

## Academic Integrity Online: How to Handle Alleged Cheating and Plagiarism?



As you are reviewing & grading student assignments in your online course, you may encounter possible incidences of academic dishonesty. In this Issue of the Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, we will:

- (a) direct you to the policies for Academic Integrity at Mason (*i.e.*, the **Mason Honor Code**) and other information about **referral process** posted on **Mason's Office of Academic Integrity (OAI) website**; and
- (b) Share tips about **how to promote and support academic integrity** in your online course.

### What are Mason's Policies for Academic Integrity?

Mason's Office of Academic Integrity (OAI) provides detailed information about the Mason Honor Code, as well as resources & strategies to promote academic integrity.

- **Review** the full text of the [2020-2021 Honor Code](#)
- **Questions?** Please contact Office of Academic Integrity at [oai@gmu.edu](mailto:oai@gmu.edu)
- **Check Also with Your Department, Program, College or School:** Please also consult with your Department, Program, College or School to see if they have additional or specific guidance for how to handle academic dishonesty. There may be a departmental matrix of sanctions for academic dishonesty.

### What to Do if You Suspect a Student Has Violated the Mason Honor Code? ([Common Faculty Questions, Faculty Resource Center, OAI website](#))

- **Is it Academic Dishonesty?** Decide if the situation is an actual attempt at academic dishonesty. If you are not sure, contact [Office of Academic Integrity \(OAI\)](#) to consult with a staff member.
- **Why Refer Case to Office for Academic Integrity?** When you report the suspected violation to OAI, you are teaching students that there are consequences for integrity violations, and you show that you & the University care about integrity.
- **How to Refer to Office for Academic Integrity?** Prepare the submission packet, which includes an Academic Integrity Referral Form, a Professor Sanction Recommendation form, the syllabus for the course, and all materials relevant to the case to show that an alleged violation took place. See [Referral Submission Portal](#) for details.
- **What to Do After Referral?** If you decide to refer a student and the outcome is grade related, do not grade the assignment in question until a determination is made with regard to the alleged integrity violation.
- **Do All Incidences of Academic Dishonesty Need to be Referred?** It is expected that faculty refer students suspected of violating the Honor Code to the Office of Academic Integrity. The process is designed to protect the faculty member from false accusations of bias and to protect the student's due process rights.

## Strategies to Support Academic Integrity in Your Online Courses

Three elements are associated with likelihood of student cheating: **Opportunity, Need, and Rationalization** (“**The Cheating Trifecta**”). Understanding how these elements may impact cheating can provide you with clues for strategies for how to reduce cheating in your online courses.

- **Opportunity:** Do students have opportunity to cheat from past assignments that may be available to them (e.g., from previous students, from online study sites)? Do you refresh assignments regularly?
- **Need:** Do students lack time management skills? Do students feel overwhelmed? Do students get regular and frequent feedback? Do you scaffold major assignments to provide students feedback for each progressive stage? Do you refer students to resources to enhance their learning?
- **Rationalization:** Do students feel that you care about their learning (as instructor)? Are you present and available in your course? Students may rationalize cheating if they feel that instructors do not care about their learning, and if instructors are not present & available in the online course.

Here are some practices to support academic integrity in your online course, right from the start as well as throughout the course.

**Make Academic Integrity Clear in Your Syllabus.** Include information in your syllabus about the importance of academic integrity. See OAI's suggested general language to include in your syllabus. In the syllabus, clearly state your course policies. Make sure to inform your students of any course-specific rules for integrity that must be followed. List what materials and resources the students may use during exams and what is expected of them in assignments. Provide clear and detailed rubrics for assignments.

**Have Students Take the Pledge.** Have your students take the [Mason Honor Code pledge](#). Make sure that the pledge has meaning for students. Require students to discuss it first as part of Week 0 or Week 1 activity at the start of the online course, before you ask them to acknowledge or sign it. Have students re-affirm the pledge as part of every major graded assignment and exam.

**Break Up Large Assignments or Projects into Stages.** Use scaffolding, *i.e.*, break up assignments or projects into stages, stressing the process toward the final product. Model stages of the writing process and guide students through each step, providing them feedback along the way. This will reduce opportunity, need and rationalization to cheat and plagiarize.

**Reinforce Importance of Academic Integrity for Each Assignment.** Revisit [the Honor Code](#) and reinforce the importance of Academic Integrity for each assignment throughout the course. Provide students with the information, skills and tools that they will need to be successful for each assignment. Discuss common areas of difficulty in the assignments; include tutorials and resources to help students; and direct students to the Writing Center, Mason Libraries and other Mason resources.

## Additional Resources about Academic Integrity in Online Courses

Kelly, R. (2014). [Promoting Academic Integrity in the Online Classroom](#). Faculty Focus. Magna Publications. (Retrieved 26 Sep 2020).

Smith Budhai, S. (2020). [Fourteen Simple Strategies to Reduce Cheating on Online Examinations](#). Faculty Focus. Magna Publications (Retrieved 26 Sep 2020).

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