



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

## QUESTIONS OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

A student looked into my eyes and asked, "Would I lie to you?" Increasingly in the last several years, I have relived the same conversation when confronting a student for lying about an assignment or cheating on an exam. Invariably, I have answered, "Yes, you would." Articles about ethics in business or education appear with alarming regularity in magazines, in newspapers, and on television magazine-format programs. Cartoons make light of the issue. It would be easy to resign ourselves to the "new ethics"; but if community colleges do not address academic integrity energetically, we risk betraying our students.

When I became chairman of the new Academic Integrity Assessment Committee (AIAC) last year, I chose one faculty member from each academic division, athletics, and student services. At the first meeting, members described one incident of academic dishonesty they had heard about or witnessed personally. The events ranged from "borrowed" freshman assignments to plagiarism in doctoral dissertations. The details differed, but the central issue was always the same: a student had tried to evade doing his or her own work. Next, we related recent events of academic dishonesty at Temple College. We had had no cheating scandal; yet, we felt we needed to address the issue of academic dishonesty immediately. [We followed the guidelines in the Academic Integrity Assessment Guide from the Center for Academic Integrity and used the survey ([www.academicintegrity.org](http://www.academicintegrity.org)).]

### Why Do We Care?

The response from the AIAC was a flood of simultaneous speech:

- because the students who do not cheat deserve to be protected from those who do;
- because part of what educators do is develop ethical human beings for the workplace;
- because education is not a commodity that can be bought;

- because the value of our degrees and certificates rests on the integrity of academic experiences at TC.

We found no mention in the college mission statement of the quality of individual the college wants to develop. The current dishonesty policy was buried in an alphabetical list of student infractions under "scholastic integrity." There were few clear definitions of violations, and the consequences were explained poorly. It is no wonder few faculty felt empowered to enforce the existing policy.

### What Can We Do About It?

The survey results revealed a wide discrepancy between faculty and student perceptions of serious cheating—i.e., what events were dishonest, how serious was each. It was little consolation that our students' responses place them on the national "baseline" for community college students. In order to present the data to the college at large and create a plan of action, we organized two Strategic Conversations. [For information on this tool, visit: [www.dist.maricopa.edu/gvbd/stratcon](http://www.dist.maricopa.edu/gvbd/stratcon)]

In the first conversation, faculty and staff rated their level of comfort with the "status quo of academic integrity at TC" on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being very comfortable). The groups answered with a 2.5 average. At best, we only moderately were comfortable with our current situation. Several worried that a stronger policy could emphasize punishment over corrective measures. Are we police or educators? Is there a way to protect the innocent without sacrificing our role as educators and mentors? How do the students know what we expect? One item on the survey provided the answer: *Faculty constituted the primary source of students' information about our academic integrity or cheating policies.* If a change in the ethical atmosphere at Temple College were to happen, it would be the faculty's responsibility to effect that change.

At the second strategic conversation, students joined the discussion about specific behaviors which should be addressed in a new integrity policy. After weighing the pros and cons of an XF grade, including ways students could expunge the X, the groups reached a consensus in



strong favor of the XF. (See *Innovation Abstracts*, Volume XXIV, Number 26, "When Academic Dishonesty Happens on Your Campus.")

As a result of the survey and Strategic Conversations, the AIAC presented these recommendations:

To the President and Board of Trustees:

- include "developing an ethical human being" in the college mission statement.

To the Vice President of Educational Services:

- place a *new* Academic Integrity Policy under "academic policies" rather than under "student discipline" in the Student Handbook;
- place the new policy prominently near the beginning of the college catalog;
- establish an adjudicating council for student appeals of any and all sanctions.

To the Faculty Council:

- place emphasis on education of students in ethical standards for all academic work;
- vigorously support the new policy.

### How Will They Know?

Within the next academic year, every course syllabus will emphasize academic integrity, and instructors will educate their students in the value of honest work.

Imagine the impact on a student if, in each course during the first class meeting each term, the instructor emphasized the importance of academic honesty.

To inform the student body and *all* faculty of the new policy, the Office of Educational Services will place posters in all classrooms and on major bulletin boards of all our campuses. The posters will emphasize the college's intent to prioritize honesty and explain the new Academic Integrity Policy. The campus web master is adding this statement to the college web site: "Temple College prizes developing ethical individuals and promotes honesty in all academic and professional activities with a strong Academic Integrity Policy." The link will take viewers to a new web page for integrity issues (available beginning the 2005-2006 academic year).

Do we expect to stop cheating with 100% success? No, but we foresee a positive change, an elevation of campus integrity. In an interview with Paula Zahn, Robert Redford observed, "These days, integrity is off the table" (Paula Zahn NOW, CNN, June 2, 2005). Integrity is still "on the table" at Temple College, and we plan to keep it in prominent view.

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*September 2, 2005, Vol. XXVII, No. 16*

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*Innovation Abstracts* (ISSN 0199-106X) is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, 1 University Station, D5600, Austin, Texas 78712-0378, (512) 471-7545.  
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