

Information for Senate Discussion of the Academic Integrity Policy

Background

The Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy dates from the 1980s, and is in need of some updating and substantive revision. In the fall of 2004, The Senate's Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee (ASRAC) was charged with reviewing the academic integrity policy. Almost simultaneously, Vice President Furmanski appointed an ad hoc Academic Integrity Committee (AIC) of staff, faculty, and students, chaired by Prof. Donald McCabe, and charged it with drafting a new academic integrity policy. The Senate's Executive Committee then put ASRAC's charge on hold until the AIC completed its review of the current policy. The AIC presented two major drafts of the proposed new policy to ASRAC, one in fall 2005 and the second early in the spring 2007 semester. ASRAC supported the main thrusts of the proposed new policy but had serious concerns about a number of elements. Equally important, ASRAC is unwilling to recommend the implementation of any new academic integrity policy without a good deal more input from the university community. The Senate's committee-of-the-whole discussion of academic integrity on November 2 is the first step in obtaining additional community input.

Brief Summary of the Current Academic Integrity Policy

The current Academic Integrity Policy recognizes four levels of violations of academic integrity, each with suggested penalties. In order of increasing seriousness, the levels are

- Level 1, for which the normal penalty is a make-up assignment of some sort
- Level 2, for which the penalty often includes disciplinary probation
- Level 3, for which the normal penalty is suspension for one or more semesters
- Level 4, for which the normal penalty is permanent expulsion from the university with a notation of disciplinary separation on the transcript

Typical offenses at each level are given in the Academic Integrity Policy. Level 3 and 4 offenses are called "separable" because temporary or permanent separation from the university is a normal penalty. Level 1 and 2 offenses do not evoke that penalty, and are therefore "non-separable." Non-separable offenses are handled at the school or college level; separable offenses are handled by the Office of Student Judicial Affairs according to the procedures of the University Code of Student Conduct, which gives students the right to a hearing before a panel of faculty and students.

Suggested Questions for Discussion

The Senate Executive Committee's intention in docketing this committee-of-the-whole discussion in the Senate is to augment the ASRAC and AIC work by eliciting from the Senate input and comments on areas of the draft, revised academic integrity policy where the Senate's ASRAC could not reach agreement. Comments on any area of the policy are welcome, but **Senate input on the issues and questions below will be particularly useful in guiding the continued work on the policy that will ultimately be brought for Senate endorsement:**

- I. The major change proposed by the ad-hoc committee was to have all alleged non-separable offenses handled by the faculty member teaching the course, who would inform the student of the alleged violation; give the student a chance to respond; impose an appropriate academic sanction, up to and including an F for the course, if he or she still believed the student committed the offense; and report the offense and sanction to a central reporting office. If the student did not admit responsibility or disagreed with the sanction imposed, he or she could appeal the finding or sanction in writing to a three-member panel consisting of one student, one faculty member, and one staff member.
 - How is this fair, or unfair, to students?
 - What are the obstacles to faculty acceptance of this rule?

- Is it appropriate to require faculty to handle all allegations of non-separable offenses themselves? Or should faculty have the option of referring a particular alleged non-separable violation to a judicial officer for adjudication?
 - Is it overly burdensome to place on faculty the responsibility for the investigation, the adjudication, and the sanction in these matters?
- II. Where and how to draw the line between separable and non-separable offenses.
- Is the point of differentiation between separable and non-separable offenses in the current policy clear and appropriate?
 - Is a measure of leniency for first-offense violations of academic integrity advisable?
 - The final AIC proposal divides violations into three categories: presumptively separable, presumptively non-separable, and discretionary. Offenses in the last category could be treated as separable or non-separable depending on the level and experience of the student, the level of premeditation, etc. The faculty member would make the determination as to whether the offense should be treated as separable or non-separable and would have considerable leeway in doing so. What do you think of this proposal?
- III. The extent to which academic integrity policies and procedures for graduate students and for professional students (particularly law students) should differ from those for arts and sciences undergraduates.
- The current academic integrity policy says that all substantive violations of academic integrity by a graduate student should be treated as level 4 offenses, and includes among level 4 violations “willful violation of a canon of the ethical code of the profession for which a graduate student is preparing.” Do you think this differentiation is adequate?
 - The proposal from the AIC handles the differences between undergraduates and graduate students by means of the discretionary category, which allows a faculty member to consider the level of the student in deciding whether a particular offense should be treated as separable or non-separable. Do you think this is adequate?
 - If you don’t agree with either of the above, to what extent do you think the academic integrity policy and procedures should be different for graduate students, if at all? For professional students?
 - What are the challenges to, or benefits of, applying the same system to graduate students?
 - Should a student’s undergraduate or graduate status be considered only in determining the sanction?
- IV. Simplifying the procedures for handling non-separable offenses may have little effect on the reported proportion of total violations unless the handling of allegations of separable violations under the University Code of Student Conduct are changed to make them less onerous and offensive to faculty members without decreasing the right of students to due process and fair treatment. One proposal that has considerable support in ASRAC is to stop the current practice of requiring the faculty member bringing the complaint to serve as the “prosecutor” in a judicial hearing; i.e., arrange for witnesses, present the evidence, question the accused student and his/her witnesses, prepare opening and closing statements, etc. Rather, it was suggested that a designated dean or Judicial Affairs Officer should present the case unless the faculty member wishes to do so, with the faculty member serving as a witness where appropriate.
- Are changes needed in the handling of separable violations of academic integrity?
 - Should faculty members be required to present the case at a hearing?
 - Do you have other suggestions for improving the handling of separable offenses?
- V. Based on your experience with the student judicial system or that of your friends or colleagues, what aspects of the academic integrity policy and procedures do you believe are most in need of change?