



TATP TIPSHEET

Academic Integrity and the Role of the TA

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I have to report all academic offences?

YES. It is your responsibility to determine whether or not there is sufficient evidence for a case to go forward. If a Course Instructor or their Teaching Assistant suspects that an offence has occurred it is the responsibility of the Course Instructor to look into the matter by conducting an initial interview with the student.

Can a faculty member ask his/her teaching assistant to resolve academic offences?

NO. TAs do not have authority to make any decisions regarding the work in question. If a TA suspects plagiarism or other academic offences it is their responsibility to inform the professor/course supervisor before returning any work to the student. The TA should refer the student to the professor if he/she has any questions.

Can a faculty member ask his/her teaching assistant to investigate a case?

YES, provided hours are allocated within the TA contract to perform these duties. These duties might include confirming evidence of plagiarism or writing a report about behaviour witnessed at a test or exam. The Course Instructor may also ask their TA to assist with the interview with the student, for example by taking notes during the meeting.

Who is responsible for imposing sanctions on students who have committed academic offences?

TAs and Course Instructors are not empowered to impose sanctions when an assignment is worth more than 10% of the final mark. If, after the meeting with the student, the Course Instructor feels that an offence has occurred, they are required to report it to their Chair or Dean.

What if a student asks me not to report an offence?

Do not enter into bargaining. It is normal for students to be stressed when they realize they have been reported for an offence. Tell the student that you are simply following protocol. Do not make any guesses as to what the sanction will be. Advise the student to make an appointment with their registrar, who can advise them about the process.

As a Course Instructor, if you suspect an academic offence has taken place, follow these steps:

Step 1: Establish a time to meet with the student.

Step 2: Conduct an interview with the student in person and in private. You may invite someone else to be present, such as a TA, another faculty member, or the Department Chair.

Step 3: Explain your concerns to the student. Determine whether or not you believe an academic offence has occurred.

Step 4: If yes, provide a brief written summary of your finding and report the matter to your Department Chair/Dean.

Step 5: Depending on the value of the work, and whether or not the student has admitted to an offence, the matter may be forwarded to the Dean's Office for resolution. You may be called upon to attend a decanal meeting and explain your findings.

HANDLING ACADEMIC OFFENCES: SOME TIPS

- Do not grade the assignment.
- Do not return the assignment in question to the student.
- Do not impose any sanctions on the student or indicate that you will be doing so.
- Do not advise the student to withdraw from the course.
- Avoid using derogatory statements and words such as 'cheating' or 'plagiarism'.
- Retain any evidence you find (Google searches, copies of articles or textbook or web pages).

ENCOURAGING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: HELPING TO DETER PLAGIARISM

- Take some time to discuss academic integrity in class and why academic offences are serious. Do not assume that students know how to recognize plagiarism in their own work. Ask your students to define important terms such as plagiarism, collaboration, paraphrase, and summarize.
- Where possible, discuss research and writing techniques with your students. Provide documentation that will assist them with writing papers (proper citation methods), such as the advice pages found on www.utoronto.ca/writing (e.g. Citation Methods, How Not to Plagiarize, and Paraphrase and Summary).
- As a Course Instructor, integrate the writing centre and/or the library into your course.
 - Provide information about courses/services offered
 - Distribute handouts to students
 - Invite writing centre/library staff into your class
 - Design a library-based assignment
- To deter test and exam cheating, create two versions of the test paper by scrambling the order of questions. Distribute the two versions on alternate desks in a "checkerboard" fashion.
- See <http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching/academicintegrity/turnitin.htm> for information on how to use www.turnitin.com as a detection tool.
- Consider careful assignment design.
 - Avoid using the same essay topics and/or test and exam questions each year.

- Design assignments that require more original input from your students
- Assign outlines, drafts, and/or annotated bibliographies.
- Return assignments to students in a secure manner (e.g. do not leave them outside your office door or on a shelf in a public office).
- See UofT’s Academic Code on the Governing Council web site at:
www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.html

DETECTING PLAGIARISM

- A common form of plagiarism manifests as incomplete paraphrasing or “tracing”, where a passage is copied from another source and a handful of words have been changed to synonyms but the structure and majority of text from the original passage remains intact.
- Plagiarism also occurs when a student obtains an assignment from a friend and attempts to rewrite or “edit” the paper to reduce the amount of exact text matches. This is often detected by turnitin.com, or when similarities become evident during grading.
- While more difficult to detect, purchased papers are often identified by the presence of:
 - Elevated language and quality of writing compared with student’s previous work
 - Topic/sources are dated or do not reflect assignment
- While grading, look for any of the following signals:
 - Changes in quality and level of writing within the paper
 - Strange syntax, e.g. an abundance of fragmented sentences and frequent typos
 - Strange structure, such as lack of formal introduction or conclusion, or repetitive paragraphs
 - Abrupt changes in font, style, and formatting
 - A feeling that some of the text is familiar to you
 - Mixed citation methods (e.g. parenthetical citations and footnotes in same paper)

Useful Resources

UofT Academic Integrity site

www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity

Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters

www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm

Writing at the University of Toronto

www.writing.utoronto.ca/home

Academic Skills Centre (UTM)

www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/

Teaching & Learning Services (UTSC)

ctl.utsc.utoronto.ca/home/

Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation

www.teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching/academicintegrity.htm

Turnitin.com
www.turnitin.com

Center for Academic Integrity
www.academicintegrity.org/

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For more TA teaching resources, go to <http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/training/ta-toolkit.htm>