What to Know about Academic Dishonesty: A Guide for Students

This information is being provided by the Academic Honesty Office to help educate students about issues of academic integrity, including charges of academic dishonesty and the right to appeal such charges. There is an official University Policy on Academic Honesty. It is expected that all University instructors - faculty, TAs, TOs, etc. - in all courses follow the policy in a consistent manner. You should familiarize yourself with the policy. It is included in the Code of Student Conduct and can be found at www.umass.edu/dean_students. If you have any questions about the policy, your rights, or any other University-related issues, Contact the Academic Honesty Office (c/o the Ombuds Office) for help. The office is located at 823 Campus Center (413-545-0867) and can also be reached by e-mail at: www.ombuds@ombuds.umass.edu.

The University requires honesty of all its members in their academic work. Honesty is necessary to the learning process and is integral to the atmosphere of genuine inquiry and intellectual curiosity which the University seeks to foster. Academic dishonesty contradicts the expectations of a community whose central purpose is the pursuit of intellectual endeavor, and is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty violates the University’s Academic Honesty Policy (revised 2007) and any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty is subject to sanctions, including grade penalties, and, in serious cases, suspension or expulsion.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty

To prevent confusion and conflict, you should familiarize yourself with what actions can constitute academic dishonesty; examples can be found in Appendix B of the Policy. In addition, for every course that you take here at UMass Amherst you should:

- Find out what documentation is required for papers, including the use of the Internet.
- Find out what is acceptable (and unacceptable) collaboration, i.e., working with other students.
- Protect your work from being used by others. Helping others cheat is facilitating academic dishonesty, and you, as well as the person you help, can be charged with academic dishonesty. So don’t help others - even your friends and roommates. Learn to use your computer’s password and security options.
- Keep all evidence of your work process including notes, drafts, previous exams, etc.
- When in doubt: go to your instructor first. Ask if what you are doing is at all problematic. It is better to admit you don’t know something than to make a mistake that could constitute academic dishonesty.
- If you need more time for an assignment or are otherwise having difficulties, ASK FOR HELP. It is much better to learn to deal with the pressure of academic life or even take a lower grade on an assignment than to commit academic dishonesty. CHECK YOUR SYLLABI in advance to see if there are some weeks where you have too many things due at once. Ask your instructor if you can hand in an assignment early so as to balance your workload.

Your Rights regarding Charges of Academic Dishonesty

The Right to be Notified

An instructor who suspects you of academic dishonesty should notify you as soon as possible, preferably in person.

Such communication should take place within ten business days after the instructor arrives at the suspicion. It should happen in person, but it can also occur by phone or mail. An instructor who suspects you of academic dishonesty should discuss the matter with you and give you the opportunity to present your account of the situation. The instructor will then decide to file a formal charge, suggest an informal resolution or determine that the suspicion was unfounded. If the instructor decides the suspicion was unfounded, you should expect to be treated as though the suspicion had never arisen.
The Right to Appeal

Most importantly, you need to know that you have the right to appeal. This means that if you are charged with academic dishonesty, you have the right to request a hearing at which a panel composed of faculty and students will judge the charges made and/or the sanctions imposed by the instructor. The instructor’s charge of academic dishonesty must be substantiated, that is the instructor has the burden of proving by a preponderance of evidence that you committed an act of academic dishonesty. If you agree to an informal resolution (see below), you relinquish your right to appeal, so be sure you know what you are agreeing to.

The Right to Assistance

There are several places to ask for information and assistance. The Ombuds Office is here to help you regarding your case. For instance, we can help you understand the charge and the University’s Policy on Academic Honesty, explain your rights and, if necessary, help you prepare your case. As the Ombuds Office also functions as the Academic Honesty Office, we cannot act as your advisor or your witness during an appeal hearing itself. You can go to Student Legal Services (922 Campus Center, 545-1995) or Judicial Advisory Program (432 Student Union, 545-1272) for such assistance.

The Right to Stay in the Course

The instructor cannot throw you out of a course because of suspected academic dishonesty. And you should not drop a class because of it either. Because you have the right to appeal an allegation of academic dishonesty, you must also have the right to receive a fair grade for the course should you win your appeal. The instructor cannot throw you out of the course and should continue to treat you as if there were no allegations made.

Other Issues You Should Know About

You can reach an Informal Resolution

If an instructor believes that you did not intentionally commit academic dishonesty or that the circumstances do not warrant formal disciplinary action, you and the instructor can agree to an informal resolution to the matter. Such an informal resolution does not go on your record. It is, however, reported to the Academic Honesty Office; should you accrue two additional informal resolutions/substantiated formal charges, a record is established and a University sanction hearing is automatically scheduled to determine if University sanctions should be imposed. Since this is a mutual agreement, there is no appeal option for this kind of resolution. Possible informal resolutions could include, for example, re-doing the assignment, additional work, a lower grade on the assignment, or a lower grade for the course.

What does it mean if the charge is upheld?

Formal academic dishonesty charges involve both a grade sanction which can be on the assignment (exam, paper, etc.) in question or for the entire course and a record of academic dishonesty in your discipline file (which is expunged upon graduation, unless a University sanction was imposed in which case it is maintained for seven years after you leave the University). This file is not automatically sent to anyone. It is part of your record here at the University, but you have to give permission for it to be released to others. Some graduate or professional schools may ask for it, as well as some employers (such as those dealing with security issues the military, police force, etc). You can deny someone’s request for your disciplinary record. But that might mean your application is not considered.

A finding of academic dishonesty also means:

- The grade for the course cannot be replaced on your academic record, though the course can be repeated. Hence, it will always affect your GPA.
- You can be suspended or even expelled for egregious violations of the policy or for multiple findings of academic dishonesty. You don’t get your money back.