

Academic settings provide their members the opportunity to engage in learning, personal growth, and the pursuit of knowledge. As a result, these communities prioritize the principles of fairness, honesty, and integrity because they help create a culture that fosters trust and respect.

When students, teachers, and staff trust one another it creates a positive learning environment for everyone which extends to the credibility of our University and adds value to the degrees we confer.

The University defines cheating as using or attempting to use materials that are prohibited or inappropriate on exams, papers, assignments, and other assessments.

Cheating, in any form, is a violation of our trust in one another and hinders our growth as a community. It can also have negative implications for the individual (by creating knowledge gaps in their understanding of the material) and their peers (who lose an equal opportunity to demonstrate their understanding).

Let's look at the following cases presented to the Office of Student Academic Affairs to get a better understanding of what constitutes cheating:

Example #1

A Film, Television, and Media (FTVM) course held its final exam on a Friday from 10-12PM. The exam was taken in-person and students were required to login to the course Canvas site on their computers in order to complete it.

While reviewing the exams on Canvas, the instructor noticed that a student's activity log showed two startling things. First, the student had begun accessing the course materials on the canvas site prior to the end of the exam which was not open book/note. Second, the student remained active and continued working on the exam well after it was scheduled to end, submitting their answers at 1:01PM. In their recollection of events, the instructor remembered the student leaving before the exam ended. Based on the evidence collected, the instructor reported their concerns to the Office of Student Academic Affairs.

In their meeting with the Coordinator of Academic Integrity, the student indicated that they had been struggling to keep up with the material in the course. Although they tried to prepare to the best of their ability, they struggled with the course content and ultimately decided to quit halfway through the exam. Instead of logging out of Canvas, they simply closed their computer and went home.

When they opened their computer shortly afterwards, they noticed the exam was still active. Rather than report it to their instructor, they attempted to complete it using the course materials available to them on Canvas. Ultimately the student accepted responsibility for cheating and apologized.

What could the student have done differently?

1. **Communicate!** The student could have reached out to the instructor earlier in the semester, prior to the exam, or perhaps even during the exam to indicate that they were struggling with the concepts. In those moments, the instructor could have provided guidance, further clarification, or even offered additional resources to the student.
2. **Be Proactive:** In this instance, the student indicated that they were struggling with course material throughout the semester. Attending Office hours, consulting with their peers, working with a tutor, or visiting another support service would have helped them better understand the material early on so that they were not struggling at the end of the semester.

Example #2

As part of an English course, students are required to submit a weekly blog discussion post in order to better understand the readings and share their perspectives on them. Although the instructor would prefer them to be submitted each week students have the option to submit them all on the last day of class if they'd prefer. These allowances are made to ensure that students have the opportunity to feel comfortable in their writing and hopefully have to deal with less stress about deadlines if a life event occurs during a given week.

At the end of the semester a student submits seven discussion posts prior to the deadline. As the instructor begins to review the student's work, they notice something very strange. In the first post, the student discusses how the main character is impacted by their cruel stepmother, a villainous judge, and their kind but distant neighbor. In the second post, the student discusses how the heroine is able to save the day by winning a stunning victory against her peer in a game of chess.

While these descriptions are certainly interesting, there's just one problem. None of these descriptions of characters or plot points actually happened in the readings that were discussed in class.

Looking into the matter further, the instructor believes that the student used generative artificial intelligence (AI) to write their responses. After submitting several of the prompts to one of these tools, the instructor's suspicions are confirmed when they notice nearly identical responses are produced by the AI. As a result, they submit the evidence they've compiled to the Office of Student Academic Affairs.

In their meeting with the Coordinator of Academic Integrity, the student indicated that they had several finals ranging from exams to papers, in addition to the discussion posts they'd neglected to complete. In hopes of balancing this workload and getting some things off their plate, they relied on AI to write their discussion posts so that they could focus on larger assignments. They understood their error and accepted responsibility for their actions.

What could the student have done differently?

1. **Practiced Better Time Management:** The student could have created a schedule to ensure that small assignments had time allocated for them each week throughout the semester. This would help mitigate the amount of work that built up at the end of the term and ensure that they had more time to focus on their larger assignments.
2. **Communicate!** If the student had reached out to the instructor to discuss their anxiety towards the end of the term, things might have ended differently. The instructor was sympathetic to students who were stressed about deadlines for assignments and may have been willing to discuss an extension until their other assignments were completed.
3. **Recognizing Generative AI is not fool-proof.** Although useful in brainstorming ideas and thinking about the writing process as a whole, it is not infallible. In this instance the program the student utilized produced completely inaccurate information, which the student assumed was fact and submitted for a grade.