

The Ethics of Academic Integrity Loyola University English Department Working Document

Academic integrity is a part of our ethical stance in life. Our conduct in an academic setting at AUC can foster an atmosphere of truthfulness and trust; or foster doubt and suspicion, and a desire for success at any cost, even personal integrity. The AUC Code of Academic Ethics reminds members of AUC of their commitment not only to their own personal integrity, but to that of the entire AUC community and their countries and the world. The implications of that commitment are:

Personal ethics

We learn early in life that ethical people tell the truth and keep promises, and that lying, cheating or stealing are dishonorable. We know, however, that everyone can be tempted, and that the fear of failure and the prospect of comfort or future success can lead us to betray principles of truth, honesty and integrity. We also know that social pressures, pleasures, or personal problems can compromise our values. Thoughtless acts can cost us our integrity.

Codes and promises cannot change who we are, but adherence to them can help to ensure every decision we make is one that upholds those values. Conscience and character are shaped and maintained by decisions and actions. Clear commitments regularly reaffirmed keep the need for ethical behavior present in our minds. Honesty, integrity and truth are not just values, they are decisions that we make and must continue to make despite temptation and the lure of the "easy way out."

Social responsibility

The Code of Academic and Professional Ethics emphasizes that students, faculty, administrators and staff are citizens at AUC, and that civic responsibility here, as anywhere, means going

beyond a purely personal concern for ethical behavior. The commitment to ethical conduct at AUC is not just an individual matter but a social contract; a consensus in support of academic honesty is the minimum requirement for accomplishing the aims we share.

So the Code of Academic Ethics requires opposing what we know is wrong. This may mean, for example, speaking out against plagiarized papers or prohibited cooperation, or advising an instructor not to reuse an earlier year's exam, or advising a colleague not to take advantage of the university's resources for personal use. It surely means considering dishonesty openly, talking about it with others, informally or in class.

Awareness

There are instructors unaware of cheating in their classes, and there are courses so oversubscribed and understaffed that adequate evaluation is difficult and the resultant temptation to cheat is high. It could be that university policies, procedures and services are not applied consistently by certain administrative officers. Better information about such incidents will help faculty, deans, students and administrative officers reduce the opportunities for dishonesty, and will identify patterns that urgently require corrective action.

The community as a whole needs to be more alert to whatever problems exist. If members of the AUC community tell the appropriate person responsible when cheating or a policy infringement is occurring, then all of us can know how widespread the problems are and whether they are getting worse or better. This knowledge is essential if we are serious about trying to achieve a more honest community.

Directness

The Code of Academic and Professional Ethics charges members of the AUC community to rely on their conscience to

communicate directly with anyone they have strong reason to believe has acted dishonestly. This is the most demanding requirement of the Code; yet it also holds the greatest promise of promoting academic integrity across the whole university.

What one should say to dishonest friends, classmates or colleagues is not prescribed by the Code. When improper conduct is identified in this way, violators will know that they have been observed and that to continue will result in serious repercussions -- knowledge that, by itself, could effect immediate constructive change.

The requirement to confront others about their acts of dishonesty may trigger violators to re-evaluate their decisions. Not every person will feel comfortable with confronting a fellow member of AUC, be s/he a student, faculty, administrator or staff, about academic and professional misconduct; but consider that corporations, government agencies, and small businesses all depend on the willingness of their people to recognize and take a stand against all breaches in ethical conduct. Employees who do not confront wrongdoing within their organizations tacitly condone behavior that could ultimately compromise their own positions and security.

Choice

The Code of Academic and Professional Ethics emphasizes the choice that witnesses to violations always face -- whether to inform the appropriate authorities. To weigh that choice means to think about the costs of dishonesty both to individuals and to the morale of the community. It means, as well, to think about individuals who lie, cheat, or steal, and whether facing disciplinary action might help them come to terms with what they are doing.

There are never good reasons for ignoring dishonest acts and the harm they do to an educational institution. Communicating directly to those who act dishonorably will sometimes be sufficient. But there will be times when conscience requires you to do more.

(The preceding section on "The Ethics of Academic Integrity " has been adapted with the permission of Duke University, May 2003)