What To Do in a Case of Plagiarism in a First-Year Composition Course: A Step-by-Step Guide

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1. You suspect academic dishonesty.

2. You may choose to meet with student(s) involved to investigate and determine if an instance of academic dishonesty did occur. (You may also choose not to meet with the student(s) or the student(s) may not be available due to semester breaks. In either of these cases, proceed to step 3.)

3. Once you confirm that plagiarism has occurred, contact the Director of Composition, the Associate Director of Composition, or the Assistant Director of Composition about the case. (This step is strongly encouraged but not mandatory; instructors who are unsure about a case of plagiarism or about appropriate penalties are encouraged to contact any of the Composition Office staff—either by email or during office hours—to discuss the case.)

4. To preserve the student’s right to appeal, you must send a letter to Judicial Affairs anytime you impose a penalty for plagiarism. Draft a letter to the student using the “Sample Plagiarism Letter” template (available on either the English Department Blackboard site or the “Resources for Composition Teachers” web page--http://web.utk.edu/~english/academics/f_teachers.shtml.

This letter notifies the student in writing of the allegation of plagiarism and details the instance of plagiarism, the specific professorial penalty to be imposed, and the student’s route of appeal. We ask instructors to use the Sample Plagiarism Letter template as a framework from which to draft their own letter to insure that all necessary information is included.

You will need the student’s student identification number and home address (you can obtain address information in 311 McClung Tower). The letter must be printed on departmental letterhead; if you wish, the Composition Office administrative assistant can print that for you if you send it electronically to [her].

5. Submit the finished letter with your signature, a copy of the student paper, and a copy of all accompanying documentation to support the plagiarism charge, to the Director of Composition for review. Once the letter is reviewed, the Director of Composition will give it to the department head for a signature.

The Composition Office will mail a hard copy of the original letter to the student, as well as copies to the following campus offices: the Office of the Dean of Students, the Director of Composition, and the dean of the academic
unit in which the student is enrolled.

6. The Composition Office will notify you via email when this letter is sent. At this juncture, Student Judicial Services strongly encourages all instructors to also send **an email copy** of the letter to the student at his/her university email address. Once you email a digital copy of the letter to the student, your responsibility in filing the plagiarism case is finished; however, please keep all documentation in case the student appeals the charge.

7. Upon receipt of the letter, the student may choose to appeal the professorial penalty according the process outlined in *Hilltopics* under the heading “Appeal of Professorial Penalty.” The student’s appeal may be resolved at the department level in consultation with the instructor and/or department head. If not resolved at the department level, the student may request that his/her appeal be heard in an Academic Review Board Hearing. If the appeal is heard by an Academic Review Board, the determinations of the board will be made according to the procedures outlined in *Hilltopics* under the heading, “Decision and Right of Appeal.” Additional appeal options may be pursued by the student after this point if the student so chooses. (See *Hilltopics*, Appeal of Academic Review Board Decision.)

**Steps followed by Student Judicial Affairs (FYI):**

1. Upon receipt of an allegation of academic dishonesty from an instructor, the accused student is contacted and one of two tracks are followed:

   a. If the instructor does not recommend any additional action be taken against the student (i.e., only a professorial penalty is being imposed), no judicial record is created for the student. A file of the incident is maintained however in the event that future incidents occur involving the same student. The student is given the opportunity to meet with a member of the Judicial Affairs staff if he/she has questions about the appeal process.

   b. If the instructor recommends that Judicial Affairs should take additional action and impose a behavioral sanction in addition to the professorial penalty, the student is instructed to meet with a member of our staff to respond to the charge of academic dishonesty. In this instance, a judicial record is created for the student.

2. If the student chooses to appeal the professorial penalty and/or the behavioral sanction to an Academic Review Board, a Judicial Advisor from the Office of Student Judicial Affairs will inform the instructor of the appeal. The Judicial Advisor will likely request to meet with the instructor and may request documentation or other information to assist in preparing for the hearing.
Instructors should save documents, correspondence, and notes related to the allegation.

3. The Academic Review Board Hearing will occur as soon as is practically possible and will, in almost all cases, require the participation of the instructor along with additional witnesses or individuals who may have knowledge of the situation.

4. If the student chooses not to appeal the professorial penalty and/or the behavioral sanction, the case will be closed. When a professorial penalty is assigned and/or accepted by a student, all other university academic policies continue to apply regarding re-taking of the course, etc.