AD HOC COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC HONESTY
COMMITTEE REPORT
APRIL 4, 2017

On 2 June 2016, the UNL Faculty Senate created an ad hoc Committee on Academic Honesty. The Committee's charge was:

The Committee shall work with the Dean of Students, who shall be an ex-officio member of the committee, to:
1. Identify the ways in which cheating or academic dishonesty occurs;
2. Assess the extent to which academic dishonesty occurs on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus;
3. Identify the obstacles faculty members confront in recognizing and dealing with academic dishonesty;
4. Evaluate the attitudes of students regarding academic honesty;
5. Survey the policies of other universities, particularly those in the Big Ten, regarding academic honesty;
6. Develop recommendations for strengthening the ability of faculty and administrators to recognize and deal with instances of academic dishonesty or cheating;
7. Recommend strategies for creating among students a culture that recognizes the importance of academic honesty and how it benefits them; and
8. Recommend whether this should become a standing committee of the Faculty Senate.

During regular meetings throughout the Fall 2016 and early Spring 2017 semesters, committee members reviewed policies related to academic honesty/integrity from BTAA and other peer institutions, including a video call with the staff of Kansas State University's Honor and Integrity System; reviewed various survey instruments used to assess understanding of and attitudes about academic integrity; and reviewed recent research literature. It is important to note that the Committee limited its focus to undergraduate students as the initial population of concern. Additional populations to consider in future include graduate students and post-docs, particularly international scholars. In addition, the university should consider providing tools to detect plagiarism to research program leaders, as recommended by the Academic Planning Committee in December 2015 (see http://www.unl.edu/apc/mins/2015-2016/APC%2015dec9mins%20-%20final.pdf).

The Committee presents the following recommendations to the Faculty Senate, for its consideration.

Recommendations

1. The committee recommends that the UNL Faculty Senate create a standing committee for academic honesty and that the Senate extend the charge of the current ad hoc committee until a standing committee is constituted.

To support a vibrant culture of academic achievement, it is necessary to assess the state of academic honesty at UNL, to report on a timely basis to the campus community about issues involving academic honesty, and to maintain an archive of those academic honesty reports. These functions can be carried out most effectively by a permanent body made up of faculty, students and professional staff as appropriate. It is especially important to involve students actively in academic honesty issues and the enforcement of UNL's academic honesty system. Because it may take some time to create a permanent body, the ad hoc committee recommends that its mandate be extended until a permanent committee can be established.

It is envisioned that the standing committee on academic honesty will have the following responsibilities:

1. Assess the campus climate regarding academic honesty and related issues, and to report the findings of its assessments;

2. Undertake a program of faculty/staff orientation regarding academic honesty and the operation of UNL's academic honesty system;

3. Undertake a program of student orientation regarding academic honesty and the operation of UNL's academic honesty system;

4. Maintain an archive of its programs and findings;

5. Report regularly to the Senate regarding #1 -- #4 above.

2. The committee recommends that a study of campus attitudes and activities related to academic honesty be completed.

The definition of what constitutes academic dishonesty has shifted with the emergence of new technologies and electronic resources and the attitudes of the faculty may be quite different from those held by the current student body. Academic dishonesty is not a simple problem that started yesterday. It is also clear that it is not limited to certain groups of students, international or domestic, regular or non-traditional. To understand the root of the problem, it may be necessary to explore the possibility that current issues with academic dishonesty are symptoms of broader problems or survival strategies. There currently is no research available on this problem at the University of Nebraska. A survey of both faculty and students regarding the prevalence of academic dishonesty and attitudes toward this issue is needed to guide decisions on the types of action that should be taken.

A validated tool that could be used to complete this survey is available from Rutgers University. It will be necessary to obtain copyright permission to use this tool and to obtain IRB approval to complete the survey. The committee recommends that the survey be conducted in early fall of 2017 with analysis of the data conducted in late fall 2017 and a report to university leaders distributed in spring 2018. We are pleased that there appears to be preliminary administrative support for this recommendation from Senior Executive Vice Chancellor Donde Plowman. During a recent Faculty Senate Executive Meeting (31 January 2017), she indicated that the ad hoc Committee should work with the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) and that the OIR should be responsible for the costs of this survey.

3. The committee recommends that a program be initiated to educate faculty about the best practices in detecting and deterring academic dishonesty.

Currently, faculty do not receive formal training in the recognition and handling of academic dishonesty either in their graduate programs or during their academic careers. Often faculty members are unable to detect academic dishonesty in their classrooms or research labs and when they do they may handle cases in an inconsistent manner. Failure to detect academic dishonesty leads to under-reporting and lack of knowledge about the best practices for handling it may lead to punishments that are arbitrary or unfair.

The committee recommends that the program to educate faculty be targeted at the department level and tailored to disciplines within the department. Such a program might include departmental seminars, faculty meetings, on-line training, or training sessions during new faculty orientation. The responsibility for organizing and conducting the training sessions will be determined by those eventually charged with establishing and implementing the recommended policies for addressing academic dishonesty at UNL.

Part of this educational effort should be directed at re-assuring faculty members that they will not be punished for reporting academic dishonesty or taking action to prevent it. Faculty should be made aware of the tools for detecting and preventing academic dishonesty available through the learning management system or on-line. It would also be useful to establish incentives for creating a support network within academic units to provide a forum for sharing best practices. The committee recognizes that academic dishonesty is not limited to the classroom and that an effective educational program needs to include information about academic dishonesty that can occur in research. Faculty, support staff, post-doctoral research assistants, and students may all be guilty of research misconduct whether inadvertently or not. Areas of research misconduct that need to be addressed include plagiarism, falsification of data, biased selection of information to be included in the research, copyright infringement, and professional standards on the assignment of authorship and recognition of the contributions of all who participated in the research. Part of the academic-dishonesty training for faculty members should be directed at making sure that they understand academic conventions and know how to avoid academic

dishonesty in their own work so that they can model academic integrity to students and colleagues.

4. The committee recommends that serious efforts to inform students about the importance of academic honesty be undertaken. One way to advance this educational effort is to institute an honor code system and the committee recommends that consideration be given to establishing such a system.

Commitment to academic integrity is a key value across the University applying equally to every student, faculty member, researcher and administrator. Expectations about academic integrity should be consistent across all disciplines and academic units. Because the meaning of academic integrity is not universally understood, it is essential for the UNL academic community to intentionally educate all community members regarding our standards of academic conduct. Further, it is important that these educational efforts be continuous and not limited to responses to isolated incidents. Effective educational programs about academic integrity require multi-faceted strategies utilizing multi-media platforms to address different audiences while presenting a clear, consistent and continuous message.

Ideally, student education about academic integrity would begin before joining the UNL academic community. Domestic high school students, however, come from diverse backgrounds with a wide array of feelings about academic integrity and highly variable experiences with enforcement and remedial action. Even at the graduate level students may come from undergraduate institutions that differ significantly in the understanding and enforcement of academic integrity standards. Special consideration must be given to educating international students about expectations with respect to academic integrity. Academic integrity standards in other countries often differ from those found in the US and complications are frequently encountered when cultural norms and expectations conflict with the North American understanding of academic integrity.

An Honor Code is a public and explicit statement of institutional commitment to academic integrity that creates a strong incentive for every student to understand and abide by the Code and that may also help to foster a campus culture of academic honesty. The University should also take advantage of opportunities for collaboration with other institutions and become an active leader in advancing standards of academic integrity. Any strategies adopted to promote academic integrity should be assessed for effectiveness.

5. The committee recommends that policies on academic integrity be designed to promote consistent adjudication of cases of academic dishonesty.

The committee believes that a proactive and remedial (rather than reactive and punitive) policy will best serve the campus community. This type of policy structure has been implemented at other universities where it appears to have been effective in establishing a culture of honesty. Policies must clearly spell out rights and responsibilities of both faculty and students and highlight the consequences of violating established academic integrity standards. Consistent, campus-wide academic behavioral standards need to be developed and clearly communicated to all students and faculty.

The right to "due process" is an important component of any provisions to sanction misbehavior. Adjudication procedures should be consistent for all students although some degree of flexibility is necessary to insure that special cases are handled fairly. Current procedures and policies employed in the office of the Dean of Students could usefully serve as a basis for further policy development. An important existing tenet that should be retained is the standard of "responsible due to a preponderance of evidence" (as currently used by the University Judicial Board). The committee also recommends that students and at-large faculty be closely involved in the development and implementation of academic honesty policies.

6. The committee recommends that appropriate office staff be dedicated to oversee UNL's academic honesty system.

Based on the foregoing recommendations, it is evident that managing academic integrity issues for the UNL campus will necessarily be an ongoing process, thus requiring ongoing administration. (Aspects of the office structure developed by Kansas State University may provide useful guidance, see https://www.k-state.edu/honor/.) Consistent, accurate reporting and documentation of incidents and outcomes is necessary to ensure that emergent patterns are identified and that serial offenders are detected. Publication of anonymous statistical data on academic dishonesty is important for the effective assessment of academic integrity policies.

It is envisioned that the office of academic honesty have responsibilities to:

> 1. Carry out assessments of the campus climate regarding academic honesty;
> 2. Undertake academic honesty efforts across campus:
>> a. efforts addressed to faculty/staff (e.g., what is academic dishonesty, how academic dishonesty may be prevented, how UNL's system of academic honesty works)
>> b. efforts addressed to students (e.g., what is academic dishonesty, developing ethical behavior, how UNL's system of academic honesty works);
> 3. Enforce UNL's system of academic honesty;
> 4. Maintain a campus database of academic dishonesty cases and report relevant data – as appropriate – to the standing committee on academic honesty;
> 5. Report regularly to the standing committee on academic honesty and the Executive VC's office regarding #1 -- #4 above.

Respectfully submitted,

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