

Task Force on Integrity and Responsibility: White Paper on Academic Integrity at Hofstra University

Spring, 2010

With an eye toward fulfilling Hofstra's mission to cultivate a sense of "social and ethical responsibility,"¹ the Task Force on Integrity and Responsibility proposes that Hofstra undertake a campus-wide conversation about academic honesty.

Why a conversation about academic honesty?

Changing cultural sensibilities and technological innovations have created a situation where incidents of academic dishonesty proliferate. This occurs in high schools, colleges, and universities across the United States and abroad.²

Since this affects *all* colleges and universities, institutions can distinguish themselves only in the ways they respond to the challenge. Many adopt uncontroversial policy statements that condemn cheating but do little to address it directly. Some couple such policy statements with the implementation of technological tools and other strategies designed to catch and punish would be cheaters. But studies have shown that such techniques do little by themselves to change cheating behaviors and often promote more innovative forms of dishonesty.³

After considerable discussion, the task force concludes that an essential part of a truly effective response to this culture-wide problem is a sustained, comprehensive and fully public discussion that acknowledges its seriousness and that engages all community members (students, faculty, and administrators) in seeking creative solutions.

What has Hofstra's response been to date?

Hofstra aspires to be one of the top institutions of higher education in the United States. On the issue of academic honesty, however, we have yet to attempt anything

¹ Hofstra Mission Statement, http://www.hofstra.edu/About/about_mission.html.

² McCabe, D. L. (1993). Faculty responses to academic dishonesty: The influence of student honor codes. *Research in Higher Education*, 34, 647-658;

McCabe, D.L., Trevino, L.K., & Butterfield, K.D. (2001). Cheating in academic institutions: A decade of research. *Ethics & Behavior*, 11, 219-233.

³ Scanlon, Patrick M., Student Online Plagiarism: How Do We Respond? *College Teaching* © 2003 [Heldref Publications](#).

like the kind of comprehensive response which the task force considers necessary and which other institutions have undertaken.⁴

Hofstra has clear policies condemning all forms of academic dishonesty.⁵ In addition, there already exists faculty developed and approved procedures and forms for adjudicating charges of academic dishonesty.⁶ Largely missing, however, is public discussion of the problem or any sense that confronting it involves everyone in our community.

Many faculty include policy statements about academic honesty in their syllabi and bring the topic up during the semester's opening weeks. But we don't know how many do so or how effective such efforts are. The Provost addresses the topic in a formal presentation to first year students during welcome week. But the impact of an introductory presentation is limited unless reinforced in other ways throughout a student's academic career.

The most extensive attention to the topic can be found in the Pride Principles⁷ promulgated and promoted by the Office of Student Life. Unfortunately, the Pride Principles are still little known among faculty and almost never a basis for a conversation about academic honesty beyond their initial introduction.

In light of the above, it is fair to conclude that Hofstra's efforts to implement policies combating academic dishonesty are ad hoc and uneven. With no regular public discussion or sustained attempt to come to common agreement there are at times, wide variations in how violations are handled.

What is our goal?

Our goal is both simple and ambitious. We aim for Hofstra to become an institution known for its commitment to academic integrity. We will have succeeded in this goal when students, faculty, administrators and the public associate Hofstra with such a reputation. Such a change will lead, we believe, to a measurable reduction in the incidents of academic dishonesty that occur at Hofstra and along the way bring us closer to fulfilling our mission to cultivate social and ethical responsibility among community members.

⁴ McCabe, D.L. "It Takes a Village: Academic Dishonesty and Educational Opportunity," AAC&U website, taken May 13, 2010, <http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-sufa05/le-sufa05feature2.cfm>

⁵ Hofstra University Pride Principles, http://www.hofstra.edu/StudentAffairs/DeanOfStudents/commstandards/commstandards_prideprinciples.html

⁶ Hofstra University Faculty Policy Series 11 and 11A http://www.hofstra.edu/Faculty/senate/senate_fps.html

⁷ Hofstra University Pride Principles, http://www.hofstra.edu/StudentAffairs/DeanOfStudents/commstandards/commstandards_prideprinciples.html

Since there will always be some who fail to live up to our best hopes and highest ideals, eliminating all incidents of academic dishonesty is not possible and should not be our goal. For this reason, rather than relying solely on developing new ways to prevent individuals from cheating (though such tools have a role), our focus ought to be on channeling and reinforcing the commitment to academic honesty already present in the vast majority of Hofstra students, faculty and administrators. By enlisting them in an ongoing public discussion of the issue we can build a multi-faceted and sustained approach that will reshape Hofstra's reputation and effectively minimize the number of violations that occur.

What strategies are we considering?

Ideas taken up by the task force for consideration include:

Clarifying the Situation at Hofstra

Comprehensive studies have shown that the level and extent of academic dishonesty at institutions across the United States is very high. The Task Force sees no reason to believe that Hofstra is different in any significant way from schools like us that have good policies but minimal programs for promoting academic integrity. Still, there are good reasons for us to develop a more fine grained understanding of the attitudes, practices, and expectations of students, faculty and administrators here at Hofstra. To that end, we are recommending the implementation of a nationally normed survey instrument, or the development of a home grown tool designed to provide a snapshot of our starting point as well as laying down a baseline against which to measure progress. Helpful along these lines would be outreach to some of the national organizations associated with this topic including the Center for Academic Integrity and the American Association of Colleges and Universities.

Academic Integrity Reports

Reporting anonymous information regularly about the disposition of charges of academic dishonesty including penalties assessed (when appropriate) could do much to shine a spotlight on Hofstra's commitment to academic integrity. Reports could take a variety of forms including annual summaries of incidents and their resolution, and/or more frequent reports akin to public safety briefs which describe violations and the penalties imposed while retaining anonymity.

Public Discussion of Educational Responses to Academic Integrity Violations

Hofstra has taken the position that we have a responsibility to educate students about the importance of academic integrity. Yet, we have no *publicly* endorsed menu of alternative educational strategies for responding to violations. Individual faculty either develop their own strategies or are forced to rely upon purely punitive responses and hope that they result in future deterrence for the perpetrator and other students. Other institutions have made good use of things like temporary notations on academic transcripts and "boot camp-like" punishments that make our commitment to academic honesty clear but that also provide a student with a path

toward renewal and reconciliation with the community. These are ideas that the Task Force thinks should be pursued vigorously.

Faculty Workshops/Training/Support in handling incidents of Academic Dishonesty

Faculty receive little in the way of direct support, counseling or training in how to handle cases of academic dishonesty when they arise. If we expect faculty to be more active in this area we must do more than outline the policies in FPS 11. The Task Force thinks that lack of attention to this aspect of faculty development has led to significant underreporting of incidents by faculty who are not all convinced the effort is worth the cost pedagogically (in terms of actually affecting behavior) and professionally (in terms of time and energy taken away from other responsibilities). This is a critical issue since failure to pursue and/or report incidents leads directly to a general sense among students and other community members that Hofstra doesn't take this topic as seriously as it should. More extensive training and a broader menu of supportive resources would give faculty greater confidence when handling such incidents and should lead to an increase in the number reported.

Student Workshops/Training/Resources in how to avoid incidents of Academic Dishonesty

Despite significant attention to the topic of academic integrity, there remains a great deal of confusion among students regarding what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty. While many individual instructors make an effort to raise student awareness on this topic, their instructions would be more effective if they were supplemented and reinforced by a more comprehensive message that students have received elsewhere. Examples of such programs include required first-year workshops on academic honesty, interactive instructional programs and web-based informational sources.

Academic Integrity Marketing Program

Policies, workshops, and programs can only do so much when it comes to raising the visibility of an important issue. The task force is convinced that such efforts should be complemented with an extensive and extended public relations effort designed to highlight the broad commitment of Hofstra students, faculty, and administrators in support of academic honesty. Potential tools used by other institutions include flash screen reminders, posters, short home-grown videos, and guerilla theater events. All of this ought to be seen as an effort to supplement and reinforce a consistent message about what academic honesty entails, and the extent to which this community is committed to it.

Faculty/Student Honor Board

Many institutions have used such a board to provide support for faculty and students, and to raise confidence that the system for handling violations is consistent and fair. The Task Force thinks this is something Hofstra might consider.

Hofstra University Honor Code

Institutions that have tackled this issue in the comprehensive way we suggest frequently adopt some form of honor code. Honor Codes communicate to each new member of a community the level of commitment you assume when you agree to attend or work there. Honor codes also can serve to remind community members regularly of an institution's dedication to academic integrity. We note that the Pride Principle concerning integrity, a first person commitment to academic honesty, is a possible starting point for Hofstra's honors code.

Hofstra Academic Integrity Resource Site

The task force has discussed the creation of a Hofstra designed web-based resource that aggregates educational information about academic integrity as well as strategies for handling incidents of academic dishonesty that would be useful for both student and faculty use.

Revising Admissions and Recruitment Strategies to Emphasize Academic Integrity

If our goal is for Hofstra to be known as an institution committed to academic integrity, the Task Force is convinced the recruitment and admissions process are central. Our hope is that this commitment will be highlighted in publicity and marketing materials. It should become one of the talking points that are raised by counselors and student pride guides when talking with prospective students about why they might want to choose Hofstra. Such changes in the way we talk to prospective students will net us an entering class that is already primed to respond positively to the programs and activities we put in place.

Regular Review of Policies and Strategies

Once the policies, strategies and programs outlined in this document are in place it is important that there be a regular mechanism for their review and updating. We've learned from experience that simply having a reasonable policy like FPS 11 "on the books" is not enough. The Task Force recommends, therefore, that there be a plan in place for the regular review and revision of all policies, strategies and programs related to academic integrity.

Conclusion

These are ideas which have been discussed in preliminary ways by members of the task force. We present them to the Hofstra community not as polished recommendations but rather as topics for public discussion. Over the next several months we will be soliciting such discussion and asking for input as we refine our thinking and develop specific proposals. To facilitate such conversation Task Force, volunteers are willing to attend departmental meetings where faculty can talk through and respond to some of the suggestions made here. Similarly, Task Force members are willing to meet with the Student Government Association as well as other student organizations to discuss their perspectives on some of the proposals listed above. Additionally, we will work with the University Senate, the Provost and the President's office to schedule public hearings where many of the issues outlined here can be considered.

Only by engaging the entire community, and building a comprehensive set of strategies can we make Hofstra's commitment to academic integrity clear and publicly known. Ultimately, the creativity and the shared values of the vast majority of Hofstra students, faculty and administrators are the most important tools we have for combating academic dishonesty.

By appointing this task force, Provost Berliner has demonstrated that the leadership at Hofstra is committed to taking academic integrity seriously. We are proud to be members of such a community and invite everyone to join us in the pursuit of these goals.

Task Force Co-chairs:

Barbara Bohannon, Associate Provost for Accreditation and Assessment
Warren Frisina, Dean, Honors College
Sandra Johnson, Vice President for Student Affairs
Susan Martin, Director, Center for Teaching and Scholarly Excellence,
Professor of Legal Studies in Business

([Link to Full Membership List](#))