

## **Responding to Academic Honesty Cases:**

### **A Guide for Course Directors and TAs**

#### **Department of Social Science**

**(November, 2024)**

This guide is intended to provide an overview of the process of responding to cases of academic misconduct in the Department of Social Science. Should you have further questions regarding this process or the Senate Policy on Academic Conduct, please contact the Chair of the Academic Honesty Committee, Jay Ramasubramanyam, ([jayram@yorku.ca](mailto:jayram@yorku.ca)), the Undergraduate Program Director, James Williams ([updsosc@yorku.ca](mailto:updsosc@yorku.ca)), or the undergraduate Students Coordinator, Jacquie Selman ([jselman@yorku.ca](mailto:jselman@yorku.ca)).

### **Introduction**

Concerns around academic misconduct have grown in recent years. The proliferation of tools such as generative AI have meant that cases have become both more common and more complicated to address. In this context, it is increasingly important that cases be reported and address through established processes and procedures. Failure to bring cases forward detracts from the value of university degrees and can create resentment on the part of students who abide by these rules. Moreover, handing these cases solely through informal channels undermines procedural fairness and leads to inequity in the sanctions meted out in these cases. All faculty in the Department of Social Science are thus encouraged to bring these cases forward. The primary objective and guiding principles of the academic honesty process in the Faculty and Department is not in the first instance to be punitive, but rather to be informative and educational and to provide students with the opportunity and means to address past breaches and to thus avoid future issues.

### **Senate Policy on Academic Conduct (2024)**

The framework for responding to cases of academic misconduct at York University is set by York University Senate which, in 2024, introduced a revised policy, the [Academic Conduct Policy](#). One of the most significant changes introduced by the new policy is that exploratory meetings, in which alleged breaches are investigated and adjudicated during a meeting with the student, are no longer required. Instead, cases may be addressed exclusively via email. The intention was to streamline procedures by allowing minor cases to proceed without the requirement of an explanatory meeting. While providing an essential guiding framework, there are aspects of the policy that are flexible and provide scope for interpretation and implementation based on the histories and objectives of different Faculties and Departments. For example, while an exploratory meeting is no longer required, academic units may encourage these meetings. Indeed, during consultations on the new policy, members of the Department of Social Science have repeatedly reaffirmed the value of the exploratory meeting. Thus, while these meetings cannot be mandated, our process will continue to emphasize these meetings as a critical aspect of responding to academic honesty cases in the Department and students will be encouraged to attend. The remainder of this guide outlines the specific steps and considerations in responding to alleged cases of academic misconduct in the Department of

Social Science. These are informed by the revised Senate Policy as well as Faculty-level guidance, adapted to the unique context of the Department.

## 1. Reporting Suspected Cases of Academic Misconduct

Course Directors have the sole responsibility for reporting cases of academic misconduct. If a suspected breach is discovered by a TA, this MUST immediately be reported (along with supporting evidence) to the Course Director. Under no circumstances should a TA discuss a suspicion of academic misconduct with a student. Regardless of whether an alleged breach is discovered by a TA or CD, it is the responsibility of the CD to review all evidence and determine if, in their view, a reportable breach has occurred. In some cases, it may be appropriate for the CD to meet informally with the student. The purpose of such a discussion would be to allow the student to respond to the CD's concern, and to help the CD to decide whether to report the case. At this point, if there is no clear evidence of academic misconduct, the CD may decide not to move forward. If there is evidence, but the breach is fairly minor or there are mitigating circumstances (e.g. inadvertent rather than intentional misconduct involving a first-year student who may still be unfamiliar with proper academic conventions around referencing, etc.), the CD may decide to give the student a warning and provide them with further education around academic norms and standards. If there is compelling evidence and it is determined that a sanction may be appropriate, the case should automatically be referred to the Department's Academic Honesty Committee. Under no circumstances should a CD assess a penalty. If a prior breach was suspected but not reported, it should not be included as part of the evidence for a subsequent, reported breach. Each instance of academic misconduct must be treated as a separate breach.

In cases which rise to the level of a reportable breach, the first step is to submit a **Suspected Breach Report** (see Suspected Breach Template) which outlines the details of the suspected breach (i.e. the course, date, time, location, nature of the suspected misconduct, the student's name and ID number, and any evidence related to the suspected academic misconduct). Please keep in mind that a copy of the report will be included in the student's academic misconduct file and could be disclosed to the student should they appear to the Faculty-level committee. This report should be submitted by email, along with any supporting documents, to the chair of the Academic Honesty Committee and Jacquie Selman ([jselman@yorku.ca](mailto:jselman@yorku.ca)). While not required, it would also be helpful for you to include a copy of the course outline and the assignment instructions.

### a. Types of Breaches

A range of breaches are stipulated in **Section 5.2** of the **Academic Conduct Policy** (see the above link) including:

- a. **Cheating:** the attempt to gain an unfair advantage in an academic evaluation.
  - ◆ **Please note:** in cases where a student is suspected of cheating during a test, collect the test and/or test book from the student, provide a new test and/or test booklet and instruct them to continue writing. Note the time on the booklet.
- b. **Plagiarism:** the appropriation of the work of another whether published, unpublished or posted electronically, attributed or anonymous, without proper acknowledgement.
- c. **Misrepresentation of personal identity or performance**

- d. **Fraudulent conduct.**
- e. **Student research misconduct.**
- f. **Violation of specific departments or course requirements.**

**b. Supporting Evidence**

It is critical that CDs provide sufficient documentary evidence to support the charge of academic misconduct. In the case of plagiarism, this will normally consist of: (1) a copy of the student's paper with the copied sections highlighted (submitted as a Word file or a PDF); and (2) the original source(s) with the copied sections highlighted (submitted as a Word file or a PDF). The ability to compare these two sets of documents is extremely helpful to the Academic Honesty Committee, and will allow them to present as clear and compelling a case as possible.

**Turnitin**

Please note that similarity reports generated by tools such as Turnitin are only a partial indicator of plagiarism. An essay that scores 40% may be absolutely fine (if everything is properly cited), while an essay with a 20% similarity rating may be problematic. Further investigation is ultimately required to contextualize the score and determine whether it is indeed indicative of plagiarism. In other cases, Turnitin may return a high similarity score based on "Internet sources" which may include notes uploaded by other students to platforms such as Course Hero. However, this may not necessarily indicate that the student in question accessed or copied these notes, but rather reflect similarity in the course content itself (which is reflected in both the notes of the students and coincidentally also the notes published to the website). Adjusting the settings on Turnitin can also help to avoid inflated similarity scores. For example, the settings may be adjusted to exclude bibliographies as well as short sentences.

Where a similarity score is indeed indicative of plagiarism, simply providing a copy of the Turnitin report is not sufficient to support a charge of academic misconduct. As noted above, the Academic Honesty Committee also requires copies of original sources (with copied sections highlighted) which can be accessed through the following steps: (1) on the "Match Overview" side bar, click on a specific match (starting with the highest % match); (2) click on the page symbols on the far right hand side of the dialog box; and (3) on the "Full Source Text" side bar, click on the link. Please note that neither Jacquie, nor the members of the committee, are able to access Turnitin reports. Thus, it is the responsibility of the Course Director to undertake these steps and provide the required evidence.

**Generative AI**

As noted above, the use of generative AI is a growing concern. These cases can be challenging to address from an academic honesty perspective. While a number of detection tools are available, these tools have a range of limitations (e.g. reliability; accuracy; reliance on outdated data sets; and bias and discrimination – most detectors are built using limited datasets that do not sufficiently represent diverse populations), and suffer from high rates of false positives. As a result, they may not be used as evidence of academic misconduct. However, cases may be brought forward based on other indicators and evidence of generative AI use including phantom citations that do not correspond to the actual source and which are not relevant to the assignment in question. These types of cases may proceed based on a direct allegation of

generative AI use under Section 5.2(a)(i) of the Senate policy. Where evidence of generative AI use is less robust or convincing, cases may still proceed on other grounds. For example, using fictional or invalid sources would qualify as “plagiarism” under Section 5.2(b) of the Senate policy. Ultimately, even where there is evidence sufficient for a case to proceed under Section 5.2(a)(i), it is recommended that the plagiarism charge also be included. If it is determined that there is insufficient evidence to proceed on the former, the case may still proceed under the latter. In suspected cases of generative AI, students may also be asked to provide notes, early drafts, or copies (rather than simply a bibliography) of all sources used in their assignment. It is also critical that, if the use of generative AI is prohibited in a course, this is explicitly stated in the course syllabus.

### **c. Dealing with Students Accused of Academic Misconduct**

While cases of alleged academic misconduct are being adjudicated, students are expected to continue to attend class and complete scheduled assignments. CDs may continue to engage with these students and may meet with them to review standards of academic conduct and to provide advice and guidance on subsequent coursework.

## **2. Reviewing Reported Cases of Academic Misconduct**

In each case reported by a CD, the Chair of Academic Honesty, in consultation with Jacquie and, if necessary, other members of the Academic Honesty Committee, will review the evidence provided and make a determination as to whether the case should proceed (e.g. are there reasonable grounds to proceed?). The decision to proceed, or not, should be made within 10 business days of receiving the initial report from the CD. If, at this point, the decision is to proceed, a block will be placed on the student’s account (this appears on their record as a PDG), which prevents them from dropping the course. Using the **Notice of Investigation Template**, the Academic Honesty Chair will then inform the student (via email and normally within **5 business days** of the PDG being coded) that a suspected breach has occurred. This will include the specific section of the Senate Policy that was breached (e.g. 5.2.a. cheating v. consulting an unauthorized source in the completion of an assessment such as a test, quiz or exam) and provide a summary of the evidence.

### **Examples of the Summary of Evidence**

**Example #1**, “An unauthorized note containing material/information relevant to the test was found on your desk at the two-hour mark of the final exam on December 19, 2024.”

**Example #2**, “Evidence of unauthorized and unreferenced use of ChatGPT in your assignment was noted by the CD. Passages in your assignment deviate from what was asked of students and are very close to answers generated by ChatGPT for the assignment questions. These passages reference sources and concepts which were not covered in the course readings, or in class, which the assignment instructions asked students to base their answer on. Some of your referenced sources do not appear to exist or be valid.”

The student will then have **10 business days** to respond (the Senate Policy does allow for extensions beyond this timeline where appropriate) and either: **(1) request a meeting (i.e. exploratory meeting) to discuss the allegation**; or **(2) provide a written email response and share their point of view and any relevant evidence**. While the email encourages students to attend the meeting, under the new policy they cannot be required or compelled to do so. The purpose of the written statement (or response) is to provide a one-time response to the

allegation of academic misconduct. Should the student engage in continued conversation or requests over email, a meeting should be set up. If a student opts to submit a written response to the allegation of academic misconduct, this will be included as part of the Academic Misconduct Investigation and saved to the student's case file. If the student does not provide a response in 10 days, the investigation closes, and a decision will be made based on the current evidence. This decision, and supporting documentation, is reported to the Dean's Office using the [LA&PS Academic Misconduct Case Submission Form](#). The Dean's Office then provides the decision letter to the student.

Please note that, at no time, should supporting evidence be sent to the student. The only time that students can see the evidence is during the exploratory meeting or if their case is referred to the LA&PS Faculty Appeals Committee (FAC/Panel) and a Panel Hearing is set. If students would like to review the evidence in their case, they should request a meeting.

### **3. Exploratory Meeting**

If a student requests or consents to a meeting, the meeting should be booked within 1-2 weeks of their response (see the **Invitation to Student Meeting Template**). The student, the Chair (or member) of the Academic Honesty Committee, and Jacquie will be present for all exploratory meetings. The Course Director will also be invited. As the initiator of the file, and the person most familiar with the course requirements and circumstances of the breach, the CD provides a valuable perspective on these cases and thus should be encouraged to attend. They may also provide a recommendation on the sanction. However, it is the responsibility of the committee to ensure that penalties are consistent across similar cases and reflect the Academic Conduct Policy. Thus, the role of the CD is to provide context and supporting information, rather than to *advocate* for the case or a particular sanction. Should Course Directors decline to participate, or if they are not able to be present during the meeting, the meeting will proceed without them. The student also has the right to invite a "support person." In some cases, it may be appropriate or necessary to include a translator. During the meeting, Jacquie will take notes using the **LA&PS Meeting Minutes Template**. If the student fails to attend the meeting, it will proceed in their absence. The objective of the exploratory meeting is not to be punitive, disciplinary, or to induce a show of remorse, but rather than to inform and education students and ultimately to avoid future breaches.

Following the exploratory meeting, the Chair will determine the outcome of the proceeding. This could include the dismissal of the case or, if the breach is confirmed, the appropriate sanction. This decision is then reported to the Dean's Office using the [LA&PS Academic Misconduct Case Submission Form](#), and the Dean's Office then sends the formal decision letter to the student, the CD, the UPD, and the UPA. At this point, the PDG is removed.

### **4. Sanctions**

Whether a case has been handled via email or an exploratory meeting, a variety of sanctions are available as per **Section 5.6** of the Senate Policy. These include: (i) written warnings or reprimands; (ii) educational development; (iii) resubmission of the piece of academic work in which the violation was committed, for evaluation with or without a grade sanction; (iv) completion of a make-up assignment or other form of assessment; (v) a lowered or failed grade, including a grade of zero, on the assignment in question. There are also a series of more serious sanctions – (vi) to (xvi) – ranging from a lowered grade in the course through to suspension, expulsion, and the rescission of degrees. Sanctions should take into account all of the circumstances of the case, including but not limited to: (1) the relative weight of the

assignment in question; (2) student's academic experience; (3) severity of the conduct; (4) whether the student accepted responsibility for the conduct; and (5) the extent to which the integrity of the student evaluation process was impaired.

## **5. Right of Appeal**

Students have the right to appeal the decision made at the Department level (including both whether a breach occurred and the sanction). Once the student receives the decision email from the Dean's Office, if they disagree with any aspect of the decision, they have 10 business days to submit a notice of appeal to the Faculty Appeals Committee. If students have questions about how to appeal a decision or what their rights and responsibilities are under the Academic Conduct Policy, please connect them with an LA&PS Academic Honesty Coordinator at [lapshonesty@yorku.ca](mailto:lapshonesty@yorku.ca).

## **6. Subsequent and Serious Breaches**

Every case should be treated as a first breach. It is the responsibility of the Faculty-level committee to check for past breaches and, if a past breach is found, to apply the appropriate enhanced penalty.

Once a breach has been determined, if it is believed that the case is egregious and the evidence may warrant a serious sanction (e.g. suspension or expulsion), the case must be referred directly to the Faculty-level committee which will assume carriage of the case.

## **7. Record of Breaches**

The Senate Policy stipulates that a record of each finding of academic misconduct will be maintained by the student's home Faculty. As per the Policy, "The purpose of this record is to allow access to information on previous offence(s) and to aid in determining sanctions in the event a new case is opened. This record of offence(s) shall not be used for any other purpose." Sanctions noted in Section 5.6 (a) (i) to (v) inclusive (which are limited to individual assignments and/or tests), will remain on the student's record for five years or until the student graduates, whichever is less. In contrast, sanctions noted in Section 5.6 (a) (vi) to (xv) inclusive (which range from a lowered grade in the course to more serious sanctions), will remain on the internal record permanently. According to the Policy, "disclosure of a student's record of academic misconduct will only be disclosed by the [RO] on direction of a Faculty Dean; such direction by a Dean will be based on the advice of University Counsel."

## **8. Preventing Cases of Academic Misconduct**

There are various ways that Course Directors may help to prevent or deter cases of academic misconduct:

- ◆ Ensure that the Senate Policy is referenced (e.g. with a link) in all course syllabi and that course policies relating to academic honesty are clearly outlined (e.g. prohibition around the use of generative AI).
- ◆ Discuss the Senate Policy at the outset of each course and ensure that students have a good understanding of the policy and what qualifies as a breach. This is especially critical with respect to generative AI. CDs need to be very clear with students regarding their expectations around the use of Gen AI – i.e. what is permitted and what is not. CDs may

have differing expectations which can cause confusion. Expand on assignment instructions and spend time reviewing these with students. Is Gen AI acceptable for any aspect of the assignment? How? If its use is permitted, show students how to be transparent about its use (e.g. refer to library's page on citing AI).

- ◆ Make completion (e.g. score of 80%-100%) of the [SPARK Academic Honesty module](#) on eClass a course requirement.
- ◆ Change the type or structure of assignments on a regular basis as well as test and exam questions. This is especially critical in courses where students have posted their assignments, essays, and even tests online.
- ◆ Change the nature of assignments to minimize the opportunity for unapproved AI use (e.g. in-person exams; in-class assignments).
- ◆ Have students complete short, in-class written assignments which will provide an indication of the student's writing skills and tendencies and which may then be compared with work submitted later in the course.
- ◆ Include an assignment where students are asked to use generative AI and then discuss the issues and limitations with the output that is produced.

## 9. **Resources**

A range of resources are available to assist Course Directors:

Academic Integrity for Faculty: <https://www.yorku.ca/laps/faculty-council/committees/teaching-learning-student-success/academic-integrity-for-faculty/>

Course Outline Template and Policies: <https://www.yorku.ca/laps/faculty-staff/instructor-resources/teaching/>