

*Comments on Proposed Academic Integrity Policy, Faculty Council Meeting, Dec. 13, 2005 by Neil R. Luebke, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, emeritus member of Academic Standards & Policies Committee and member of Academic Integrity Committee (AIC) & the AIC Subcommittee on Policies and Procedures.*

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important topic that will likely affect virtually everyone in this room—faculty and students.

Some faculty members have asked why OSU needs an Academic Integrity (AI) Policy at all. Here is a brief answer. As in financial dealings and marriage, trust and trustworthiness are essential to academic pursuits and to any other societal activity that requires expert scholarship and research. Violations of academic integrity are basically violations of that trust. Plagiarism and falsification of research reports are all too frequent front page news. So-called “diploma mills” are called such precisely because they do not uphold principles of AI in their own operations. To evaluate properly the work of a student, a teacher must be confident—or at least have good reason to assume--that the work is actually the student’s own. The accessibility of the internet and of electronic communication devices has made cheating easier than it was formerly. For these and other reasons, it is important that OSU seeks to foster a campus climate—among students AND faculty--that upholds and supports principles of AI. Indeed, at the current time we have an opportunity to lead the state in this cause. Our students—and our faculty--should be known not only for their professional competence but also for their professional trustworthiness. This policy and its attendant implementation & educational activities are designed to be a major step in that direction.

There has been regular dissatisfaction with the current policy, which is now 21 years old (approved Dec 1984). In Fall 2003, the Academic Standards and Policies Committee reviewed the policy and similar policies at other Big 12 schools. The Committee decided to overhaul, rather than merely amend, the policy and, in the process, became aware of the resources of the Center for Academic Integrity established at Duke University (since then relocated at Rutgers University). In Spring 2004, Provost Strathe appointed and convened the Academic Integrity Committee, which has representatives from each of the Stillwater campus colleges and the two student government associations.

Among the reasons for dissatisfaction with the current policy are the following. (1) It is so cumbersome and legalistic that it is seldom used. (2) It is almost exclusively penalty-oriented rather than, at least in part, education-oriented. (3) The evidentiary criterion of “clear and convincing” is often difficult, if not impossible, to meet, especially on the question of intent. (4) The current policy makes a distinction between “dishonesty” and “misconduct” in which “dishonesty” is defined as requiring an intent to deceive. The difficulty of proving intent has led to a number of cases being dismissed or downgraded to misconduct, a category in which the penalties are lower. (5) The only sanctions permitted, other than probation, suspension or expulsion, are the lowering of grades or a redo of assigned

work. No re-education of the student is demanded. There is no transcript designation for violations of academic integrity. (6) The same Board that hears grade appeals also hears cases of academic dishonesty, opening the process to some confusion. Indeed, the wording of the policy itself fosters a confusion between the instructor's role in assigning grades expressing judgment of the student's competence in handling the content of the course and the instructor's quite different role in identifying violations of academic integrity. (7) In the current policy no one except the instructor and the student is required to be involved in the case until the student seeks appeal of the grade or unless the instructor seeks to have the student placed on probation, suspended, or expelled. After that point, the procedures become markedly adversarial. (8) While the current policy lists types of violations and examples of sanctions, there is no recommended "default" classification of violations that match a violation with a recommended sanction. Hence, the faculty member has little guidance and the sorts of sanctions imposed vary across campus.

The proposed AI Policy is a product of a year and half of rather intensive work, diligently facilitated through the office of the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Education and often using the resources of the Center for Academic Integrity. The proposed Policy aims to be more educationally-focused, especially for first-time undergraduate offenders; to be less legalistic and cumbersome, especially for faculty and department heads; and to communicate more directly and seriously regarding violations of academic integrity.

Major changes from the current policy include the following. (1) The proposed Policy encourages frequent and early reporting of violations, separating them from the normal grading procedure, and makes a trained third-party part of the first step of the process. (2) It provides for a roster of trained "Facilitators" who will function in the "third party" role just mentioned. (3) It also provides for AI Hearing Panels that contain both faculty and students. (4) The proposed Policy states as a lower standard of evidence for violation charges: "more likely than not" vs. "clear and convincing." (5) It does not require proof of a student's intent to commit a violation. (6) It provides for a transcript identifier of violation, the "F!" (pronounced "eff shriek"). (7) It provides an educational mechanism for a student to remove the violation-identifying "!" (shriek) by taking a remedial short course on academic integrity. (8) The proposed Policy outlines three levels of sanctions and correlates them with levels of violation, serving as an OSU "default" standard for faculty, although, after properly informing students, faculty may vary from this practice.

What I have not discussed, and do not have time to discuss, is a fully developed educational plan to cover current students, incoming students including transfers, current faculty and staff, and new faculty and staff. The AIC subcommittee on education has been working for several months on elements of this educational plan. The AIC Committee regards the educational plan as essential to the long-term success of the proposed AI Policy.

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