Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee  
Advisory on Academic Integrity Education  

Spring 2019

For many years, colleges and universities have grappled with how to address the issue of academic dishonesty among students. The latter is certainly not a recent phenomenon: in his 2013 book *Cheating Lessons*, James M. Lang cautions against “expecting to find evidence that we are in the midst of a cheating epidemic, and that the problem is much worse now than it was in the idyllic past,” noting that “cheating and higher education in America have enjoyed a long and robust history together.” For a variety of reasons, Lang goes on to explain, it’s hard to say conclusively that more or fewer students are cheating or plagiarizing than in years past. What is clear, however, is that students now have more means at their disposal, given the rapid development of new technologies, and with test and essay banks, essay mills, and other contract cheating businesses proliferating internationally. Just as problematic, though perhaps less egregious, are cases of unintentional plagiarism or cheating, which suggest a divergence in views between students and faculty regarding both what constitutes original work and when and how to attribute borrowed ideas or language.

The Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee proposes a holistic approach to educating students about the central role of academic standards in their college education. A key principle of these discussions is the importance of academic integrity as a core value within the community of scholars at NYU. As soon as students accept NYU’s offer of admission, they become members of our scholarly community. Cases of academic misconduct not only have repercussions for individual students, but they also have a negative impact on our shared educational goals. To cite the policy statement “Academic Integrity for Students at NYU,” issued by the Provost in 2011:

At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting

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2 Susan D. Blum, *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press (2009). “The official rules governing citation, stemming from Enlightenment notions of authorship, ownership, and originality, and the distinction between ideas and expression of ideas, are simply not accepted by today’s college students. They quote constantly in their ordinary lives and rarely have to cite their sources. [...] The academic premium placed on citation merely emphasizes the distance between academic practice and students’ values as expressed in their daily lives.” (p. 58)
membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others. In turn, these values will create a campus climate that encourages the free exchange of ideas, promotes scholarly excellence through active and creative thought, and allows community members to achieve and be recognized for achieving their highest potential. In pursuing these goals, NYU expects and requires its students to adhere to the highest standards of scholarship, research and academic conduct. Essential to the process of teaching and learning is the periodic assessment of students' academic progress through measures such as papers, examinations, presentations, and other projects. Academic dishonesty compromises the validity of these assessments as well as the relationship of trust within the community.³

There is certainly an important role for rules and expectations regarding plagiarism and cheating, and there will be disciplinary consequences for students who do not respect these principles. With this in mind, the committee plans to explore the various sanctions imposed by faculty and schools, as well as any concerns that faculty may have about reporting infractions to their Dean’s Office. We believe, however, that clear rules and consequences alone are insufficient; instead, we need to change the culture of academic integrity at NYU by shifting the focus from litigation to education.

While a few schools have adopted innovative approaches to educating their students about both the values and the finer points of academic honesty, the NYU-wide baseline is somewhat low at present. (See item #2 below.) Simply put, we don’t know what students do or do not know. This is problematic for several reasons: not only do our students come from diverse backgrounds and with various levels of understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and cheating, but they also take courses across NYU’s schools, departments, global sites, and portal campuses. We believe that there is a need to ensure that all students understand what academic integrity means and why it’s important, and that University-level units (e.g., the Libraries, Information Technology, Student Affairs, and the Center for the Advancement of Teaching) have an important role to play in this effort. With this in mind, we make the following recommendations:

1. **Expand and enhance existing online resources for faculty and students.**
   NYU Libraries has an online research guide to “Preventing Plagiarism,” which was originally created for faculty at Tandon by its Bern Dibner Library. This page includes some helpful tips on deterring and detecting plagiarism, as well as links to articles and other resources. This guide should be:

   ³https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html
a. adapted for use by faculty from across the University, rather than appearing specific to Tandon (e.g., by incorporating links to schools’ policy statements and any other relevant online materials that they may have);

b. updated to include more recent articles and resources, in addition to standard language that faculty can incorporate into their syllabi regarding plagiarism and cheating;

c. expanded in scope to include suggestions for deterring/catching classroom cheating (though this may necessitate a change of title);

d. reorganized for an enhanced user experience (e.g., less text-heavy);

e. more prominently positioned on the Libraries’ website, so that it can be more easily found by faculty.

A similar research guide for students, “Plagiarism and How to Avoid It,” exists on the Libraries website, but it is currently somewhat sparse. This page should be significantly enhanced and feature more dynamic and engaging educational materials, e.g., videos and animations.

2. **Replace the current academic integrity tutorial.**

NYU has an online academic integrity tutorial, which is based (with permission) on a self-test developed by Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin Colleges for their joint Plagiarism Resource Site. Since the tutorial is administered through Albert, the current system allows for easy integration with registration, in that completion of the tutorial can result either in a note on the student’s record visible to advisers or in the automatic lifting of a registration hold. But since the tutorial itself is relatively simple (e.g., students cannot proceed from one scenario to the next until they correctly answer a “yes or no” question), it feels somewhat pro forma and of limited educational value. Although there are clear benefits to the kind of automatic notification that is currently available through Albert, the content and structure of the tutorial should be redesigned, in collaboration with instructional designers from NYU IT’s Teaching and Learning with Technology team and librarians in Bobst Library’s Undergraduate and Instructional Services unit. Ideally, the tutorial would draw on and refer back to materials on the Libraries’ revamped academic integrity resource for students, “Plagiarism and How to Avoid It.” (see #1 above).

3. **Ensure a common standard of educational programming for students.**

Undergraduate schools should be strongly encouraged to integrate academic integrity education into their curricular and co-curricular programming for first-year students. This should take place
not only during orientation but also during the first semester, to ensure that students understand the connection with their coursework. A good model is the CAS Cohort Program, which devotes an interactive session in late September to research skills and academic integrity that takes place in Bobst Library and is co-facilitated by an NYU Librarian. Discussions of academic integrity should not, however, be the sole responsibility of co-curricular programs. We encourage faculty members, especially those teaching required first-year courses, to have a conversation about academic integrity with their students; examples of such courses include Writing the Essay and other first-year writing courses, CAS’s First-Year Seminars, and similar courses in other schools. Although this kind of programming is most effective when it foregrounds the positive aspects of academic honesty, the consequences of infractions should also be made clear to students—not only the sanctions that may result from infractions, but also their negative impact on NYU’s scholarly community.

4. **Develop programming for faculty.**
Workshops should be organized for faculty on how to design courses and assignments that minimize the inclination or possibility for students to plagiarize or cheat. Some examples are “scaffolding” assignments, asking students to submit a bibliography in advance of their paper, and articulating course-specific expectations on the syllabus (e.g., explaining on which assignments it is acceptable for students to collaborate, and on which ones they must work individually). It may also be helpful to address the different cultural perspectives on source referencing that faculty may be encountering in their courses.

Some additional possibilities for workshop topics are (a) how to have productive discussions with students about academic integrity, and (b) how to deter and catch cases of cheating in the classroom, the laboratory, and, especially, examinations.

5. **Involve students.**
Students should be engaged to help promote academic integrity on campus. The University Learning Center (ULC) already offers student-led time management workshops and writing tutorials, and its peer tutors have in the past conducted workshops on how to cite resources. The ULC should be encouraged to work with schools to promote these programs and to integrate them, where possible, into schools’ programming for first-year students.

6. **Partner with Student Affairs.**
The Division of Student Affairs is also an important partner in these efforts. Students often make the decision to cheat or plagiarize out of desperation, when they are not adequately prepared for an exam or have postponed writing a paper until the day before it is due. The Student Health
Center offers “toolkits,” or skill-building workshops, on relevant issues such as time management and procrastination. Other Student Affairs units--especially Residential Life, in collaboration with the Faculty Fellows in Residence--could be engaged to address such concerns in their programming within the residence halls, and to emphasize academic integrity as a core community value.

Finally, as noted above, the committee plans to explore the processes currently in place within the schools for reporting and investigating cases of academic dishonesty, as well as the range of resulting sanctions. We may, therefore, issue an additional set of recommendations related to academic integrity in the coming months.