

Promoting Academic Integrity at USC

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Executive Summary

The charge given to CTAP for AY 2015-16 was to consider ways to improve the culture of academic integrity at USC by way of revisiting and extending the work of the Committee from AY 2013-2014. After careful review, discussion, and synthesis of the information gathered, the committee affirmed the charge given to us that there is a need to enhance the culture of academic integrity within the University. The resulting recommendations of this committee fall within two broad categories: improving enforcement of existing policies and promotion of a culture of academic integrity.

The recommendation for improving enforcement of existing standards of academic integrity is in response to a generally held view that the current system of judicial review through SJACS takes too long and lacks transparency and efficiency, resulting in undue stress for students, faculty, and academic units involved. We recommend developing a federalist system that would *allow* for distribution some of the workload and authority to individual academic units while maintaining important roles for the university's central administration. Academic units wishing to do so would be allowed to develop their own in-house systems of judicial review to localize and expedite the process, particularly in the preliminary stages of adjudication. All cases would be reported to SJACS which would remain the central repository of information on all academic integrity cases, guarantee consistency across the university, and would adjudicate the most severe infractions. While the option of an in-house system may not be practical or desirable for many units, it may be preferred for larger schools that process a high volume of cases, as well as for units that wish to tailor standards to meet the specific requirements of an academic discipline or a profession.

A limited review of academic integrity practices at peer institutions revealed that Harvard, Yale, NYU, and Northwestern, have a decentralized model whereas Stanford has a centralized structure (see Appendix B). To ensure *consistency of policy across units*, to coordinate between the central and local system, and to maximize the benefits of both a centralized and decentralized model, we outline a set of guidelines (see Appendix A) to facilitate this process.

The second set of recommendations fall within the overarching goal of promoting a culture of academic integrity through a variety of coordinated efforts, including the following actions:

- (1) Convey and reiterate the importance of academic integrity
- (2) Develop and/or identify educational resources to promote academic integrity

- (3) Implement multiple layers of education around academic integrity for faculty and students
- (4) Identify effective pedagogy as a primary deterrent to academic dishonesty
- (5) Develop a mechanism for implementing these recommendations

Introduction and Background of the Charge

Promoting academic integrity begins with a recognition and reiteration of its foundational importance to a culture of learning. It also involves recognizing the increasing complexities of defining and enforcing policies in a rapidly shifting landscape of broader social, cultural, technological, and global forces that shape and reshape the boundaries and contexts in which learning/teaching takes place. In light of the increasing diversity of students as well as learning/teaching contexts, the traditional approach of viewing academic dishonesty as primarily a matter of factors endemic to the individual, such as personality and morality, is overly simplistic and no longer tenable. James Lang, in his book *Cheating Lessons*, argues for such a shift from such *dispositional factors* to *contextual factors* that influence cheating (Lang, 2013, p. 16). Key features of the modern university that complicate traditional notions and approaches to academic integrity are noted in the AY13-14 report (chaired by Andrew Lakoff):

- (1) *The proliferation of digital devices and social media platforms that change the experience of the classroom and pose the question of where authoritative knowledge is “located.”*
- (2) *The extension of the classroom setting outside of the physical space of the classroom through distance learning innovations.*
- (3) *A diverse set of sub-cultures among our student body, in which there may be disparate understandings of what academic integrity means and how serious its violation is.*
- (4) *An increasing emphasis in our teaching on teamwork and collaboration; but at the same time, a continued expectation that student examinations and assignments will demonstrate individual achievement.*

We began our work with a review of the existing resources and judicial review process at USC that included conversations with Ainsley Carry, Vice-President for Student Affairs, Donna Budar-Turner, Director of SJACS, and Carolyn Gardner, Information Literacy and Educational Technology Librarian. In addition, a member of our committee, Sofia Gruskin, met with Jim Ball from the Office of the General Counsel as well as Roopali Malhotra in Ainsley Carry’s office to seek clarity on the principles that guide “due process” in such cases at the university level. In addition, a subset of this committee conducted a limited review of academic integrity practices at peer institutions, which provides an informative comparative perspective (see Appendix B). The resulting synthetic work of this committee is set forth in the following recommendations:

- **Implement a dual system of judicial review and allow units to develop their own in-house review process.**
- **Implement various strategies to enhance the culture of academic integrity within the University.**

The first set of recommendations stem from assessments made by multiple sources indicating a need for greater efficiency and transparency in the judicial review process. Of equal if not greater importance is the need to go beyond a review of existing efforts of enforcement to provide concrete suggestions for improving the culture of academic integrity at USC. These recommendations are detailed in the following sections.

Improving Current System of Judicial Review

Limitations of the current SJACS system

A significant concern regarding the current system of judicial review is that the process is seen as “cumbersome and inefficient,” according to Ainsley Carry whose office oversees SJACS. Complicating this is the perception of SJACS as a “bureaucratic black hole,” stemming from lack of transparency and communication regarding the process and outcome. Even fairly minor violations can take 3-4 months or more to resolve, leaving students, faculty, and departments in limbo. The length of the review process and ensuing uncertainty contributes to undue stress and burden, exacerbating an already difficult and charged process. For example, when scheduling classes for the following semester, the student may not know if a course needs to be retaken or whether they have satisfied the prerequisites. Concerns regarding the length of the review process are of even greater significance to those awaiting the outcome of the review on their probationary status or ability to graduate on time, if at all. In cases involving challenges to the initial ruling, the matter may stretch out longer, even a year or more, leaving both the student and faculty in a state of uncertainty and anxiety, as was the case for one faculty member who challenged the initial ruling on a case that she reported to SJACS. Furthermore, the standard recommended sanction of “F” for all convicted cases of academic integrity violations may be seen as unreasonable and inflexible. In some cases, the “F” is certainly warranted, but in other lesser cases an “F” may be disproportional to the offense. This has been identified as a deterrent for some faculty in filing an SJACS report at all.

According to Donna Budar-Turner, Director of SJACS, the length of time it currently takes to adjudicate reported cases of academic dishonesty are due to, a) the SJACS office being understaffed, b) the desire to ensure due process and due diligence, and c) a developmental focus on the “whole person” wherein, in addition to the specific violation, the underlying motivational issues are addressed so that students can learn from their mistakes. The committee recognizes the structural constraints on the existing system and affirms the underlying values of the current approach. These factors notwithstanding, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the current system needs to be reconsidered and improved. The upcoming Academic Program Review of SJACS might provide deeper insights and specific recommendations for improvement. Although the most obvious solution may appear to be to increase staffing to alleviate the workload, an alternate solution, which our committee recommends, is to allow individual academic units to develop their own in-house review process that is *complementary* to the centralized support provided by SJACS.

Benefits and rationale for a dual system of judicial review

Allowing individual schools to develop their own judicial review process is likely to yield the following benefits:

- (1) Expedition of the review process due to closer proximity and ease of communication with and among affected parties

- (2) Allowance for more holistic consideration of the student and better consideration of the contextual factors of a particular case
- (3) Levying of more nuanced sanctions appropriate to the level of offence, and allowance for mediation where such is warranted
- (4) Better monitoring and support of remediation plans and educational interventions
- (5) Development of a code of student conduct and standards for academic integrity that are more closely aligned with particular professional standards while adhering to university-wide norms and guidelines
- (6) Reduction of the workload for SJACS

The dual system that we recommend would *make it possible* for schools to create their own internal system of review. While it may not be practical or compelling for smaller schools (such as Gerontology) to develop their own in-house process, some of the larger schools already have one in place (Leventhal Accounting in Marshall Business) or are in the process of pursuing such an option (Viterbi Engineering). Regardless of the size of the school or volume of reported cases, some schools, particularly graduate and professional schools, may also welcome the opportunity to develop a system that is more aligned with their own professional standards. Academic units with their own judicial review systems would always be free to refer a case to SJACS if, for example, a student from another unit was involved or the case raised issues more complex or offenses more egregious than the unit was prepared to handle. A canvassing of peer institutions revealed that many of them already practice this decentralized model (see Appendix B).

Admittedly, there are potential risks and drawbacks of a decentralized system, the primary one being lack of consistency of process and sanctions across schools. However, we believe it is possible to maintain a strong role for the university's central administration and preserve the benefits of a centralized record-keeping system to identify repeat-offenders while distributing some of the work of enforcing academic integrity standards to individual academic units. Clearly, for schools that decide to adopt their own system of judicial review, there would have to be guidelines that define the relationship between the unit and the central system, akin to a dual "state" and "federal" system. In **Appendix A**, we articulate a set of guidelines for schools to follow in developing their own internal review process that we believe will maximize the benefits of a dual system while minimizing the risks.

Recommendations for Enhancing the Culture of Academic Integrity at USC

Promoting a culture of academic integrity goes beyond improving the mechanisms of policing and enforcement. It is a complex issue that requires consideration of the larger cultural and societal contexts in which learning takes place, as well as the constantly shifting landscape of technology. The following recommendations address a variety of ways to enhance the culture of academic integrity at USC.

Place greater emphasis on academic integrity

Promoting a culture of academic integrity involves symbolic as well as substantive changes in the way we talk about and engage this issue, from the highest level to the grass-roots level of how it is messaged in the syllabus. As President Nikias has already done in at least one of his welcome addresses to students of the class of 2020, the importance of academic integrity needs

to be stated and restated, and integrated into the very fabric of the intellectual life on campus. Another method of conveying the importance of this issue to the faculty in particular is for the Provost to make this the theme of the annual Provost-Academic Senate Retreat. At the curricular level, including academic integrity as an explicit criteria and domain of evaluation in the Academic Program Reviews would highlight its importance at the most practical level.

Develop/identify additional educational resources

There is a need to devote resources to identify and/or develop centralized educational resources around academic integrity. In our conversation with Carolyn Gardner, Information Literacy and Educational Technology Librarian, we learned that currently there are only three tutorials available in-house to educate students around what constitutes plagiarism, academic dishonesty, and appropriate use of sources. While these resources are a good start, clearly more such educational tools are needed, whether developed in house or utilized via existing external sources.

Implement multiple layers of education about academic integrity for faculty and students

Both students and faculty need repeated exposure to education around issues of academic integrity. For students, exposure to this topic needs to extend beyond an initial introduction in an orientation with reference to a 178-paged *SCampus* document that is now entirely online. There needs to be follow-up and repeated exposure in greater depth and nuance as a mandatory component of courses that, for example, fulfill the writing requirement. Making the three existing modules mentioned above mandatory for all incoming students would be a good start in ensuring a basic level of awareness. Similarly, all new faculty, whether full-time or part-time, should be required to complete an online educational module similar to that of the CITI training for human subjects review for faculty supervising research. Whether online or administered through CET, the training should provide an overview of policies, procedures, and resources around academic integrity.

Identify effective pedagogy as a primary deterrent to academic dishonesty

At the center of the shift from dispositional factors endemic to the individual to contextual factors argued by Lang (2013) is pedagogy. He states, “the amount of cheating that takes place in an educational situation may very well *depend on the structures of the learning environment*” (p. 36). Features already known to promote cheating include, focus on extrinsic rewards and performance orientation over internal rewards and mastery orientation, and high stakes testing, where significant outcomes rest on a single assessment. Building on what is already known, academic units should be encouraged to form their own communities of learning, for faculty to come together to identify and share instructional design strategies that deter cheating and promote a culture of integrity in their respective disciplines. Additionally, CET could organize workshops around such topics as how to personalize assignments to reduce the risk of plagiarism.

Develop a comprehensive system for implementing recommendations

Given that the scope of work of CTAP is to gather information and make recommendations to the Faculty Senate and the Provost’s office, the final recommendation of this committee is to suggest that a working committee be formed to implement these recommendations as approved by both bodies. In order to sustain the effort expended by now two sets of CTAP committees, it

seems necessary to identify a mechanism for implementation. A multi-year approach is suggested with a series of workshops hosted by CET, showcasing best practices in areas such as educational resources and effective pedagogy. This committee could also be a resource and consultant to units wishing to develop their own in-house system of judicial review. In the longer term, USC should capitalize on the opportunity to emerge as a leader in navigating the complexities and challenges of defining, enforcing, and promoting a culture of academic integrity by hosting a conference to highlight its own successes as well as best practices at other institutions. Our inquiries regarding the judicial review process at peer institutions elicited a reciprocal curiosity of our own practices as well as expressed desire on their part for better models to emulate. It seems opportune to capture this moment. Efforts should be directed toward seeking external funding to support and highlight this important work, akin to the Hewlett Foundation support of *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity* project and monograph published by Clemson University, as well as our own Mellon grant that supported the Mellon Mentoring Forum at USC.

Appendix A: Components of and Guidelines for Developing an In-house Judicial Review Policy
For units that chose to develop an in-house judicial review process to parallel that of SJACS, we suggest the following guidelines and features *to ensure consistency across units*:

A. Policy and procedure

Clearly articulate policy and procedures for a judicial review process that delineates the following:

1. An internal reporting mechanism that is easy for faculty to use.
2. Specific steps of the review and appeal process that is timely and expeditious.
3. Means to identify, select, and train the personnel that will conduct reviews.
4. Means of assuring that FERPA guidelines are followed.
5. A threshold for varying levels of offense and concomitant sanctions, with particular attention to articulating the level at which a case is to be referred to SJACS (e.g. if dismissal/expulsion from the University is warranted).
6. Regular term meetings should be scheduled between SJACS and the academic unit to ensure communication, consistency, and calibration of in-house process with that of the central system.
7. For professional schools with an ethical code of conduct specific to the field, this should be reflected in the standards and guidelines.
8. A designated person within the unit to serve as the identified “Academic Integrity Officer” to oversee policies and procedures as well as serving as a consultant for faculty who are uncertain about filing a report.
9. Clear conveyance of the rationale and basis for rulings to students and faculty members, ensuring transparency of process, steps, timeline, and outcome of the review.
10. A policy to prevent a student who is in the midst of an academic integrity violation review from being able to withdraw from the affected class.
11. Mechanism for faculty to challenge a negative course evaluation by a student involved in a reported case of academic integrity.

B. Education

Provide education and training of faculty, staff, and students around issues of academic integrity and review process for violations.

1. Faculty: Provide training for all continuing faculty, and make it mandatory for all new faculty, whether full- or part-time. Training should include use of Blackboard and *Turnitin* feature for relevant courses.
2. Staff: Training for relevant staff to be knowledgeable of resources and process to provide support and guidance to faculty and students to ensure due process.
3. Students: Not to rely solely on freshman orientation or the *SCampus*, which is now online, but to provide “just in time” delivery of relevant aspects of academic integrity (e.g. ahead of a major research paper) as well as periodic refreshers on what constitutes as academic dishonesty.
4. Sub-groups: For specific sub-groups such as international students and those in the Greek system, consider specialized training that takes into account contextual and cultural factors that are specific to that group.

C. Reporting and coordination with SJACS

1. Create a system of record keeping to be instituted within each unit to track prevalence, patterns, and trends in cases of academic dishonesty
2. In recognition of the importance and benefits of having a central clearinghouse and database, particularly to identify repeat offenders, *all cases* of academic dishonesty should be reported to SJACS.
3. *To facilitate communication between the individual units and SJACS, the University should create an efficient database and reporting system.*

D. Identify and develop discipline-specific resources

1. In addition to general resources through SJACS, the library, or CET, individual units are encouraged to identify or develop their own discipline-specific resources to promote academic integrity.
2. Particular emphasis should be placed on identifying good pedagogical practices that take into account particular contexts of the discipline.

E. Legal principles and guidelines for ensuring due process

1. Minimize the potential for discrimination or harassment in how the process is conducted as well as perceived, and what is done with the results.
2. Treat everyone consistently and fairly regardless of demographic category.
3. Prioritize privacy rights of students and faculty and any witnesses as a priority, particularly in relation to, but not limited to medical and mental health issues.
4. Recognize importance of due process as not simply conceptual but as contractual in nature concerning our relationship with students. Due process must be obvious and apparent to all affected parties.

Appendix B: Report on Academic Integrity Practices at External Institutions

Contributing Members: Sofia Gruskin and Michael Thom

Summary

We canvassed academic integrity policies and procedures at Harvard, Yale, New York University, Occidental, Stanford, Northwestern, Emory, and Michigan State University. In particular, we sought information on the type of instruction provided to students and faculty regarding institutional policies on academic integrity, background on university versus school-specific jurisdiction, and the process for reporting violations and handling appeals. Preliminary findings are summarized below.

Student Instruction

Institution-wide academic integrity training is cursory at best and is usually passive in delivery. Harvard, Yale, NYU, and Northwestern delegate this task to individual schools and programs. Occidental and Michigan State address plagiarism and cheating during orientation sessions for incoming students, but do so in a fairly rudimentary manner. Emory offers instruction at orientation sessions and requires incoming students to complete a quiz based on the school's honor code; scores above 80% on the quiz are deemed passing. Faculty teaching first-year seminars at Occidental are supposed to inform students of the school's policies, but little is known about compliance. Stanford's six-day new student orientation activities do not have a specific session on academic integrity, but students are given a handout with general information at a welcome session. Interestingly, it does not appear that parent orientation sessions at these institutions – which have grown in popularity in recent years – include discussion of academic integrity.

Faculty Instruction

The institutions we surveyed provide little to no concrete faculty training regarding academic integrity procedures. Exceptions were Occidental, which offers training to first-year seminar faculty, and Michigan State, which offer faculty-specific guidance on using Turnitin software. Emory shares tips on how to prevent cheating. Stanford offers a "Course Design Institute" for new faculty that appears to emphasize pedagogy more broadly. Northwestern offers little, if any, faculty support; searching for "plagiarism" on the university's policy website returns zero results.

Jurisdiction

A majority of the institutions we surveyed have decentralized jurisdiction. Harvard, Yale, NYU, Emory, and Northwestern have wide-ranging, university-wide integrity principles that are supposed to be refined at the school and/or departmental level. Northwestern has a school-specific contact person for academic integrity policy, typically an academic advisor or student affairs professional. Michigan State largely empowers individual faculty to make determinations about acceptable and unacceptable student conduct. In contrast, Stanford renders enforcement a university-level issue.

Process for Reporting Alleged Violations

Most of the universities we examined rely on paper-based, non-electronic mechanisms to document and report alleged academic integrity violations. Northwestern appears to be the least

formal in this regard, with each school or department setting its own reporting procedures. For instance, Northwestern's Weinberg School of Arts and Sciences directs faculty to report suspected academic integrity violations to the school's dean via e-mail or telephone. At Emory, allegations are e-mailed to the Dean of Students and then followed up via telephone or in-person meetings.

Two institutions utilize electronic reporting. Michigan State implemented a web-based "Academic Dishonesty Report" in 2009. This form is only available to instructional staff after logging in to the university's "Instructor Systems" portal. Stanford has more recently moved to a web-based reporting process for violations of the university's honor code. The link is prominently featured on *communitystandards.stanford.edu*. Note that Stanford's student-centric honor code empowers peer reporting for violations – i.e., one student can report another for plagiarism.

Appeals

All institutions appear to handle appeals similar to existing USC policy.