

# **Smeal Honor Code**

## **Graduate Programs Disclosure Notice – Fall 2008**

**February 2009**

Dear Smeal Graduate Programs Community:

In the fall semester, four graduate (MBA, Executive MBA, or Ph.D.) academic integrity cases were brought before the Smeal Graduate Programs Honor Board for investigation and review. These cases are outlined below.

**Note** - All academic integrity case records are maintained in a permanent file at the Office of Judicial Affairs.

### **Case 1**

The review panel investigated a concern over collaboration among three students on a take home final examination. The panel conducted a careful review of the professor's communicated expectations for the deliverable, electronic and hard copy versions of the students' completed assignments, email communication between the students and interviews with the students. Two of the students admitted to having assisted the third student by electronically providing their answers to specific exam questions. The third student admitted to receiving and utilizing exam answers provided by the other two students. It was determined that all three of the students had committed an honor code infraction in collaborating beyond the boundaries set forth by the professor. As a sanction, the two students who provided assistance on the final exam received a reduced letter grade in the course. Independently, they also volunteered to share their experiences and relevant learning with other students. The third student who received and utilized assistance on the final exam received a failing grade for the course.

### **Case 2**

The review panel investigated a serious appearance of impropriety and potential wrongful collaboration between two neighboring students on a mid-term examination. A comparison of the two exams found 98% of the total questions were answered identically. Of the incorrectly answered questions, 98% were also identical. Additional concerns of impropriety were noted in the course of comparing the two students' exams. Each student took part in an independent peer review with the Smeal Honor Review Board. The actions and verbal accounts of both students reflected a lack of situational awareness and created a serious appearance of impropriety in the form of wrongful collaboration on the exam. It was determined that both students failed to uphold the Smeal Honor Code. Both students received a failing grade for the exam, will have their GA funding discontinued and will not participate in the pre-commencement ceremony.

### **Case 3**

The Honor Review Board was asked to investigate a student for accessing an on-line resource guide during an ANGEL-based quiz. Access to the resource/study guide, which contains many quiz questions and answers, was expressly prohibited during in-class quizzes per the professor's instructions. The panel participants determined that the student had engaged in inappropriate behavior and that a violation of the Smeal Honor Code occurred. The student received a failing grade for the quiz and loss of extra credit points associated with the quiz grade.

### **Case 4**

In Fall 2008, the Graduate Admissions Management Council (GMAC) canceled the GMAT scores of 84 test-takers, including one Smeal graduate student. Specifically, the test scores of 72 individuals were canceled as a result of their online confirmations of GMAT exam content on a popular website. Test scores of 12 additional individuals were canceled as a result of posting live GMAT questions on the same website. Those individuals are prevented from testing again for a minimum of three years.

In the Smeal case, a GMAT score was canceled because the student utilized the aforementioned website to access and review GMAT exam questions during test preparation. According to GMAC, this behavior constituted a breach of the rules that were agreed upon at enrollment.

Following the exam, the student again utilized the website to confirm actual test questions that appeared on the GMAT exam. The conduct was in violation of the stated and agreed upon GMAT test security policy:

“Test Taker Rules Agreement

I will not try to record, copy, or disclose any exam question or answer, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means (orally, in writing, on any internet “chat room”, or otherwise).”

In conclusion, the following actions have been taken:

- Student has retaken the GMAT exam and secured a score equivalent to the original score
- GA funding has been discontinued
- Student will not participate in pre-commencement ceremony

According to GMAC other business schools have taken a range of actions depending on the circumstances. Some candidates have been required to retake the exam. At the other end of the

spectrum, students have been dismissed from their graduate programs while other programs have considered revoking degrees of graduated students.

### **Key Learning**

With your input and feedback we will continue the commitment to improve our student-led Honor Code system. In the spirit of ongoing learning and dialogue, we would like to highlight three important takeaways from these experiences.

1. We are all part of a learning environment with a system of standards. The students involved in these cases have been peer reviewed as part of the Graduate Program's investigation process. Several of these students have taken responsibility for their actions, and we are grateful to those who have shared their learning in the interest of strengthening our programs. The Smeal Honor Code is less about being perfect and more about taking ownership and being accountable when we do make mistakes or when we are at risk of making a mistake that could harm individual and/or program reputations.
2. Situational awareness is paramount, especially for business leaders and decision makers. Accordingly, our Honor Code includes a stated expectation about the appearance of impropriety, and we are all responsible to manage ourselves accordingly. As integrity-driven leaders, we must be mindful of our actions and respect the perceptions of our colleagues.
3. All Smeal students and faculty are encouraged to report Honor Code concerns or violations as a part of our shared commitment to strengthening our community of integrity.

Sincerely,

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Dean

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