

Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee
Response to Charge S-0408
May 2, 2008

Charge S-0408, Academic Integrity Policy Review: Review the current [University Policy on Academic Integrity](#), particularly with respect to University-wide standards of academic integrity and differences in local academic cultures. Also consider levels of student education on academic integrity, vehicles for prevention of violations which may help reduce reliance on punishment, and methods of centralized reporting of all offenses to facilitate appropriate recourse in cases of multiple-offenders.

History of the Charge

This charge was first issued to ASRAC in October 2004. Shortly thereafter, an Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Integrity was formed by Executive Vice President Furmanski. The Committee, consisting of staff, faculty, and students from all three campuses, was chaired by Prof. Donald McCabe, a recognized expert on academic integrity issues. ASRAC therefore decided to put its consideration of the charge on hold until the ad hoc committee had completed its review of the current academic integrity policy. Senator McCabe joined ASRAC and agreed to keep the committee informed concerning the ad hoc committee's deliberations.

The McCabe Committee presented a draft of a proposed new academic integrity policy to ASRAC in October 2005. ASRAC discussed the draft at several meetings and articulated a number of serious concerns with it. Prof. McCabe took ASRAC's concerns back to the ad hoc committee and some modifications were made, but ASRAC still had a number of objections to major aspects of the proposed policy.

To advance the process of revising the Academic Integrity Policy, a survey of faculty and students concerning attitudes toward the current academic integrity policy and procedures was carried out in the fall 2006 semester. The McCabe Committee then revised its draft policy again in response to the survey findings and input from ASRAC and the New Brunswick Faculty Council. A final draft of the proposed academic integrity policy was transmitted to ASRAC in early 2007. While supporting the goals and a number of key provisions of the McCabe Committee's proposal, ASRAC still had a number of concerns regarding the proposed policy and was unwilling to recommend its approval to the whole Senate.

At the end of the spring 2007 semester, it appeared that ASRAC and the McCabe Committee would not be able to reach agreement on a new academic integrity policy. In an attempt to move forward, Executive Vice President Furmanski, in consultation with the Senate Executive Committee, formed a new ad hoc working group on academic integrity (AIWG) consisting of some ASRAC members, some members of the McCabe Committee, and representatives of some major constituencies that were not represented on the McCabe Committee. The AIWG was charged with proposing a series of revisions to the current Academic Integrity Policy that would be acceptable to almost everyone and that could be implemented temporarily while a new permanent academic integrity policy was developed. The AIWG reached consensus on a number of recommended changes to the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy and prepared a rough draft of an interim academic integrity policy that incorporates the agreed upon changes and leaves unchanged those aspects of the previous policy on which there was no broad consensus for change. This draft was submitted to ASRAC in early 2008.

The McCabe Committee Proposal

The major change to the Academic Integrity Policy proposed by the McCabe Committee was a new system for handling allegations of nonseparable violations of academic integrity¹. Under the Committee's proposed policy, all alleged nonseparable academic integrity violations would be handled by the faculty member teaching the course. The faculty member would investigate the allegation, decide whether or not the student had committed the alleged violation, and recommend an appropriate academic sanction, up to and including a grade of F for the course. If the student did not accept responsibility or disagreed with the recommended sanction, he or she could appeal the finding and/or sanction in writing to a new faculty, student, and staff appeals committee. The proposed policy would leave unchanged the procedures for adjudicating allegations of separable academic integrity violations under the *University Code of Student Conduct*.

ASRAC agreed with the goals of the proposed policy, including:

- to give faculty members more discretion and authority in dealing with nonseparable violations of academic integrity, while providing an effective appeals procedure for students.
- to simplify the procedure for handling allegations of nonseparable offenses.
- to create a central reporting system for nonseparable offenses in order to identify repeat offenders.
- to increase the fraction of violations of academic integrity that is reported.

Likewise, we agreed with the stated premises of the policy; namely, that “academic integrity is primarily an academic and educational matter that is best addressed as a part of the teaching and learning process and that the assessment of academic work and the assignment of grades are a faculty responsibility.” We also found much to like in the proposed method for handling allegations of nonseparable academic integrity violations; but we believe that faculty members should only be encouraged, not required, to handle such allegations themselves. We did not, however, recommend approval of the proposed academic integrity policy for several reasons.

First of all, ASRAC had serious concerns with several aspects of the proposed policy, including the way in which violations of academic integrity are classified, the lack of adequate safeguards to insure that two students who commit essentially the same offense would not receive highly unequal treatment from two different faculty members, and the failure to address the special situations of graduate and post-baccalaureate professional students in a satisfactory manner.

In addition, the McCabe Committee's proposal fails to address some of the most serious problems with the current academic integrity policy; namely, problems with the procedures for adjudicating allegations of separable violations of academic integrity. ASRAC believes that any new and comprehensive academic integrity policy must change the way in which separable, as well as nonseparable, academic integrity violations are adjudicated.

Finally, ASRAC believes that given the central importance of academic integrity to the university community, a much wider discussion of academic integrity issues must take place among students, faculty, staff members, and administrators before a new comprehensive academic integrity policy is

¹ Separable violations are those for which temporary or permanent separation from the University is the normal sanction; nonseparable violations are those for which separation is not a possible sanction.

developed and implemented. Without such a discussion, it will not be possible, we believe, to implement an appropriate, effective, and enforceable academic integrity policy.

The Proposed Interim Academic Integrity Policy

As noted above, the proposed interim academic integrity policy incorporates those revisions to the current Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy that were agreed to by the academic integrity working group (AIWG). This interim policy, which both the AIWG and ASRAC believe should be approved initially for a period of no more than two years, makes a number of improvements to the way in which nonseparable violations of academic integrity are handled and reported, while a new and more comprehensive academic integrity policy is being developed.

The principal new features of the Interim Academic Integrity Policy proposed by the AIWG are:

- Faculty members will be permitted to handle allegations of nonseparable violations of academic integrity themselves.
- A faculty member who does not wish to handle an allegation of a nonseparable academic integrity violation will have the option of referring the allegation to an Academic Integrity Facilitator. The AIFs, who will normally be academic staff or faculty members, will help to educate students and faculty concerning academic integrity and advise faculty concerning academic integrity policies and procedures, as well as handle allegations of nonseparable violations of academic integrity that faculty members do not wish to handle themselves.
- A student found responsible for a nonseparable violation of academic integrity by either a faculty member or an AIF will be able to appeal the finding of responsibility and/or the recommended sanction in writing to a new appeals committee called the Academic Integrity Review Committee (AIRC).
- The role that had been played by the Vice President for Student Affairs in the sanctioning of separable violations of academic integrity will now be played by the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) on each campus; namely, the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs in New Brunswick/Piscataway and the Chancellor in Newark and in Camden, or by an academic administrator to whom the CAO delegates this responsibility.

The procedures for faculty adjudication of alleged nonseparable violations of academic integrity and for review of student appeals by the AIRC were largely taken from the McCabe Committee's proposed academic integrity policy.

Other provisions of the current Academic Integrity Policy remain unchanged in the proposed interim policy, including the definitions of the four levels of violations, the recommended sanctions at each level of violation, and the procedures for adjudicating allegations of separable violations of academic integrity.

ASRAC considered the AIWG's draft interim academic integrity policy and made several substantive, though relatively minor, changes to it. In the interim policy, as revised by ASRAC:

- The AIF to whom a faculty member should refer an allegation of a nonseparable academic integrity violation is the AIF of the school or college offering the course.
- The decision of an AIRC appeals panel with respect to a finding of responsibility is final, whereas the panel's decision with respect to sanction is a recommendation to the CAO or his or her designee.

- Since all violations of academic integrity by a graduate student or post-baccalaureate professional student are potentially separable, faculty members are not ordinarily permitted to adjudicate allegations of any type of violation of academic integrity by a graduate student or post-baccalaureate professional student, but are expected to refer such allegations to the appropriate AIF or to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs.
- In order to ensure that allegations of nonseparable academic integrity violations are resolved in a timely manner, time limits or deadlines are imposed on responses by faculty members, AIFs, the AIRC, and student respondents at various steps in the reporting and adjudication process. When a faculty member, an AIF, or the AIRC fails to meet a deadline, the student respondent may file a complaint with the campus CAO or appropriate designee.

Recommendations

Having made the changes noted above, ASRAC is now ready to recommend that the Senate approve the Interim Academic Integrity Policy with one proviso.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the proposed Rutgers University Interim Academic Integrity Policy be approved by the University Senate for adoption for a period of two years, provided that the University Administration commits the resources needed for its successful implementation.

We believe that adoption of this Interim Policy is a step in the right direction. Its implementation will allow the University to determine whether adjudication of nonseparable violations of academic integrity by faculty members is viable and fair and whether the AIRC provides a satisfactory appeals mechanism for students. The successful implementation of the Interim Policy requires personnel and other resources. These resources are needed for the appointment, training, and monitoring of the AIFs and AIRC staff investigators; for the support of the AIRC; for maintenance of a database of academic integrity violations; and for the education of students and faculty about academic integrity in general and about the interim policy and procedures in particular. We emphasize, therefore, that the interim policy should be implemented only if and when the necessary resources are provided.

ASRAC also has several additional recommendations that address the process for developing a new “permanent” academic integrity policy.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that a new Academic Integrity Committee be established before the end of the spring 2008 semester by the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and that the Committee be charged with developing a new comprehensive academic integrity policy.

We believe it is important that the new committee be established before the end of the spring semester so that it can begin its work early in the fall 2008 semester.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the new Academic Integrity Committee consist of students, faculty, staff, and administrators from all three Rutgers campuses, with students being the largest subgroup on the committee. The Committee should have representation from the University Senate, student government and faculty governance organizations, graduate and professional schools, arts and sciences schools and colleges, the Office of Student Judicial Affairs, and the Office of University Counsel.

We believe that it is very important for students to be the largest subgroup on the committee because they are harmed the most by academic dishonesty. It is also very important for faculty to be strongly represented on the committee because they have the greatest responsibility for seeing that the highest standards of academic integrity are maintained.

Recommendation 4: *We recommend that the process of developing a new academic integrity policy provide opportunities for discussion and input by all students, faculty, staff, and administrators at every step in the process. In order to ensure that the community discussion is based on a firm understanding of the issues, we recommend that the administration implement a program to educate students, faculty, and staff about academic integrity and about the academic integrity policies at other AAU public universities.*

We suggest that the effort to educate the community begin with a conference on academic integrity for students, faculty, staff, and administrators in the fall 2008 semester. We further suggest that representatives from several AAU public universities with a range of academic integrity policies be invited to the conference to discuss their experiences with their respective academic integrity policies.

Recommendation 5: *We recommend that the new Academic Integrity Committee take a fresh look at all aspects of the Rutgers system for promoting academic integrity, including the philosophy and premises of the academic integrity policy, the programs for educating students and other members of the university community about academic integrity, and the procedures for adjudicating violations of academic integrity. We further recommend that the Committee consider a wide variety of models for promoting and enforcing academic integrity, including models that are very different from those we have been using at Rutgers.*

We believe that it is very important for the Committee to go beyond simply trying to fix the most obvious problems with the current Rutgers academic integrity policy and adjudication procedures.

Recommendation 6: *We recommend that the new Academic Integrity Committee give careful consideration to the special needs of graduate and professional schools in defining, adjudicating, and sanctioning violations of academic integrity or codes of professional ethics by their students.*

We believe that an academic integrity policy should hold graduate and post-baccalaureate professional students to a higher standard than undergraduates, should define appropriate sanctions for violations of academic integrity and/or professional ethics by graduate and professional students, and should provide an adjudication process in which these students are judged by their peers, rather than by undergraduate students.

2007-8 Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee

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