Rutgers University Senate
Student Affairs Committee
Response to Charge S-1713:
Procedures for Adjudicating Academic Integrity Policy Infractions
January 2018

Charge S-1713: Procedures for Adjudicating Academic Integrity Policy Infractions: Review the current status of the educative and adjudication processes of the Offices of Student Conduct regarding infractions of the University Academic Integrity Policy. Identify areas of concern, and provide appropriate recommendations. Provide a response which will be forwarded to the Senate's Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee on this same issue (Charge S-1714). Respond to the Senate Executive Committee by February 20, 2018.

Background
This committee was charged to investigate the Academic Integrity Policy Infraction process, with a stress on the student experience. The committee views the responses here as an overview of the issue as it concerns students. We hope our response will be helpful for the Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee (ASRAC) in evaluating this charge and forming a report that adequately addresses this issue from the point of view of the entire university community.

In the next section, we discuss important issues that should be considered in the context of academic integrity and students. Afterwards, we identify areas of concern and then discuss potential solutions. We conclude with a reflection of the broader issues raised in this report and urge the members of the ASRAC to consider the issues raised in the appropriate context necessary for the broader university community.

Special Circumstances Concerning Students
In assessing the academic integrity policy and how to fix outstanding issues, it is important to consider the transient nature of students. According to the last official set of data available on the Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning (OIRAP) website, about 76% of students graduate Rutgers within six years[1]. Generally, the majority of students graduate within four years. Many faculty and staff members are present at Rutgers University for sufficiently longer periods of time. For these reasons, staff and faculty generally have a better understanding of Academic Integrity at Rutgers University and the policies and procedures in place. While most faculty (or their colleagues) have had experience with students violating the code of Academic Integrity at Rutgers University, students generally do not receive training on this

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[1] https://oirap.rutgers.edu/disclosure_files/2008%202007%202006%20Cohort%206-Year%20grad%20rates%20-%20BA%20RU-Uwide-v2.pdf

issue, do not understand the procedures, and are generally unaware of the resources available to understand the policies or procedures on campus.

Additionally, a sizeable population of students at Rutgers University are international students, who were raised with different customs and cultures. In this context, it is also part of the university's educational mission to educate students on how to do academic work in a responsible and honest way. We as a university must explain the reasons behind attribution of sources, the right way to write a paper, and the value of a Rutgers degree. In contrast to some international students, many domestic students will have an understanding of the general guiding principles behind the formulation of an Academic Integrity Policy (AIP), but due to differing practices among domestic high schools, may not understand the seriousness of potential violations. This context is recognized in the AIP through the use of separable and nonseparable offenses, but the opportunity to educate students on why Academic Integrity (AI) is always an opportunity we as a university should seize.

Students come to this university for a world class education. A Rutgers University degree is valuable and graduation is a substantial achievement for many students. First and foremost academic dishonesty devalues the students' degrees. Clear and concise explanation of this fact may be sufficient to convince most students to support the university in its mission to promote AI. For this reason we outline methods of increasing legitimacy and reach of organizations that exist at the university that promote the AIP among students.

Areas of Concern
After consulting with student leaders on campus, with knowledge of the process, as well as student members of the hearing boards, we have identified issues of concern for students. It is important to understand that these are not the only stakeholders, nor should only these concerns be used in the formulation of the final response to this issue. The concerns identified here should be used to start a conversation on how to best address this issue. Another issue with the confidential process of these situations is that qualitative data can be easily obtained by discussing these issues with various individuals on campus, but more quantitative data is more difficult to obtain.

One of the primary areas of concern is the availability of resources for students during all steps of the academic integrity policy. Generally more resources should be available during all steps of the process, before a student has committed a violation of the AIP, during the investigative process, during the hearing process, and after the adjudication.

Many instructors and faculty members assume uniform knowledge of academic integrity among the undergraduates. While this is generally true among junior and senior undergraduates as well as graduate students, there may be a gap in knowledge for first and second year students. AI

violations are not limited to plagiarism and cheating. The University AIP also prohibits Facilitation of Dishonesty, Academic Sabotage, etc. Many students might be aware that they should not do work for others or allow others to copy from them, but may not be aware that negligently allowing someone to use their work also constitutes an AI violation. Some AI violations occur due to lack of knowledge. While some steps have been taken to educate all students across the board on this issue, the current procedures do not fully educate the average student on many aspects of the AI policy. Additionally, each faculty member may have different policies on instruction in their classroom. Students may not understand that while it is okay to work together in one class, the same may not be true for another class.

During the AI process, for minor assignments, the faculty member or instructor makes a decision on the case. Such a process puts an interested party as responsible for deciding the outcome, which can be inherently unfair (any appeal from the process is done to a separate Appeals Committee). During this process, students may have no knowledge of the role of campus advisors in the process. For major assignments, the accusations of a faculty member are investigated by Academic Integrity Facilitator (AIF). At the start of this process the accused member of the community may not be informed of (or fully understand) their rights to not speak on the AI matter; however, the respondent student will be informed of these rights and their understanding confirmed during any formal hearing process.

During the hearing board or disciplinary conference process, some of the parties that can speak are the complainant, accused, hearing board officers, members of the hearing board, and any applicable witnesses. Any counsel or advisor of the complainant or the accused cannot participate in the hearing except for passing of notes to the party they represent. In such a situation, a complainant party, such as a faculty member or instructor, may have substantially more experience with the process than the respondent student.

While the office of student conduct is organized differently across the multiple campuses, one case study of interest is the New Brunswick campus. One area of the conduct process that promotes AI is the Scarlet Honor Council, an organization under the Department of Student Conduct. This organization consists of several boards, each with their own membership. Under the current organization scheme, many of these boards do not have effective communication among each other.

Recommendations
A big step the University can take in resolving Academic Integrity(AI) issues among students is to explain why AI is so important to an academic community, such as Rutgers University. It is important that students understand, not only what is prohibited, but also why such conduct is prohibited. By encouraging these conversations and ensuring that students understand the

mentality behind these issues, students may more likely "self-police" and create a culture which discourages others from violating the AIP.

Additionally, in order to improve student support of AI, it is important that appropriate organizations empower student leaders to educate their peers about the importance of AI. For logistical reasons, there is a need to have several different groups of people trained to adjudicate or be part of the process for different types of conduct violations. In order for student members, who are part of the various hearing boards, to be more effective in promoting AI, it is important that those students have an ability to engage and work with each other. An organization that brings students interested in promoting AI together, will only help to increase the legitimacy of AI. Several student leaders, involved in promoting AI on the New Brunswick campus, have indicated that better communication will lead to a stronger organization dedicated to peer education of AI issues.

Another part of the AIP that should be addressed is the vagueness present in certain parts of the policy. This vagueness could be addressed by providing default standards and then a different standard for that class could be set in the course syllabus or through other forms of communication. For example, on page two of the current AIP, in order for a student to avoid plagiarism, "both direct quotation and paraphrasing must be cited properly according to the accepted format for the particular discipline or as required by the instructor in a course." By indicating a default standard that applies, such as MLA, APA, or other, the average student could be aware of what is expected of them. This default standard could be changed by the course instructor, but would prevent ambiguous circumstances from arising when no standard is communicated. A similar default standard should be adopted for collaboration between students on coursework. Students should be, by default, either permitted or prohibited to collaborate on class assignments, but the instructor should be able to set course specific policies.

Additionally, for students to understand what is expected of them, the definition of "Facilitation of Dishonesty" on page 3 of the policy should not include vague language such as "negligently allowing". Instead this language should be precisely defined to include the conduct expected of a student. Does the university wish to prohibit self publication by a student? Can a student post substantial work that student performs as part of a class on a social media website, on their website, or provide access to it as a part of their resume? If another student were to gain access to this material, would it be facilitation of dishonesty? The less vague and more understandable a policy is, the more legitimacy it has among the group of people who must follow it.

In addition to the definitions used in the policy, the university should take particular care in educating students, who are found responsible, about academic integrity. The university should continue to issue appropriate punitive sanctions associated with violating the AIP, but, additionally, work to insure that students do not continue to violate the policy. Great care should

be taken in devising activities and other educative steps that can be taken (in addition to punitive sanctions) to explain AI and employ methods to ensure that these educative steps result in increased understanding of the AIP.

In a larger sense, we believe that methods of education on AI issues is a topic the university should explore. It may be of use to recommend the Student Affairs Committee (SAC) or the ASRAC investigate the issue of how to best educate students on AI inside and outside the classroom.

Another concern identified by the committee was the potential disparity in the experience with AI of the complainant and the respondent. While the committee does not believe that there is necessarily cause for concern at the current moment, it is important to consider that the current standard of proof, clear and convincing evidence, appropriately addresses this issue. In the future, a different standard should be cause for reexamination of this issue.

Conclusion
Academic Integrity is an important issue for the university to set high expectations on. Students should be taught about the importance of complying with these policies and educated on the reasons why the Academic Integrity Policy exists. It is important that uniform knowledge not be assumed for students just entering the university as undergraduates.

We hope that the areas for concern identified in this report serve a points of debate and discussion for the ASRAC. The issues and potential solutions identified in this report continue to require deliberation. The Student Affairs Committee welcomes continued discussion of this issue and notes the considerable expertise the ASRAC committee has with this issue. We hope this report aids the committee in this regard.

Student Affairs Committee 2017-18

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