



ALL-CAMPUS JUDICIAL COUNCIL

UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Recommendations for Changes to the Academic Honesty Policy

After participating last semester in the Academic Honesty Board's adjudication process, the All-Campus Judicial Council has some concerns about the policy and its administration. We have several ideas for its improvement.

Chief among our concerns is scheduling. Over the past semester ACJC or its members have been asked to appear at hearings on days, hours, or moments notice. While we were able to attend every hearing save one, we require a more definite, regular, and predetermined schedule for future semesters.

We also have additional ideas and recommendations that directly affect both student rights in academic honesty hearings and the reputation of the academic honesty policy and board in the minds of the student body. These recommendations are based on our observations and discussions over the past semester. We do not make these recommendations lightly, but we also recognize that many of them also have been already understood as problem areas by the Academic Honesty Board and its chair. We note all of them here to formally delineate our areas of concern.

IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

Students accused of violations of the academic honesty policy should have essentially the same rights to fundamental fairness as those accused of violations of the University Standards of Conduct. No modification of the existing AH policy is necessary to immediately extend the following rights to students (although the policy should be changed as soon as possible to codify these rights).

❖ Advance notice

Students ought to receive immediate notification of the nature and cause of the accusation against them. If the situation occurs at the end of the semester and students receive an 'N' in the class, they should be notified as soon as possible that the 'N' is because of an academic honesty charge. Furthermore, students should be notified as to the time and place of the hearing seven business days in advance of such date. Seven business days is a standard practice and is consistent with the standard used by the Dean of Students Office for judicial hearings. Notice should be communicated by e-mail, by note to the student's CPU box, and by phone.

❖ Speedy hearing

Students ought to have the right to a hearing within a reasonably short time frame. The current policy requires that cases be disposed of within seven weeks. This period is too long, and ought to be reduced to four weeks under routine circumstances. The board should drop all cases that are not heard (through no fault of the student) after a specific time limit: for example, three months. To continue to holdover cases is to violate the language and the spirit of the current policy, and may open the University to a lawsuit.

❖ Swift notification

Students ought to have the right to notification of the AH panel's judgment shortly after the decision is made. This time period should consist of a matter of days, not weeks.

❖ Evidence and testimony

All evidence and testimony should be presented to the board in the presence of the accused, or the accused should have the right to review his/her entire case file well in advance of the hearing. Such provision is a protection of the fundamental right to confront one's accusers.

- ❖ **Presumption of Innocence**
Panel members should only be told of any of the Respondent's previous infractions *after* finding the Respondent responsible for the alleged infraction. To inform panelists of a student's prior infractions before deliberation on responsibility is to unfairly prejudice them against the accused student and is a violation of the student's right to a fair and impartial hearing. ACJC members have witnessed on several occasions a culture among the other members of the panel that consists of a presumption of guilt, not innocence. Panelists that have prior knowledge of the case (outside the parameters of the hearing) that would prevent them from being objective should not serve on the panel.
- ❖ **Modification of the Short Form**
The method of handling cases through the Academic Dishonesty Incident Report form should be modified to ensure that students are properly advised of their rights and that punishments are evenhanded and consistent with decisions made by the AH Board. Short forms should be reviewed by members of the Board or by the chair, not just to determine a pattern of dishonest behavior, but also to ensure that students are not coerced into submitting to an unfair punishment.
- ❖ **Hearing Panel Student Representation**
All student representatives to each hearing panel ought to enjoy full voting power within the panel. While the current policy is well-intentioned, to deny student representatives such ability is to undermine the integrity of the academic honesty process in the eyes of the student population. Under the current policy, this change can be made by the Convener of the hearing.
- ❖ **FERPA briefing**
All members of the faculty, and/or all members of the Academic Honesty board should be briefed on their responsibility under the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy (FERPA) Act if they have not been already. The consequences to the University's reputation and to the rights of students, should a professor or other AH staff members violate FERPA, are severe, and the potential for such an occurrence is great.
- ❖ **Press Release to the Campus Times**
After these recommendations have been implemented, the Academic Honesty Board with the All-Campus Judicial Council should submit a joint press release to the Campus Times presenting the changes to the policy or its implementation. A positive article in the CT would help to reestablish student faith in the policy and its swift and fair administration, and could alleviate student concern over the short form.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE END OF THE TERM

- ❖ **Statistics**
The Academic Honesty Board should publish statistics on its adjudicated cases at the end of each semester or year.
- ❖ **Full Rotation of Professors**
The faculty should consider rotating *all or at least many more* professors through Academic Honesty hearing panels. Widening the pool would have several advantages. 1) Scheduling would be made more flexible. Professors are the bottleneck in scheduling many recent cases. Removing the restriction on which professors could serve on the panel would allow the board to deal with cases more swiftly. 2) Professors might be unburdened. Now, many professors on the board may feel that because AH cases are discussed among the rest of the faculty, they have to impose a stricter punishment that can stand up to uninformed peer review.
- ❖ **Codification**
Each of the recommendations above should be codified within the academic honesty policy as soon as possible. The policy should be published in a single place, and all other copies of the policy should be removed from websites, handbooks, guidebooks, etc. and replaced with a *reference* to the official version. Additions and further explanations peculiar to individual professors and classes should reference that official version, not provide another copy of it.

❖ **Training in Judicial Procedures**

Each of the faculty that serves on the Academic Honesty Board ought to receive some direct training in judicial principles and procedures. Every person participating in an AH hearing should be familiar with the principles of fundamental fairness and judicial philosophy. The Board might work in concert with the Dean of Students Office to obtain such training.

❖ **Notice**

Current provisions within the AH policy require students to sign a form at freshman orientation acknowledging that they have received information about academic honesty. Orientation, however, is a very bad time to brief students on such an important policy. It would be much better to cover the policy in freshman English courses, where it can be simultaneously applied (at least in terms of avoiding plagiarism) in coursework. Additionally, recommended or standard punishment for violations should accompany the policy so that students have an idea of how seriously the University takes academic honesty.

❖ **Website**

The University should create a website for the Academic Honesty policy at a prominent address (such as www.rochester.edu/learning/honesty). Professors should provide students with the AH website address on every syllabus. The website should provide students with a master copy of the policy (that professors could also link to) as well as associated materials that students could consult to avoid plagiarism (see <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/>). It is folly to *assume* that students know or should know how to properly cite and use sources to avoid plagiarism when big name authors like Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin are in the news for having 'accidentally' committed the sin.

We are not opposed to hard consequences for violations of the academic honesty policy, but the process must be fair, and it must be a process both the student body and the faculty have confidence in. It is our sincere hope that through these tweaks in the policy and its administration we can ensure that we have a system that the University can judge to be honest, objective, efficient, and effective.

Respectfully submitted,

[signature in paper copy]

Ryan Walters
Chief Justice