



## **An Instructor's Guide to Preventing, Confronting, and Reporting PLAGIARISM**

### **Introduction**

Academic honesty is taken very seriously at UC Merced. The *Academic Honesty Policy* (within the Student Code of Conduct, sections 800.00-805.00) emphasizes that students, faculty and administration all share responsibility for maintaining a fair and honest academic environment. UC Merced is creating a strong tradition of upholding the student academic honesty policy and addressing suspected violations through the *Faculty Report Form For Academic Misconduct* and when appropriate the Office of Student Conduct (OSC). Faculty and students both express confidence in the current process, which resolves almost all cases through informal meetings with students rather than formal hearings and emphasizes education in the discipline process. Faculty and OSC strive to hold students accountable for violations, but gives them the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

To encourage prevention and consistent handling of suspected academic dishonesty by instructors, the following information provides an overview of University policy, as well as advice from experienced instructors.

### **Prevention**

In keeping with UC Merced's *Principles of Community* and the mission of the University, we believe that preventing academic dishonesty through education is preferable to establishing elaborate strategies to catch cheaters. This section contains suggestions for establishing and reinforcing a class culture that will encourage responsible scholarship and discourage academic dishonesty.

### ***Establish a class culture that values academic honesty.***

#### **In the syllabus:**

- *Inform students that Academic Senate policy requires instructors to complete a Faculty Report Form for Academically Misconduct, meet with the student, and submit the form to the Dean of their school and Student Conduct.*
- *Attach copies of OSC handouts on plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration (available online and from the Office of Student Life).*
- *Using examples, distinguish clearly between authorized collaboration and unauthorized collaboration both in and out of class.*
- *Explicitly state your rules regarding use and citation of Internet sources. Roughly half of all new plagiarism cases involve the Internet.*

#### **On the first day of class:**

- *Review University policy on plagiarism and inform students of the academic standards of integrity to which they will be held.*
- *Explain that plagiarism often results from desperation and request that students contact you if they feel desperate, rather than do something they'll regret.*
- *Briefly describe a specific case of plagiarism that you have found in student work to drive the message home.*

#### **Repeatedly throughout the semester:**

- *Teach and periodically review with students how to paraphrase from a source. Provide them with excerpts from, or direct them to, the current edition of a handbook such as the MLA or APA handbook.*
- *Hold rough draft workshops to encourage students to treat writing as a process.*
- *Assign a text that uses direct quotation, paraphrase and summary. Demonstrate appropriate techniques of citing sources for each method.*
- *Discuss differences in perception of individual ownership of ideas and explain how citation conventions vary in different situations, for example, in feature journalism or standard business documents or reports. Explain*

*why academic institutions value original writing so highly and insist on crediting authors for their research, ideas and words.*

- *Direct struggling students to the Calvin E. Bright Success Center (formerly the Student Advising and Learning Center), located in the Kolligian Library room 222 for an appointment with a peer tutor.*

### **Construct assignments to reduce plagiarism**

- *Rotate assignments from semester to semester so that students can't plagiarize from recent semesters.*
- *Require that students get your approval for topics and e-mail you thesis statements in advance of rough draft workshops. Don't allow students to change topics without permission.*
- *Break assignments up into staged tasks. For example, ask students to summarize a key source for the assignment, to compare two sources, to synthesize or critically evaluate several sources, and/or to write a proposal or prospectus for a long assignment.*
- *Require drafts before the final, graded assignment is due.*
- *Require that students attach to their paper, copies of all sources used.*
- *If students are using internet sources, check their list of citations before accepting the papers to ensure they give complete website information.*
- *Require academic citations and reference lists in pieces of writing that would not normally include them, e.g. a newspaper article or business report, along with any references to source typical for that format.*
- *Make assignments distinctive in format or topic. For example:*
  - *Have the students apply a specific theory, approach or theme discussed in their readings or in class to a personal experience or to another piece of writing.*
  - *Center the assignment on some event or date that is personally relevant to the students.*
  - *Require that students use only materials selected by you, e.g. essays in an anthology, specific primary sources, or particular data sets.*
  - *Base the assignment on personal reporting. Students could do interviews, observe cultural events, or participate in activities.*

### **Take Home Exam Plagiarism Prevention**

- *Create multiple sets of exams.*
- *Be specific and detailed on directions regarding take home exams; what resources students are allowed to use.*
- *Explain to students your expectation regarding collaboration and use of outside materials.*
- *Require students to show work (if applicable).*

### **Investigation and Referral to OSC**

*Despite all of your efforts to create a culture of honesty in your class, you will inevitably encounter cases of suspected plagiarism. Try not to take this personally, as an insult or affront. Common red flags signaling that the work may not be the student's own include: failure to address the proper topic; a last-minute topic switch; failure to turn in required drafts; sudden improvements in sophistication of grammar, syntax, diction, organization, or ideas; or uneven quality of writing, particularly uneven grammar, poor transitions, or shifts in the quality of coherence.*

*When you suspect that misconduct has occurred, you should take the following steps:*

1. **Confer** with an OSC staff member if you are unsure how to proceed.
2. **Gather** information regarding the case.
3. **Complete** a Faculty Report Form for Academic Misconduct (available at <http://studentconduct.ucmerced.edu>)
4. **Meet** with the student(s) involved, explain the suspected misconduct and determine if the student is responsible.
5. **Complete** the Instructor-led Process (**Stage 1**). See the UC Merced Academic Honesty Policy brochure (available at the Office of Student Life) for more information.
  - a. **If the student is found responsible for academic dishonesty:**
    - i. *Determine sanction (options include: failing grade for course, failing grade for course with notation added to student's transcript, failing grade or zero for piece of work, lowered grade for piece of work, assignment of additional work or reexamination)*
    - ii. *Determine if the violation(s) is/are serious enough to warrant a referral to OSC for formal disciplinary procedures. If yes, indicate on Faculty Report Form and consult with the Dean of the college.*
    - iii. *Have student sign completed form (with sanction indicated).*
    - iv. *Submit a completed Faculty Report Form for Academic Dishonesty to OSC (Kolligian Library 184).*
    - v. *If the student refuses to sign the form, send the student, Dean of the college, and OSC a copy of the unsigned form with documentation summarizing any interactions with the student.*

### **Hints for Determining If a Violation Occurred**

- Interview the student. We recommend interviewing the student in person, but this is not required. If you feel unsafe interviewing the person alone, you can do it in the presence of a TA or OSC member.
- Express concern about the paper and the student's use of sources. Give the student an opportunity to respond.
  - a. If the student asks about the nature of your concerns, state them in a descriptive, non-accusatory tone, e.g. "The tone of language seems uneven," or "It seems that you may have used some sources that are not properly cited."
  - b. You might ask the student directly whether or not they used any unacknowledged sources or received any assistance in writing the paper. Ask the student to provide copies of the sources the student claims they used to write the paper. You may also query the student about the content or any specialized language, to see if the student seems knowledgeable about the subject.
  - c. Tell the student that you are required by university policy to investigate whenever there are concerns about suspected plagiarism.
  - d. If the student admits misconduct or you determine that misconduct took place, you are required to complete a Faculty Report Form for Academic Dishonesty and submit it to OSC and the Dean of your academic department.
- Gather copies of all relevant materials that support your concerns (e.g. any statements you gave to students about plagiarism, the assignment requirements, the student's papers, a writing example from earlier in the semester) and the completed report form.
- Identify the passages or parts of the paper that seem questionable to you.
- Provide a suggestion about or a copy of the source material if you can identify it. However, you do not need to find the source of the plagiarism to complete the Faculty Report Form. Some internet-based strategies for finding the source material include:
  - a. Using the search engines [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) or [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) to search for the suspect passage(s). Google and Yahoo are uncannily good at finding the original source of a brief but distinctive phrase or passage entered in quotation marks.

### **Send the Completed Faculty Report Form and Other Relevant Documents to OSC and your Academic Dean**

For cases involving particularly egregious cases of academic misconduct, cases may be referred to OSC for a formal hearing. Referrals can be sent by interdepartmental mail, e-mailed to [studentconduct@ucmerced.edu](mailto:studentconduct@ucmerced.edu) or in person to the Office of Student Life (184 Kolligian Library).

### **After Receiving a Completed Faculty Report Form**

After receiving a completed Faculty Report Form, OSC will create a disciplinary file for the student. In the case of repeat violations of the academic honesty policy or previous judicial sanctions, OSC may contact the student for a conduct hearing. If the case cannot be resolved through an Informal Disposition Meeting (IDM), then the case may be referred to a hearing panel consisting of students, faculty and/or staff to determine appropriate resolution.

### **Grading**

If an academic honesty case's outcome would affect the student's grades and the case remains under investigation or appeal at the time final grades are due, the instructor of record shall assign a grade of 'NR' until the case is resolved. In virtually all cases, a grade of 'F' (or '0' on a standard 4-point scale) should be assigned for the paper. If you determine that the plagiarism was a genuinely unintended and minor misuse of sources, you may (at your discretion) have the student rewrite the assignment for partial credit.

### **For Especially Egregious Cases of Academic Misconduct Formal Disciplinary Procedure (Stage 2)**

If the instructor believes the academic misconduct was especially serious, the case can be referred to a formal disciplinary process. To refer a case, check the box on the Faculty Report Form or, in writing, to the dean of the school/college/graduate division requesting offering the course requesting that action be taken.

Upon receipt of the request for an investigation, OSC will follow up by conducting interviews that may include the reporting party, all witnesses, and any person(s) alleged to have violated the university's regulations. All persons accused will be informed in writing of the nature of the charge, his/her rights, and the procedures to be followed. If the preliminary investigation does not result in the withdrawal of charges from OSC, in consultation with the dean, the case will be heard by the Faculty/Student Academic Conduct Board, which consists of three faculty members, one undergraduate, one graduate student, and a staff member from OSC or designee.

### ***Sanctions for Stage 2 Process***

Students found responsible for academic misconduct by the Faculty/Student Academic Conduct Board may receive the following sanctions:

1. **Disciplinary Probation**
  - a. A status imposed for a specified period of time during which a student must demonstrate conduct that conforms to University standards. Conditions restricting the student's privileges or eligibility for activities may be imposed. Misconduct during the probationary period or violation of any conditions of the probation may result in further disciplinary action, normally in the form of Suspension or Dismissal. The sanction of probation is normally limited to a student's first violation.
2. **Loss of Privileges and Exclusion from Activities**
  - a. Specific exclusions or loss of privileges for a specified academic term or terms.
3. **Suspension**
  - a. Termination of student status for a specified term or terms. This sanction will be noted on the student's academic transcript during the term(s) of suspension.
4. **Dismissal**
  - a. Termination of student status from the University for an indefinite period. Students who are dismissed may not return to UCM without the express permission of the Chancellor. This sanction will be noted on the student's academic transcript.
5. **Other sanctions as determined appropriate by the board**
  - a. In cases where a determination of academic misconduct has been made and where close supervision of a student's academic conduct seems appropriate, course instructors may be requested to specifically monitor or separately test that student for a specified period of time.
  - b. Work, research projects, or community service projects may be assigned.
  - c. Violations of any of the conditions imposed under this section can be cause for further disciplinary action, usually in the form of loss of privileges and exclusion from activities, suspension, or dismissal.
  - d. Sanctions are assigned with the intent of correlating the sanction with the extent and severity of the violation(s) as well as any past violations.

### ***Appeals***

*For Stage 1 (Instructor-led process)*

Students may request a review (appeal) of the action of an instructor by submitting a written request to the dean of the school/college/graduate division offering the course. If the dean is the instructor of the course, the request for review should be forwarded to the Executive Vice Chancellor/Provost. The dean can either respond or refer the matter to OSC for an advisory opinion. Students have 10 working days to submit a written request for a review; the dean or EVC/P has 10 working days to review the request and respond to the student in writing. The dean or EVC/P may revise or revoke the action of the instructor on the basis that the instructor failed to follow the procedures from the Academic Honesty Policy or that the instructor's action was based on impermissible criteria (for example, discrimination based on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity or national origin).

*For Stage 2 (Formal Disciplinary Procedures)*

Appeals after Stage 2 sanctions must be directed to the Executive Vice Chancellor/Provost. The EVC/P will review only the written materials regarding the case, including hearing documents provided by the chair of the Board, the appeal letter from the student outlining the rationale for the appeal and any new evidence provided by the student that was unavailable at the time of the hearing. Appeals shall be limited to:

1. Whether there was substantial evidence to support the finding(s) of a violation of university policy.
2. Whether there is new evidence that is likely to change the hearing's outcome.
3. Whether there was procedural unfairness in the hearing.
4. Whether the sanctions imposed were inappropriate.

Any appeals to the EVC/P must be made in writing within 10 working days after the student receives the Board's decision. The EVC/P's (or designee's) decision is final and shall be sent to the student and the student's dean within 15 working days from receipt of the appeal letter.

### ***Frequently Asked Questions***

*If a student plagiarizes on a draft, must I complete a Faculty Report Form and submit it to OSC and my dean? Not necessarily. If you suspect academic misconduct on a draft, take this opportunity to educate the student about plagiarism and appropriate citation conventions.*

*If a student admits to misconduct in our interview, may I give him/her a failing grade on the assignment and not report the case to OSC?*

No. Even if the student admits to the misconduct, you must still complete a Faculty Report Form and send it to your dean and OSC. In order for there to be equitable treatment for all students, it is necessary for the centralized reporting through OSC to be consistently utilized.

*(For a Formal Disciplinary Process) How long will it take for OSC to contact the student and resolve the case after I refer it to them?*

OSC will contact the student via e-mail as soon as possible to notify them of the process. The amount of time required to resolve the case depends upon the nature of the charge and the degree of cooperation from the student and referring party. On average, cases are resolved in 3-4 weeks.

*(For a Formal Disciplinary Process) What happens if I'm not happy with the way OSC resolves the case?*

OSC does its best to keep the referring party informed during the disciplinary process so that an instructor can voice any concerns prior to the resolution of a referral. In fact, OSC welcomes any feedback about the disciplinary process before, during or after any disciplinary referral.

*Can the student take legal or administrative action against me for completing a Faculty Report Form or referring a case to OSC?*

The best protection for an instructor dealing with suspected misconduct is to follow the established University policies and procedures. The University administration will support and defend these policies, and courts rarely intervene when a University follows its own established procedures (which means completing a Faculty Report Form and maintaining proper documentation when you suspect a violation). Cases in which students file administrative grievances are very rare. Cases in which students seek legal remedies are even rarer. This should not discourage an instructor from confronting academic dishonesty. By completing the Faculty Report Form and following established policies and procedures, you are ensuring that the student's due process rights are protected.

*I have questions or need advice! Who can I talk to?*

OSC is happy to help! You can contact us in the following ways:

On-line: <https://studentconduct.ucmerced.edu>

E-mail: [studentconduct@ucmerced.edu](mailto:studentconduct@ucmerced.edu)

Phone: 209-228-5433 (the Office of Student Life)

Office: Kolligian Library 184

*Adapted with permission and thanks to UC Davis Office of Student Conduct.*