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Campus Report

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University statistics for 2008-09 on academic misconduct

Statistics from 2008-09 on academic misconduct at the University of Saskatchewan show that the university's effort to educate students about plagiarism and proper citations may be bearing fruit. Of the 51 cases of academic misconduct heard in colleges this year, only half concerned plagiarism accusations, while in previous years more than two thirds of misconduct cases involved plagiarism.

There was an increase in the number of cheating cases compared to the previous year, however, due primarily to attempts to bring notes into exams. This is the seventh year in which the university has gathered and reported on these statistics.

The term "academic misconduct" includes both plagiarism, which is the use of other people's ideas or writing without credit, and other forms of cheating, such as taking notes into an exam or lying about admission qualifications. The Office of the University Secretary maintains a record of the number of academic misconduct cases handled by colleges.

For the last academic year, from July 2008 to June 2009, the university had 57 academic misconduct cases heard by college and university panels. Of these, 51 students were found to be guilty. Two students were expelled, both for presenting false records for admission; two students were suspended following second offenses. The rest were penalized with either outright failure in the class or with a grade reduction in the class.

This year, approximately half of the cases involved plagiarism in an essay or assignment; the remainder covered various types of cheating such as bringing notes or electronic devices into an exam, taking a copy of the exam, and submitting the same essay in two different classes.

Here are university statistics dating from 2002, when the Office of the University Secretary began keeping track of these figures:

2008-09:	57 cases heard: 51 guilty. Penalties included 2 suspended, 2 expelled.
2007-08:	45 cases heard; 42 guilty. Penalties included 1 suspended.
2006-07:	69 cases heard: 52 guilty (10 pending) Penalties included 3 suspended, 1 expelled.

2005-06:	75 cases heard; 74 guilty. Penalties included 4 suspended, 2 expelled.
2004-05:	52 cases heard; 47 guilty. Penalties included 1 suspended, none expelled
2003-04:	73 cases heard, 60 guilty. Penalties included 4 suspended, 3 expelled
2002-03:	79 cases years, 67 guilty. No data on penalties.

Academic Integrity Initiatives

Colleges report that instructors and teaching assistants now routinely include information about academic integrity in their course outlines and in class discussions. This class-by-class approach helps students to understand how integrity and ethical behaviour can be incorporated into all of their learning activities at the university.

In terms of specific initiatives, the College of Kinesiology reports that it ensures that its teaching assistants are knowledgeable about monitoring student assignments for plagiarism and academic misconduct. The College of Veterinary Medicine reports that it ensures instructors are aware of the importance of adherence to examination procedures such as invigilation, signing in and out, and monitoring of electronic devices and book bags, to protect the student; one of its departments also supplies simple calculators and rulers for students to use during examinations to ensure no personal devices are brought into exams.

The College of Graduate Studies and Research has initiated a language bursary program to improve the communication and writing skills of international graduate students. Bursaries are available to fund graduate students to take specialized English as a Second Language programs through the Language Centre. This three-year pilot project will make thirty-five bursaries available to students for the 2009-10 academic year, with 70 and 100 bursaries available in year two and year three respectively. Since 2007, all incoming graduate students have taken an on-line “Introduction to Ethics” course. As well, the college is working jointly with the Graduate Students’ Association and the International Students Office to encourage a more pro-active approach toward educating students on integrity issues. The college is also working with academic units to ensure that a statement on integrity is included in all graduate course syllabi. Many units have incorporated dialogue on integrity issues into their mandatory graduate seminar courses.

Student Judicial Processes workshops: The University Secretary offers several sessions annually of a workshop on “Student Judicial Processes at the University of Saskatchewan”. The workshop is for faculty, staff and students who are involved in university judicial processes, such as discipline and appeal hearing boards, who make decisions about student appeals, or who provide advice to students about appeals.

Academic Integrity Week: In the last week of September, the University Learning Centre organized the University’s seventh annual Academic Integrity Awareness Week (www.usask.ca/integrity/)

Standard of Conduct in non-academic matters: Last fall, the University Senate approved a new Standard for Student Conduct in non-academic matters which covers student behavior outside the classroom and sets out a procedure for handling complaints about student behavior on campus. The standard is breached when a student disrupts or threatens disruption of university activities, or harms or threatens harm to members of the university community or to university property. Eleven formal complaints were brought to the University Secretary under this standard; resolutions included behavioural contracts, and financial restitution where appropriate.

Background information about academic misconduct

The U of S takes a proactive approach in educating students about honesty and integrity so that their degrees are earned honestly and are respected by their future employers.

One of the contributing factors in students' decisions to plagiarize is poor time management – students who had not allocated enough time to work on an essay or assignment, taking what appeared to be the easy way out by cutting and pasting material from the internet. However, faculty do know their students' writing abilities through in-class assignments and exams, and can identify phrases which appear “canned” or overly sophisticated. Instead of having to search through books and articles in a library to find the source, faculty can now use simple exact-phrase Google searches to find out whether an essay or assignment has been plagiarized.

Most plagiarism cases are discovered in classes taught by the College of Arts and Science, particularly in classes such as humanities and social sciences which require submission of a significant amount of written work such as essays, reports and other assignments. Almost all of the 20,000 students at the university take classes in Arts and Science, particularly in their first and second years. About a third of the dishonesty cases in Arts and Science classes involve first-year students.

Surveys of other universities indicate that most other universities comparable to the University of Saskatchewan in size penalize about 80 to 100 students a year.

Over the last seven years, the Office of the University Secretary has embarked on a campaign, now offered in collaboration with the University Learning Centre, to educate students about honesty, and to give students and faculty access to resources to avoid plagiarism. The “Writing it Right” campaign began in the fall of 2002, with posters advertising a web address (www.usask.ca/honesty) which provides tools for faculty and students to encourage honesty. The site includes guidelines for correct citations of sources, resources for faculty in designing course assignments, and guidelines for academic conduct and on how accusations of dishonesty are handled. The website is designed to be accessed by students online, to offer immediate help as they are writing their essays and assignments.

For the last four years, the College of Graduate Studies & Research and the Associate Vice-President for Information and Communications Technology collaborated on a

PAWS channel through which students were encouraged to familiarize themselves with the university's policies on academic integrity and on computer usage.

Faculty are also encouraged to discuss academic integrity in class, and to provide information about plagiarism and cheating in class outlines. Handout sheets describing university policies are available on the Honesty website.

University penalties

The University of Saskatchewan policy on academic misconduct requires that accusations of cheating are dealt with by faculty committees at the college level. Penalties are not prescribed in the policy but are left to the discretion of the faculty committee hearing the individual case.

As the college which has dealt with the most cases of academic dishonesty, Arts and Science has articulated its rationale for penalties. Their penalty for a first offense of plagiarism or cheating is normally a zero on the assignment or exam in question, plus an additional final grade penalty of between five percent and 15 per cent. The severity of the final grade penalty is decided through committee discussion of the following factors: the year of the student; the student's understanding of the offense and of the general academic rules of the university; the student's accountability for their actions and their cooperation with the committee in the hearing; and the degree to which the instructor outlined relevant issues such as including a note in the course outline about academic honesty. The penalty is discussed with the instructor and student. If a student is found guilty of a second case of plagiarism or cheating, usually that student is suspended or expelled.

In professional colleges penalties may be severe even for a first offense due to professional certification requirements.

The College of Graduate Studies and Research has published a document on academic honesty which describes the range of penalties that will apply in cases including plagiarism and research dishonesty. The document clarifies that graduate students can be expelled for plagiarism in coursework, even for a first offense, and that plagiarism in a thesis or in research data will almost inevitably result in suspension or expulsion.

Websites:

Main site: www.usask.ca/university_secretary/honesty/

Academic Integrity Week: www.usask.ca/integrity/

Links to U of S policies and other resources:

www.usask.ca/university_secretary/honesty/resources