

Report of the teaching committee 2004-2005

The teaching committee addressed the following issues which and the results of those discussions are summarized in this document:

- Develop a procedure for evaluation of teaching proficiency of teaching assistants
- Review and propose modifications to selecting recipients of teaching awards
- Develop policy and procedures for addressing academic plagiarism for the college of engineering
- Recommend charges for 05-06 academic year

Develop a procedure for evaluation of teaching proficiency of teaching assistants

According to operations manual of The University of Iowa:

...each department or program will prepare a plan incorporating the following elements:

- a. A procedure for selecting and training all teaching assistants.
- b. A procedure for evaluating all teaching assistants for teaching proficiency by the end of each academic period in which they are employed in a teaching capacity. This procedure should allow for systematic evaluation by students and by faculty advisors. For teaching assistants who have not previously taught at the University, a preliminary assessment should also occur within the first eight weeks of the first semester in which they are assigned teaching duties.
- c. A procedure for providing additional instructional assistance for teaching assistants when warranted. This procedure should provide for the possibility of assistance in the areas of teaching methods, evaluation of student performance, oral and written communication, and subject matter.
- d. A procedure for addressing concerns raised by students regarding the teaching proficiency of their teaching assistants.

This plan will be filed with the appropriate dean or administrative officer as well as with the Provost. The Office of the Provost will provide each teaching assistant with a handbook on teaching.

Any procedure for evaluating teaching assistants must consider the diverse roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants in the college of engineering. A single evaluation form cannot fit teaching assistants that only grade, those that lead laboratory sections, and those that hold office hours. The teaching committee makes the following recommendations to meet these requirements:

1. Before the beginning of each semester, the course instructor shall meet with the teaching assistants to define the responsibilities of the teaching assistants and the expectations of the instructors. This information should be outlined in a written document. If the student has taught before, previous evaluations should be reviewed to assess how the student has addressed any issues previously identified.
2. Teaching assistants shall be reviewed within the first eight weeks of the semester. At a minimum, this review should consist of a short meeting with the course instructor where the responsibilities and expectations are discussed. Any changes to these should be documented and any student comments should be reviewed. A written plan to address any concerns of the instructor or teaching assistant should be developed. This might include a plan to seek additional instructional assistance to improve the skills of the teaching assistant. Those teaching assistants who have

- not previously taught at the university will also receive ACE feedback from the students at this time.
3. Teaching assistants shall also be reviewed after the end of the semester. This meeting shall include the DEO, the teaching assistant, and the instructor. During this meeting the instructor shall review the teaching assistant's performance relative to the responsibilities and expectations defined at the beginning of the course. The instructor shall also review progress in responding to any deficiencies identified during the mid-semester review. This meeting will also identify recommendations for the teaching assistant to improve teaching methods, evaluation of student performance, oral and written communication, and subject matter expertise. ACE results and associated comments from students will be reviewed during this meeting. A copy of the evaluation should be placed in the teaching assistant's file.
 4. During the mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluations, instructors should also work to identify teaching assistants who are performing exceptionally well so that they can be nominated for appropriate awards.

Review and propose modifications to selecting recipients of teaching awards

After some discussion, the teaching committee concluded that the primary issue with the award process is the relatively few nominations that departments generate. With only 2-3 nominations the review process is relatively straightforward. Three recommendations of the committee include:

- Encourage greater departmental participation in the process.
- Encourage nominations from individual students and student groups. Student suggestions could be acted upon by departmental secretaries to reduce the load on individuals.
- Have the nomination include ACE results and percentile information for every course taught over the previous two years.

Develop policy and procedures for addressing academic plagiarism for the college of engineering

Growing evidence suggests academic honesty (cheating, plagiarism, and fraud) are a growing problem across the nation at the high school, undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels. The University of Iowa college of engineering may be similarly affected. In this context, the current policy of the college seems inadequate. The teaching committee reviewed this issue and believes a systemic approach to examine the nature and extent of the problem may be most useful rather than simply revising the current policy posted on the website. Specific steps the committee recommends include:

- Recognize growing problems of academic dishonesty
- Define scope of response the college is willing to pursue
- Assess the scope of cheating through surveys and focus groups
- Develop a policy on academic fraud, dishonesty and cheating similar to that of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) that is tuned to the particular needs of the college of engineering
- Consider the “broken window” approach, in which the potential precursors of academic dishonesty are confronted aggressively

The causes of academic dishonesty are complex and successfully confronting the issue depends on developing an understanding of how problems are manifest in the college. This understanding can then be used to ensure an effective response. At the most simple level, a well-crafted policy statement is useless if the students never read it. The most effective way to strengthen academic honesty within the college may be through a systemic, bottom-up approach that considers not only the obvious elements of academic dishonesty, but also the more subtle precursors of academic dishonesty. A strong commitment of the faculty to take specific actions, such as those described under the “broken window” approach, may be the most effective response.

Most generally, the teaching committee suggests that the college forms a task force charged with carrying out specific actions rather than leaving this to next year's teaching committee.

The growing problem of academic dishonesty

A brief survey on recent studies shows that cheating and plagiarism are becoming more widespread, more accepted by students, both at a high school and university level. Informal discussions with several faculty members suggest similar trends may exist at Iowa. A particularly interesting discussion of this trend and speculation regarding its underlying causes can be found in *Beer and Circus*. Below are a few excerpts from two internet sources that nicely summarize the problem.

McCabe and Bowers compared only male juniors and seniors attending small to medium-sized selective residential colleges. The following chart summarizes their disquieting findings. Note the dramatic increases in cheating in just thirty years and that in the more recent sample *over half* the students surveyed reported copying from another student on a test. (McCabe & Trevino, 1996)

Type of Cheating	1961	1991
Copied from another student during an exam	26%	52%
Helped another student cheat on an exam	23%	37%
Used crib notes to cheat on an exam	16%	27%

In his excellent rundown of the research on college cheating Cizek summarizes the results by saying that dozens of studies made at different times by a wide variety of researchers in dissimilar places all concur that more than half of college students responding admit to having cheated. (Cizek, 1999). Of course, it is reasonable to suppose that many cheated but did not admit it.”

(<http://www.newfoundations.com/PREVPLAGWEB/CheatingTrends1.html>)

Eighty-four percent of the students surveyed last year by Who's Who Among American High School Students said that cheating was common among their high-achieving peers. Moreover, studies conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics show that the percentage of students who admitted to cheating on a test has risen from 61 percent in 1992 to 71 percent in 2000. Research conducted by the Educational Testing Services suggests that this jump is partially due to the pressure cooker environment of high schools.

Michele Goldfarb, the director of Penn's Office of Student Conduct, said that these nationwide findings correlate with the situation at Penn. "The figures that we've heard nationally are true here as well," Goldfarb said. "You'd like to think that that wasn't the case, but that's probably wishful thinking."

In the spring of 1999, a University Honor Council survey found that only 54 percent of Penn students considered copying homework to be cheating. Moreover, 61 percent of the students indicated that they would not report a case of cheating to the Office of Student Conduct.

(http://www.dailypennsylvanian.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2001/11/27/3c03502bad345?in_archive=1)

Given the pervasive and growing problem of cheating nationally, it is likely the same situation exists at the college of engineering. Based on this assumption, several steps can be recommended.

Define the scope of response the college is willing to pursue

Any response to the issue of academic dishonesty needs to begin by defining the investment the college is willing to make in this area. At one extreme, the college could simply update the written policy on the website. At the other, the college might engage students, faculty, and administrative staff in a comprehensive response. Some important considerations in defining the response of the college include:

- Undergraduate and graduate students—each population has different factors influencing academic dishonesty and may need different responses to ensure success
- Range of inappropriate behavior—inappropriate behavior to be addressed could be defined narrowly as cheating or more generally in terms of the students’ responsibility to contribute to a productive learning environment
- Degree of joint responsibility—at one extreme responsibility for ethical behavior can be placed on the student at the other the responsibility is jointly held by both students and professors.

To some degree any response must consider education, deterrence, and enforcement. Education is particularly important with graduate students who may not know exactly what constitutes plagiarism. As the cheating becomes more accepted the behaviors students consider acceptable may differ from those that professors consider unethical. As a result, undergraduates may need to be taught what constitutes unethical behavior. As an example students may not consider copying homework from solution manuals they find online unethical. Education could be addressed at many levels from including it as a message during the initial recruitment of students to developing a web-based tutorial on academic honesty that could certify students as knowledgeable of college expectations. This web-based system could be implemented similar to the NIH system for educating and evaluating ethical standards for human subjects research (<http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/cbt/cbt.html>). Many of the current students may have never read the college policy and so may have an honest misunderstanding of what constitutes cheating.

Deterrence refers to the responsibility professors and other students have in making cheating less tempting. Some students complain that cheating is rampant in some classes because professors use the same exams year after year and some students gain access to those exams. Posting all old exams might counteract this problem. Professors can contribute to making cheating more or less tempting.

Enforcement refers to the need to take decisive action when instances of dishonesty are discovered. The process should be fair to the students, but should not be so cumbersome as to discourage professors from initiating the process when cheating has been detected. It may be useful to engage students in the process both by making them responsible for reporting cheating (e.g., agreeing that failure to report academic dishonesty is an instance of academic dishonesty). Students could also be involved in a peer review of cases as part of the enforcement process.

Any policy regarding academic honesty must be based on a shared understanding of how deeply the college is invested in the issue.

Assess the scope of cheating and its underlying causes in the college of engineering

A survey of faculty and students could assess the types and degree of inappropriate behavior. This survey could also identify what students view as inappropriate and what they believe is the underlying cause of the behavior. Such information could help target the response of the college. Such a survey might address the trends, prevalence, and reason for different types of inappropriate behavior, such as:

- plagiarism, copying homework
- copying exams and projects
- using the same project for multiple courses
- poor attendance and disruptive classroom behavior
- grade inflation (professor's contribution)
- repetitive exams or homework (professor's contribution)

- canceling classes on Friday (professor's contribution)
- poorly proctored exams (professor's contribution)

Adopt a policy similar to that of College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) policy on academic fraud, dishonesty, cheating

The current engineering policy has several weaknesses addressed by the CLAS policy. The engineering policy lacks a clear definition of inappropriate behavior. In some cases cheating may stem from honest misunderstanding of students, such as the degree to which they may collaborate on homework. The CLAS policy gives clear examples of inappropriate behavior. The CLAS policy also describes a more detailed process and outcomes for those students accused of cheating. As a first step the college might suggest that professors refer students to this policy. A second step would involve revising this policy according to the scope of the college's intended response and the particular factors that influence cheating in the college. Below is an excerpt from the CLAS website:

Academic Fraud, Dishonesty, and Cheating

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences considers academic fraud, dishonesty, and cheating serious academic misconduct. All students suffer when academic misconduct takes place. Academic fraud, dishonesty, and cheating disturb the mutual respect that should exist between instructors and students and among students, and can poison the atmosphere of a classroom. Perhaps most seriously, those who commit academic fraud, dishonesty, or cheating are robbed of the educational experiences that are the primary purpose of course work in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. We expect instructors to help students understand and avoid all academic fraud.

If you are unclear about the proper use and citation of sources, or the details and guidelines for any assignment, you should discuss the assignment and your questions with the instructor. All forms of plagiarism and any other activities that result in a student presenting work that is not really his or her own are considered academic fraud. Academic fraud includes these and other misrepresentations:

- presentation of ideas from any sources you do not credit;
- the use of direct quotations without quotation marks and without credit to the source;
- paraphrasing information and ideas from sources without credit to the source;
- failure to provide adequate citations for material obtained through electronic research
- downloading and submitting work from electronic databases without citation;
- participation in a group project which presents plagiarized materials;
- taking credit as part of a group without participating as required in the work of the group;
- submitting material created/written by someone else as one's own, including purchased term/research papers;

Cheating on examinations and other work also interferes with your own education as well as the education of others in your classes. If you are unclear about the guidelines for any testing situation or assignment, you should discuss your questions with the instructor. Academic cheating includes all of the following, and any other activities that give a student an unfair advantage in course work.

- copying from someone else's exam, homework, or laboratory work;
- allowing someone to copy or submit your work as his/her own;

- accepting credit for a group project without doing your share;
- submitting the same paper in more than one course without the knowledge and approval of the instructors involved;
- using notes, text messaging, cell phone calls, pre-programmed formulae in calculators, or other materials during a test or exam without authorization;
- not following the guidelines specified by the instructor for a "take home" test or exam.

When an instructor in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences suspects a student of academic fraud or cheating these procedures will be followed:

- The instructor (or supervisor, if the instructor is a teaching assistant) must inform the student--in writing--as soon as possible after the incident has been observed or discovered.
- If the instructor comes to the conclusion that the student academic fraud or cheating has occurred, he or she (in consultation with the supervisor if the instructor is a teaching assistant), will determine what action to take. The instructor may decide to reduce the student's grade on the assignment or activity, or in the course, or even to assign an F for the assignment or activity or for the course
- The instructor will send a written report of the case to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and send copies of the report to the DEO and to the student(s) involved
- The associate dean for academic programs will impose the following or other penalties: disciplinary warning until graduation (usually for a first offense); suspension from the college for a calendar year or longer (usually for a second offense); or recommendation of expulsion from the University by the president (usually for a third offense).

If a student feels that the finding of academic fraud or cheating is in error or the penalty unjust, he or she may request a hearing. Information on the appeal procedures is available from CLAS Academic Programs & Services.

Consider the broken window approach

An underlying cause of academic dishonesty may be a lack of engagement in the learning process and respect for how the courses are taught. Several interrelated factors contribute to a vicious cycle that could lead to a spiral of increasingly poor behavior. As an example, disengaged faculty make attending class less valuable for students, students being rational and time pressured begin attending class less frequently, it then becomes acceptable for others to skip class, performance on the exams drop, but the grades are curved, making it even less worthwhile to attend class. The cycle continues with poor attendance and performance causing faculty to disengage from teaching. Conversations with several faculty and students suggest such a process is underway. Based on a very informal sample, attendance for some courses is below 50%.

A similar pattern has been attributed to urban decline and some argue that trends of increasing inner city crime can sometimes be reversed by addressing the seemingly trivial details that contribute to the vicious cycle. This "broken windows" approach works by addressing visible indicators of neglect, which can reduce not only reduce further acts of vandalism, but also more serious crimes. In the case of New York, an aggressive campaign to remove graffiti was credited with creating an atmosphere of lawfulness that reduced more serious crime on subways (See *The Tipping Point* for more details).

The “graffiti” in the college of engineering seems to be attendance and inappropriate classroom behavior, such as arriving late, cell phone use, doing other work, talking, and preparing to leave before the end of class. A uniform set of expectations of student behavior might lead to a greater respect for the learning process. Likewise, professors should be expected to show the benefit of attendance. It might be useful for each professor to ensure attendance and participation actually contributes to better exam performance.

Another form of “graffiti” is grade inflation and diminished academic rigor. If students can get a B with poor performance on exams and attending only 50% of the lectures then other students may choose to do the same. One approach to combat grade inflation is to encourage a move from norm referenced testing (grading on a curve) to criterion referenced testing (grading according to specific absolute performance criteria). To some extent, a criterion referenced approach is mandated by ABET. It might be useful to pursue such an approach more vigorously.

Recommend charges for 05-06 academic year

Work with the EFC to address issues of academic honesty.

Refine the teaching assistant assessment process according to faculty and EFC input.