Best Practices related to Academic Integrity

This listing of "best practices" was assembled by a special *Task Force on Academic Integrity* in Fall 2006 with input solicited from the entire NJIT community. The task force was created by the Committee on Academic Affairs (CAA) in response to a growing concern on many parts that misconduct and poor practices were becoming widespread. The task force was charged with coming up with ideas to address this issue. This compendium of best practices is the result, and includes in the first section recommendations on how it should be used. The membership of the task force included: Atam Dhawan (Chairperson, Electrical and Computer Engineering, and representing CAA), Jack Gentul (Dean of Students), Ronald Kane (Dean of Graduate Studies), Dana Knox (Associate Provost for Undergraduate Programs), Michael Pallotta (President, NJIT Student Senate), Ala Saadeghvaziri (Civil and Environmental Engineering and Chairperson, Faculty Council), Leroy Thomas (Associate Dean of Students), and Caitlin Weaver (President, NJIT Graduate Student Association).

The NJIT administration is fully committed to the due implementation of the academic integrity and honesty policies, and to the provision of full support to faculty, students and staff in their implementation. The confidentiality of of those reporting violations will be protected to the fullest extent possible.

The best practices are organized into four broad categories:

1) General procedures (individual / department / college / university)
2) Cheating (on examinations)
3) Plagiarism
4) Fabrication

General Procedures

1) Review measures (including this document) to help prevent cheating and plagiarism at department meetings, in detail, on a regular basis (especially the first meeting of the semester). Include education of faculty about innovative uses of modern technology in cheating and plagiarism.

2) All cases of academic misconduct must be referred to the Dean of Students – it may not be the first (or last) time.

3) Publicize, to the extent permissible, specific and general results of hearings of the Honor Commission (similar to how crime statistics are reported).

4) Include references to academic integrity and the academic integrity website (including this document) in all syllabi.

5) Classes, or at least exams, should be scheduled into rooms of sufficient size and of appropriate type. The location of scheduled final exams should be made available to departments early enough for corrective actions to be taken if the room size or type is not appropriate. Faculty should have a role in determining what constitutes appropriate locations for their exams.

6) Academic advising of all students – starting especially from the freshman year – should include frank discussions of issues related to cheating and plagiarism.

7) Counseling should be available for students concerned about cheating and plagiarism issues, and for students feeling stress related to their studies.

8) Professional societies and honor societies should include sessions on academic integrity and professional ethics issues.

9) Hold open forums on cheating and plagiarism issues. Encourage attendance by junior faculty (include participation in their teaching portfolio). Require attendance by students who have had past problems related to these issues.

10) Development of courses on professional ethics and research integrity should be encouraged, and available courses should be promoted to students.

Cheating
The Faculty Handbook defines cheating as "deceiving or attempting to deceive by misrepresenting that one has learned information pertinent to an academic exercise. Cheating on exams can be either planned (cheat sheets, coded messages …) or opportunistic (happens only because opportunity presents itself).

1) Examinations (and exam questions) from previous semesters should not be reused.

2) Exam questions should be completely new each time – not just old questions with new numbers.

3) Exams should be altered in a manner that is unpredictable for the students so that returning students do not have an unfair advantage.

4) Exams should, to the extent possible, have different but equivalent questions for each student.

5) Order of exam questions should be varied for adjacent examinees.

6) Instructor should take time to arrange chairs properly at least 10 minutes before the scheduled start of the exam (especially to prevent opportunistic cheating).

7) Walk around the class in random patterns.

8) Proctors should not be focused on doing anything other than proctoring.

9) Students should be informed before the exam begins that they may not leave the room during the exam, except for emergency situations. If the instructor or proctor judges that there is an emergency and permits the student to leave the exam room, then the exam paper and any other materials should be left in the exam room. If possible, another instructor or proctor should escort / assist the student.

10) Calculator use must be monitored closely. Only non-communicating calculators should be allowed, and perhaps only specified models (as is done by SAT).

11) No technology of any kind should be allowed – no cell phones, I-pods, PC's, etc. – or visible during exam unless required for the exam and identified by the instructor in advance.

12) No books or notebooks allowed or visible during exam (if closed-book).

13) No extra clothing laying about (cheat sheets can be hidden in caps, for instance).

14) Take-home exams should not necessarily be presumed to represent individual work. Follow-up presentations or conversations can be used to verify the individual's familiarity with the work submitted.

15) At end of an exam, be prepared to walk out if exams are not turned in.

16) Instructors should, in advance, take the exam themselves in order to check for any possible errors in the exam statements and to check the likely time required for most students to complete the exam. Errors or undue length result in an unfair exam and create stress on the students that can cause them to resort to cheating.

17) If an error is found in an exam after the start of the exam time, it should be announced that the question will be discarded. If this results in unfair treatment for individual students, they should be given appropriate consideration in grading.

Plagiarism

The Faculty Handbook defines plagiarism as "using or attempting to use written, oral or graphic work which was authored or prepared by another and submitting it as one's own". Examples can include paying someone else to do the work for you, using someone's paper or project from a previous semester, and improper or missing citations.

1) Use Turnitin.com to check for plagiarism.

2) Be especially suspicious of dramatic improvements in writing ability or sudden changes in style or performance.

3) Instructors should familiarize themselves with websites and other sources that offer to write papers or do their assignments for students. If instructors are known to be aware of this, their use will decrease.

4) Limit the allowed references to ones that can be verified, and they must be elaborated upon by the student if so requested.

5) If homework expected to be done individually, state so clearly and enforce rule when unlikely duplicate errors found.

6) If homework expected to be done by groups, allow group submission. (In which case, use random call-ups for explaining homework solutions.)

7) Students should be instructed to cite their own earlier work, if appropriate.

Fabrication

The Faculty Handbook defines fabrication as "using or attempting to use invented or false information in an academic exercise". Examples would be the creation of fake data or calculations or any other outcome.

1) Require lab notebooks and sign / collect duplicate pages.

2) Spot-check calculations in project reports.

The University community is encouraged to suggest improvements to this document by sending them to provost@njit.edu. Further information regarding academic integrity may be found at http://integrity.njit.edu .