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Advice from students to faculty members on protecting academic integrity

INTRODUCTION: Several years ago Syracuse University sponsored an academic integrity forum featuring presentations by student leaders from the University of Maryland, Princeton University, Vanderbilt University, and Syracuse University. Participants were:

- Shaun Gates, Honor Council Chair at the University of Maryland;
- Austin Elder, Honor Council Chair at Vanderbilt University;
- Pauline Nguyen, Honor Committee Vice Chair at Princeton University;
- Eric Montgomery, Syracuse University Academic Integrity Hearing Officer.

Each student leader offered specific suggestions on ways to protect and promote academic integrity. Their 32 suggestions--edited by Gary Pavela--appear below.

EARLY IN THE COURSE

[1] Include a syllabus statement about University academic integrity standards.

[2] Discuss academic integrity expectations on the first day of class. Share personal examples and perspectives highlighting why academic integrity is important to you.

[3] Emphasize the mutual obligations of teachers and students. [See Professor Bill Taylor's "[Letter to my Students](#)" (designed to "show . . . students that academic integrity isn't something that we as faculty do to them, but it's a set of principles that bind all of us equally for the good of inquiry and learning")].

[4] Ask students to discuss why academic integrity is important to them. Doing so helps break through an "us vs. them" (students vs. faculty) attitude toward academic integrity. Refer to relevant letters or published statements from student leaders (see e.g. Shaun Gates' "[Welcome from the University of Maryland Honor Council](#)").

Editor's note: Pauline Nguyen, honor committee vice chair at Princeton University, said the Princeton Honor Code arose out of student and faculty dissatisfaction with a climate of widespread cheating in the late 1800s. She cited this overview from the Princeton Honor Committee archives:

"Examinations at the College of New Jersey (as Princeton University was then known) in the late 19th-century were rife with cheating; students saw cheating as a way to outwit the faculty, while professors went to great lengths to uncover undergraduate cheating. Booth Tarkington '1893, as quoted in W. Joseph Dehner, Jr.'s 1970 paper, described this rivalry as a "*continuous sly warfare between the professor and the student.*" Crib sheets were common, as was sharing answers during examinations. Students who refused to collaborate were ridiculed. Reporting fellow students to the faculty was seen as dishonorable and out of the question for most students. Professors, on the other hand, would spend exams stalking the recitation rooms watching for any inconsistencies, and sometimes hired extra sets of eyes for the purpose of catching cheaters" [italics added].

REMIND AND REITERATE

[5] A passing reference to academic integrity on the first day of class isn't sufficient. Reiteration highlights the importance of the topic. Initiate a short discussion or class e-mail on "ways to avoid plagiarism" several weeks before a major paper is due. Consider use of an "honor pledge" on examinations and other academic work [see TPR 08.27 "[Classroom honor codes](#)" and research cited therein about the impact of timely reminders]. The University of Maryland provides faculty members with this "[Question and Answer](#)" resource on the Honor Pledge.

BE PERSONAL

[6] Discuss why you were attracted to your field or discipline. Why does the subject interest you? What questions or mysteries remain to be solved?

[7] Discuss the academic challenges you encountered and the strategies you developed for success.

[8] Invite discussion about the academic and ethical standards applicable to your discipline or profession.

[9] Pay attention to students as individuals. Identify interests, strengths, and weakness. Urge students who are struggling to ask for help.

[10] Participate on one hearing panel a year so you can discuss your personal insights with students about how the academic integrity system works.

[11] Emphasize that cheating and plagiarism are a *breach of trust* with fellow students and with you.

PREVENTION: CHEATING

[12] Don't reuse examinations.

[13] Don't use standard textbook homework exercises (answers are likely to be online).

[14] Change the design or wording of lab assignments from year to year.

[15] Provide an examination "cover sheet" with an academic integrity reminder and specific examination instructions (e.g. your policy on use of calculators; display or use of cell-phones; asking permission to use bathrooms, etc).

[16] Use assigned seating during examinations.

[17] Provide ample space between examination takers.

[18] Vary the order of questions on different copies of the same examination.

[19] Allow students to see graded examinations, but require that the examinations be returned to you at the end of class.

[20] Provide specific instructions about when collaboration is or is not permitted.

[21] Assume collaboration is likely to occur on any take home examination. Set time limits for take-home examinations keyed to when the questions are downloaded and answers submitted.

[22] Consider allowing students to use a legal "crib sheet" (specified size) during examinations. Doing so encourages students to think about, synthesize, and organize materials before the examination.

PREVENTION: PLAGIARISM

[23] Give students practical guidance on how plagiarism is defined and can be avoided. [Refer them to resources such as [The Harvard Guide to Using Sources](#) and the Syracuse University guidance "[What does Academic Integrity Mean?](#)"]

[24] Assign focused topics likely to be engaging to students.

[25] Use shorter and more frequent papers, including in-class writing exercises. Learn student writing styles.

[26] Have students submit components of major papers in stages (e.g. start with a proposal and outline).

[27] Review and comment on how students use citations.

[28] Ask students to "present" their papers and respond to questions in class.

RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS

[29] Use general words of caution when appropriate (e.g. "remember, there is to be no discussion during this examination").

[30] Allow students to complete challenged examinations, but make note of circumstances and students sitting nearby.

[31] Discuss your concerns privately and individually. Allow students to respond before reaching firm conclusions.

[32] Initiate charges and decide cases sooner rather than later. Waiting for a pattern of repeated misconduct increases the likelihood more serious penalties will be imposed by a hearing panel.

Supplement

[A] From the AAUP ["Statement on Professional Ethics"](#)

As teachers, professors encourage the free pursuit of learning in their students. They hold before them the best scholarly and ethical standards of their discipline. Professors demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors. *Professors make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct and to ensure that their evaluations of students reflect each student's true merit.* They respect the confidential nature of the relationship between professor and student. They avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students. They acknowledge significant academic or scholarly assistance from them. They protect their academic freedom (emphasis supplied).

[B] On the ethical influence of faculty members

A recollection by Thomas Jefferson about teachers he encountered when he was a student at the College of William and Mary in Virginia:

When I recollect that at 14 years of age the whole care and direction of myself was thrown on myself entirely, without a relative or friend qualified to advise or guide me, and recollect the various sorts of bad company with which I was associated from time to time, I am astonished I did not turn off with some of them, and become as worthless to society as they were. I had the good fortune to become acquainted very early with some characters of very high standing, and to feel the incessant wish that I could even become what they were. Under temptations and difficulties I could ask myself what would Dr. Small, Mr. Wythe, Peyton Randolph do in this situation? What course in it will assure me their approbation? I am certain that this mode of deciding on my conduct tended more to its correctness than any reasoning power I possessed.

-- cited in Fawn Brodie: *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* p. 27.

[C] Ken Bain from his book *What the Best College Teachers Do* (2004):

"Highly effective teachers tend to reflect a strong trust in students . . . They often display openness with students and may, from time to time, talk about their own intellectual journey, its ambitions, triumphs, frustrations, and failures, and encourage their students to be similarly reflective and candid. They may discuss how they developed their interests, the major obstacles they faced in mastering the subject, or some of their secrets for learning particular material. They often discuss openly and enthusiastically their own sense of awe and curiosity about life. Above all, they tend to treat students with what can only be called simple decency" (p. 18).