

Dear Smeal Graduate Programs Community,

In the spring and summer semesters of 2009, there were three academic integrity incidents within the Smeal Graduate Community. The Smeal Graduate Community includes MBA, EMBA, and PhD students. Cases are summarized below.

Please note that all academic integrity case records are maintained in a centralized file at the Office of Judicial Affairs.

Case 1 (two students):

A professor was concerned that an academic integrity violation took place after noticing similarities between two students' take-home exams. The assignment should have been completed individually, per the professor's guidelines.

In the initial investigation, the two students offered inconsistent accounts of how their materials were developed and delivered.

Upon further questioning, the first student admitted to turning in an earlier draft of the other student's work. The draft document was obtained and submitted without the authoring student's knowledge or consent.

Case review found both students in violation of the Smeal Honor Code. The student who admittedly turned in a classmate's early draft was sanctioned for plagiarism and cheating on an exam. The student received a zero on the exam and a failing grade in the course.

It was determined that the second student falsified case details in the initial investigation stage. The attempted cover-up was an act of aiding and abetting which is a violation of the Smeal Honor Code. The student was sanctioned with a letter grade reduction against the final course grade.

Case 2

A student submitted a paper that contained numerous un-cited passages of text. It was determined, through investigation, that the student had committed plagiarism and violated the Smeal Honor Code. The student had secured prior permission to have the paper fulfill two separate course requirements. Accordingly, the student was sanctioned with a failing grade on the paper which resulted in a final F grade in both courses.

Key Learning

With your input and feedback we will continue the commitment to strengthen our Honor Code. In the spirit of ongoing learning and dialogue, we would like to highlight key takeaways from these experiences.

1. Students may feel more vulnerable to academic integrity violations when faced with strict deadlines or pressure to perform well on assignments. We encourage students to discuss these pressures with professors who may be able to provide academic resources or solutions to scheduling conflicts.

2. With accountability as a key tenet, the Smeal Honor Code is less about being perfect and more about taking ownership when mistakes are made. Both students in Case 1 would have been better served by demonstrating accountability from the outset, rather than misrepresenting the case.
3. There are different details, severity of infractions, circumstances and even programs represented in these disclosures, the articulation of which could inappropriately reveal the identity of the people involved. Our intent here is to not publicly expose the individual but rather expose general violation categories and outcomes.
4. As part of our learning environment, these notices are designed to promote discussion, transparency, and a heightened awareness of the standards set forth in our Code.

We invite you to reflect on these learning opportunities, and if you would like to share your thoughts, please do so by sending us an e-mail. Once again, we thank all of you for your ongoing commitment to honor and academic excellence in the Smeal Graduate Community.

Sincerely,

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