

Academic Misconduct: What is it?



“Academic misconduct is an act by a student, or by students working on a team project, which may result in a **false evaluation** of the student(s), or which represents a deliberate attempt to **unfairly gain an academic advantage.**”

- 2006-2007 WLU Undergraduate calendar, p. 110 (emphasis added).

Some obvious examples of misconduct are presenting the work or ideas of others as one’s own, copying answers from classmates during exams, misrepresenting the reasons for deferring an exam, and turning in papers that were wholly or partly authored by others. It is each **student’s responsibility** to become familiar with what constitutes academic misconduct.

Some forms of academic misconduct may surprise you, such as:

- Self-plagiarism, for example submitting the same piece of work for credit in more than one course without permission.
- Helping others engage in academic misconduct.
- Unauthorized collaboration.

The following sources should be used to gain more information about why academic integrity is a fundamental part of university life, what is considered academic misconduct, and how to avoid it:

- Your professor
- Your teaching assistant
- The WLU Undergraduate Calendar:
 - www.wlu.ca/calendars/section.php?cal=1&s=95&sp=342&ss=327&y=12
- The WLU Writing Centre (www.wlu.ca/writing):
 - www.wlu.ca/writing/handouts/cite.pdf
 - [www.wlu.ca/forms/745/How_to_Use_Source_and_Avoid_Plagiarism_\(APA\).pdf](http://www.wlu.ca/forms/745/How_to_Use_Source_and_Avoid_Plagiarism_(APA).pdf)
 - [www.wlu.ca/forms/746/How_to_Use_Source_and_Avoid_Plagiarism_\(MLA\).pdf](http://www.wlu.ca/forms/746/How_to_Use_Source_and_Avoid_Plagiarism_(MLA).pdf)
- WLU Library: library.wlu.ca/erm/reference/display.cfm?navbar=wlu&categoryID=15
- Orientation sessions

Student Comments about Academic Integrity

- “It is a relief to know that plagiarism will not be tolerated at university.”
- “This [session] is a useful wake-up call to all elements of cheating.”
- “There was a lot that I didn’t know was academic misconduct.”
- “No one can plead ignorance, and a level playing field is in place.”
- “Good to know it [academic misconduct] is taken seriously.”
- “[This session] shocked us into reality.”
- “Cheating in university is far more serious [than in high school] and penalties are far more severe.”
- “It’s best to hear it from a student, because we realize what a temptation cheating can be, but that we can overcome it.”

Source: Open-ended feedback from participants in WLU Orientation sessions, September 2004.

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Why Should Students Care About Academic Misconduct?

First, academic misconduct is **unethical** in several ways:

- It causes **significant harm** to:
 - the *university*, by harming its reputation, inhibiting fundraising, and creating challenges in recruiting outstanding students and faculty;
 - the *cheater's classmates*, by denying them the opportunity to excel, devaluing their degree, creating whistle-blower dilemmas, and lowering employer interest in WLU's graduates;
 - *alumni*, by devaluing their achievement; and,
 - *faculty*, by creating distrust and harming faculty-student relationships.
- Plagiarism violates intellectual property **rights**, and denies others the **right** to equal access to the benefits of honest work.
- There is **injustice** because cheater's classmates face an **unfair**, uneven playing field in terms of admission to further educational programs, scholarships, co-op programs, job interviews, etc.

Second, you are **harming yourself** in several ways:

- you don't learn and don't develop needed academic skills;
- you sacrifice your honour and integrity;
- getting caught can be a traumatic, embarrassing and stressful experience, which consumes your time and energy and lowers your self-esteem;
- you lose the respect of your classmates and could potentially be ostracized and stigmatized;
- professors will hesitate to write a positive letter of reference for jobs, scholarships, graduate school;
- your job and career path will suffer.

Third, you should care because if you are caught, the **punishment can be severe**, including:

- suspension or expulsion from your program (either indirectly because of grade reduction from minor misconduct, or directly as a result of severe misconduct);
- cancellation or revocation of your degree;
- inclusion of an academic misconduct notation on your transcript.

Sources:

- "Stopping Plagiarism" www.uregina.ca/arts/plag/studwhycare.htm;
- Ellis, David (2003) Becoming a Master Student, Canadian Third Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 173;
- "Code of Conduct (Academic) johnmolson.concordia.ca/ugrad/codeofconduct.pdf

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