuring cases are handled in a consistent, efficient manner.

V. Deter Academic Dishonesty

Faculty, teaching assistants, and students raised numerous concerns with the ease with which students could cheat on exams because of inadequate invigilation and over-crowded exam rooms. Advice for faculty and teaching assistants on dealing with these

issues are included in “Exam Procedures: A Few Thoughts from an Ombudsperson,” which is available on the Task Force website (<http://www.sfu.ca/integritytaskforce/resources.html>).

Recommendation 22:

Establish university standards and procedures for exams that address the issues of space and describe invigilation requirements. These procedures should include guidelines for appropriate numbers of invigilators, a description of circumstances in which identification should be checked, tactics to reduce opportunities for cheating, advice on how to deal with suspicious behaviour, and with people writing exams for students as well as any other information that can be used to discourage academic dishonesty.

Recommendation 23:

Review room assignments for final exams to determine ways of resolving current problems with overcrowding and/or visibility of other students’ work. Possibilities include multi-class exams in gymnasiums or two or more courses writing exams in the same classroom with exams distributed in a manner to deter cheating.

An increasing number of SFU faculty are using turnitin.com in their courses. Student responses on the integrity surveys suggest that students are generally in favour of its use as a deterrent. While recognizing its usefulness, especially by instructors with large classes and heavy marking loads, members of the Task Force recommend caution.

Plagiarism-detecting software is useful in detecting papers that are cut and pasted from Internet sources, written by other students whose papers are in the system’s data bank, or acquired from paper mills. Such software could also be useful for helping students recognize when their ability to paraphrase is not sufficiently developed and they are technically guilty of plagiarism. One concern is that faculty may use turnitin.com as a deterrent without addressing the major cause of plagiarism. Avoidance of plagiarism is a complex task that requires basic instruction, reinforcement, and advanced instruction in specific disciplines. Many students who speak English as a second or other language as well as many students who are native-English speakers arrive in university without the experience necessary to paraphrase and attribute sources according to academic standards. No detection tool can substitute for adequate instruction.

Plagiarism-detecting software, such as turnitin.com, that create a data base of all the work submitted by students also raise concerns with the possibility of violations of intellectual property and privacy. Members of the Task Force expressed concern that turnitin.com might offer inadequate safeguards for intellectual property and privacy rights. Security issues in general and the passing of the U.S. Patriot Act in particular elevate concerns that papers submitted for a course could be accessed without the student’s knowledge or permission. In many situations, a careful reading of a student’s work and an Internet search are viable alternatives.

Recommendation 24:

While plagiarism-detecting software is a useful deterrent, everyone using turnitin.com should be made aware of potential issues concerning privacy and intellectual property that arise when assignments become part of a permanent data base. While taking the nature of a course into account, faculty should consider if other means of detecting plagiarism that do not create a permanent data base, such as an Internet search engine, are viable alternatives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Task Force thanks the university community for its thoughtful and candid responses on these challenging issues. We look forward to receiving your input on these draft recommendations. Please send your comments and questions to academic-honesty@sfu.ca.