

# The College of the Liberal Arts Academic Integrity Information for Students

What academic integrity is, and how it is maintained and enforced, varies across cultures, schools, colleges, and universities. Students are responsible for understanding how to avoid academic misconduct and academic dishonesty at Penn State. Collaboration (working with another person on graded work), hiring someone to complete your coursework, and plagiarism (misrepresenting another person's words, images, or ideas as your own) are often prohibited in Penn State courses. If you have questions about academic integrity, you should seek guidance before you submit coursework for evaluation. Often, you can find helpful information in your course syllabus. You may also seek guidance from your instructor and from our Academic Integrity Office ([laai@psu.edu](mailto:laai@psu.edu); (814) 863-4297).

## Why do Penn State Educators Care So Much About Academic Honesty?

**Because they care about students:** [Penn State's policy on academic integrity](#) says, "The shared conviction...is that academic integrity is best taught and reinforced by faculty as an element of the teaching and learning process." Students come to Penn State with a wide-range of background experiences, including some that have led students to academic expectations that are inconsistent with Penn State policies and expectations. Educators should provide guidance to help students succeed in our educational system.

**Because they value fairness:** Some students appreciate an educators' efforts to announce, maintain, and follow through with academic integrity policies. They appreciate that the educator provides a "level playing field" and strives to provide grades to all students based on the merit of their work. For many students, a Penn State education is a serious investment of time, effort, and money, and they appreciate knowing that their investment is meaningful and that educators respond actively to students who try to gain an advantage dishonestly.

**Because it is part of who we want to be:** "The Penn State Principles were developed to embody the values that we hope our students, faculty, staff, administration, and alumni possess" (<http://www.psu.edu/this-is-penn-state/penn-state-principles>). According to these principles, "Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at Penn State University, allowing the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner..."

[The College of the Liberal Arts Honor Code](#) says, "I pledge to conduct myself with honor and integrity in all academic, personal, and professional pursuits. I will be responsible for the academic integrity of my work and encourage my peers to do the same. I will carry these values with me as I graduate from this college."

**Because it is part of their job:** Integrity is central to the mission of the College of the Liberal Arts and a fundamental responsibility of all scholars, educators, students, and researchers. The College of the Liberal Arts expects students and educators to recognize that academic integrity processes are an important and meaningful part of education and to follow related policies and procedures. Educators are required to assign course grades and make academic determinations based on the merit of the student's work, or as stated in Penn State's [policy on the basis of grades](#), "Grades shall be assigned to individual students on the basis of the instructor's professional judgment of the student's scholastic achievement."

To contact the Liberal Arts Academic Integrity Office, send email to [laai@psu.edu](mailto:laai@psu.edu) or call (814) 863-4297.

# How to Avoid Common Academic Integrity Problems

- 1) Read your course syllabus. Pay attention to what you may and may not do.
- 2) Unless you have clear and explicit permission, do not use outside or online sources, do not collaborate, do not share any class information or materials with anyone else, and do not upload or share any course information to an online vendor, repository, tutoring site, or quizzing site.
- 3) When in doubt, ask your educator - Everyone makes mistakes, loses track of deadlines, and gets confused. If you cannot meet a deadline or you are not sure if something is permissible, the best thing to do is ask.
- 4) Avoid plagiarism -- If you use another author's or person's words *or ideas*, you need to cite the source both in the body of your text AND in a reference/bibliography/works cited section at the end of your paper. If you use someone else's words, you must put them within quotation marks unless directed otherwise by your instructor. If you rephrase someone else's words, you should change the wording substantially and cite the original source. Small changes (e.g., using a few synonyms) are not enough to make someone else's words or ideas your own. When in doubt, ask.

# What to Do If You Face Allegations of Academic Misconduct

1. **Try not to take it personally.** Penn State policies direct faculty members to report suspicions of academic misconduct to the College, even when students engage in academic misconduct because they “made a stupid mistake” or misunderstood something. Faculty members who do not do this could put themselves at jeopardy.
2. **Do not panic.** Allegations of academic misconduct are a beginning, not an end. As part of this process, students may indicate that they challenge, or contest, the allegations and/or the penalties (a.k.a. sanctions) proposed by the educator. Students who contest have an opportunity to voice their concerns to an independent committee of students and faculty. That committee determines if there is evidence of academic misconduct and, if there is, if the sanctions/penalties recommended by the educator are appropriate. When educators submit allegations of academic misconduct, students receive specific information about their rights. Read this information and ask your educator questions, if needed. You are welcome to contact the College Academic Integrity Office with questions ([laai@psu.edu](mailto:laai@psu.edu)).
3. **Talk with the faculty member.** Ask about the evidence that led the faculty member to believe that you violated instructions or policies. If you have a reasonable explanation for the evidence, share that explanation with the faculty member.
4. **Remain in the course.** Once you are notified of allegations of academic misconduct, you **may not drop the course** until those allegations are dismissed. If you do, the College Academic Integrity Office will ask the Office of the Registrar to return you to the course and you could be responsible for the consequences of missed work/assessments. In the event of a serious, non-academic reason to drop the course (e.g., medical or trauma), please contact the College Academic Integrity Office ([laai@psu.edu](mailto:laai@psu.edu); (814)863-4297).

5. **Check your PSU email regularly** and look for correspondence from our Academic Integrity staff.
6. **Complete and return the form.** After notification, students facing allegations of academic misconduct must complete and submit a form within 5 business days. If you do not, University policies require the College Academic Integrity Office to consider that an indicator that you accept both the allegations of academic misconduct and the sanction(s) proposed by the educator.

To complete the form, you must make a decision. The options are:

**Accept the allegations(s) and sanction(s):** This will end the process and the faculty member will impose the sanction(s) proposed by the educator, unless...

...the student has a previous academic integrity violation on record. In that case, the College Academic Integrity Committee may decide to add or alter academic and educational sanctions and/or request a disciplinary sanction from the Office of Student Conduct.

...the faculty member recommends a disciplinary sanction. In this case, the College Academic Integrity Committee reviews the case and determines if it supports/does not support the educator's request for a disciplinary sanction. That decision is passed on to the Office of Student Conduct for their consideration.

**Contest the allegation(s) of misconduct, the proposed sanction(s), or both:** When students choose this option, they are asked to submit a statement to the College Academic Integrity Office explaining why the suspicious behavior(s) was/were not evidence of academic misconduct. Essentially, students should tell their side of the story. If desired, students may also submit supporting information (e.g., medical documentation). The College Academic Integrity Office will send everything students submit to the educator, who will have a chance to review and comment. If students want to submit private information (e.g., sensitive medical documents), they should alert the College Academic Integrity Office that the information is confidential. The College Academic Integrity Office will share a summary of that information with the instructor (e.g., that the student provided medical information) while striving to honor the student's confidentiality request (e.g., without sharing symptoms or a diagnosis). After reviewing student-submitted information, if the educator comments, students have an opportunity to respond.

The College Academic Integrity Committee will review all of the information submitted. If there is enough evidence for the Committee to find the student responsible for academic misconduct, the Committee reviews the sanctions proposed by the educator, considers the student's history of academic misconduct, and then determines then the sanction(s). The College Academic Integrity Office will share the committee's decisions with the student and the educator. If the Committee determines that there is not enough evidence to support allegations of academic misconduct, the Committee remains unaware of the student's previous academic integrity violations.

On very rare occasions, the Committee will request a face-to-face hearing. In this event, both the student and the educator must be present (or virtually present) to provide testimony. Students may invite an adviser, who is a member of the University Park community (e.g., another student, an academic adviser, a faculty member), to the meeting. The adviser may not be a parent or lawyer and, although you may converse with your adviser, your adviser may not provide testimony or evidence or

ask questions. The College Academic Integrity Office might require you to sign an information release form before sharing information in the presence of your adviser.

For an overview of University procedures, please read the information at <http://undergrad.psu.edu/aappm/G-9-academic-integrity.html>

## Sanctions for Academic Misconduct

- Once students becomes aware of allegations of academic misconduct, **they may not drop the course** until those allegations are dismissed. Students who disregard this information and drop the course will be returned to the course and could be responsible for the consequences of missed work/assessments. In the event of a serious, non-academic reason to drop a course (e.g., medical), contact the College Academic Integrity Office ([laai@psu.edu](mailto:laai@psu.edu), (814) 863-4297).
- Consequences often include academic sanctions: These can include a reduced grade on the exam, assignment, or paper, a reduced course grade, or an F for the course. For repeated offenses or very serious offenses, including cases involving graduate students, consequences can include removal from the degree program. The magnitude of the sanction depends on many things, including: how much of the academic work was affected by the prohibited behavior(s), how important that work was for the course grade or academic evaluation, how important that work was for the identity of the course or education, and if the student has engaged in academic misconduct previously.
- Sometimes, the College Academic Integrity Committee assigns an educational assignment to help students learn how to avoid academic misconduct. Students must complete and submit the assignment correctly before the deadline or risk penalties.
- Sometimes, consequences include a request from the College to the Office of Student Conduct for a disciplinary sanction. Disciplinary sanctions might include a warning or probation, and might include a transcript notation. For egregious or repeated violations, the sanction might be an “XF” which includes both an F for the course and a notation on the transcript. Once the Office of Student Conduct receives a request for a disciplinary sanction, that office manages that process and determines both the appropriateness and duration of transcript notations.
- To track repeat offenders, the University keeps a record of students who accept responsibility for academic misconduct and who are found responsible for academic misconduct. The College Academic Integrity Office will not share this record with educators (unless they are on the Academic Integrity Committee). Academic misconduct is not noted on a student’s transcript unless a transcript notation is an explicit part of a disciplinary sanction. Currently, the University does not report academic misconduct to other organizations unless the academic misconduct results in a disciplinary sanction.

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Updated 9/20/2018