



An Instructor's Guide to Preventing, Confronting, and Reporting PLAGIARISM

Introduction

Academic honesty is taken very seriously at UC Davis. The *Code of Academic Conduct* emphasizes that students, faculty, and administration all share responsibility for maintaining a fair and honest academic environment. UC Davis has a strong tradition of upholding the student honor code and reporting suspected violations to Student Judicial Affairs (SJA). Faculty and students both express confidence in the fairness of the SJA process, which resolves more cases through informal meetings with students than through formal hearings and which emphasizes education in the discipline process. SJA holds students accountable for violations, but gives them the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

To encourage prevention and consistent handling of suspected academic dishonesty by instructors, the following information provides an overview of university policy, as well as advice from experienced instructors.

Prevention

In keeping with UCD's Principles of Community and the mission of the university, we believe that preventing academic dishonesty through education is preferable to establishing elaborate strategies to catch cheaters. This section contains suggestions for establishing and reinforcing a class culture that will encourage responsible scholarship and discourage academic dishonesty.

Establish a class culture that values academic honesty.

In the syllabus

- Inform students that Academic Senate policy requires instructors to report any suspected plagiarism to SJA.
- Attach copies of SJA handouts on plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration.
- Distinguish clearly, using examples, between authorized and unauthorized collaboration both in and out of class.
- Explicitly state your rules regarding use and citation of Internet sources. Roughly half of all new plagiarism cases involve the Internet.

On the first day of class

- Review university policy on plagiarism and inform students of the academic standards of integrity to which they will be held.
- Explain that plagiarism often results from desperation and request that students contact you if they feel desperate, rather than do something they'll regret.
- Briefly describe a specific case of plagiarism that you have found in student work to drive the message home.

Repeatedly throughout the quarter

- Teach and periodically review with students how to paraphrase and to quote from a source. Provide them with excerpts from, or direct them to, the current edition of a handbook such as the MLA or APA handbook.
- Hold rough draft workshops to encourage students to treat writing as a process.
- Assign a text that uses direct quotation, paraphrase, and summary. Demonstrate appropriate techniques of citing sources for each method.

- Discuss differences in perception of individual ownership of ideas and explain how citation conventions vary in different situations, for example, in feature journalism or standard business documents or reports. Explain why academic institutions value original writing so highly and insist on crediting authors for their research, ideas, and words.
- Distinguish clearly between authorized and unauthorized collaboration. For instance, students may comment on each other's work during peer review workshops, but may not correct errors or revise for their peers, unless specifically instructed to do so. Generally, only the student author should provide specific wording, fix grammatical errors, edit, or revise.
- Direct struggling students to the Learning Skills Center, located in Dutton Hall, for an appointment with a peer tutor or a Writing Specialist.

Construct assignments to reduce plagiarism.

- Rotate assignments from quarter to quarter so that students can't plagiarize from recent quarters.
- Require that students get your approval for topics and email you thesis statements in advance of rough draft workshops. Don't allow students to change topics without permission.
- Break assignments up into staged tasks. For example, ask students to summarize a key source for the assignment, to compare two sources, to synthesize or critically evaluate several sources, and/or to write a proposal or prospectus for a long assignment.
- Require drafts before the final, graded assignment is due.
- Require that students attach to their paper copies of all sources used.
- If students are using Internet sources, check their lists of citations before accepting the papers to ensure they give complete website information.
- Require academic citations and reference lists in pieces of writing that would not normally include them, e.g., a newspaper article or a business report, along with any references to sources typical for that format.
- Make assignments distinctive in format or topic. For example:
 - Have the students apply a specific theory, approach, or theme discussed in their readings or in class to a personal experience or to another piece of writing.
 - Center the assignment on some event or date that is personally relevant to the students.
 - Require that students use only materials selected by you, e.g., essays in an anthology, specific primary sources, or particular data sets.
 - Base the assignment on personal reporting. Students could do interviews, observe cultural events, or participate in activities.

Investigation and Referral to SJA

Despite all of your efforts to create a culture of honesty in your class, you will inevitably encounter cases of suspected plagiarism. Try not to take this personally, as an insult or affront.

Common red flags signaling that the work may not be the student's own include: failure to address the paper topic; a last-minute topic switch; failure to turn in required drafts; sudden improvements in sophistication of grammar, syntax, diction, organization, or ideas; and uneven quality of writing, particularly uneven grammar, poor transitions, or shifts in the quality of coherence.

When you suspect that misconduct has occurred, you should take the following steps: 1) **confer** with an SJA staff member if you are unsure how to proceed; 2) **gather** information regarding the case, and finally if you still suspect academic misconduct, 3) **refer** the case to SJA. Keep

the original paper and return an ungraded and preferably unmarked copy of the paper to the student with a note asking the student to see you (if you are comfortable with such a meeting), or informing him/her that the matter is being referred to SJA.

1) Confer If you have any questions or simply need support, please feel free to call SJA. Consulting with instructors is an important part of what we do.

2) Gather Information.

- Interview the student. We recommend interviewing the student in person, but this is not required,. If you feel unsafe interviewing the student alone, you can do it in the presence of a TA or refer the case without interviewing the student.
- Express concern about the paper and the student's use of sources. Give the student an opportunity to respond. Alternatively, you may simply tell the student you have concerns and have referred the matter to Student Judicial Affairs.
 - If the student asks about the nature of your concerns, state them in a descriptive, non-accusatory tone, e.g., "The use of language seems uneven," or "It seems that you may have used some sources that are not properly cited."
 - You might ask the student directly whether or not she or he used any unacknowledged sources or received any assistance in writing the paper. Ask the student to provide copies of the sources the student claims he or she used to write the paper. You may also query the student about the content or any specialized language, to see if the student seems knowledgeable about the subject.
 - Tell the student that you are required by university policy to refer a paper to SJA whenever there are concerns about suspected plagiarism.
 - If the student admits misconduct, you are still required to refer the case to SJA.

Note: You are not required to prove that misconduct occurred to refer an incident to SJA. You are simply required to gather information regarding the case. SJA can proceed with a referral based on the instructor's professional judgment that the student's writing is not his or her own.

- Gather copies of all relevant materials that support your concerns (e.g., any statements you gave to students about plagiarism, the assignment requirements, the student's paper, a writing sample from earlier in the quarter).
- Identify the passages or parts of the paper that seem questionable to you.
- Provide a suggestion about or a copy of the source material if you can identify it. However, you do not need to find the source of the plagiarism to refer the matter to SJA. Some Internet-based strategies for finding the source material include:
 - Using the search engine at www.google.com to search for the suspect passage(s). *Google™* is uncannily good at finding the original source of a brief but distinctive phrase or passage entered in quotation marks.

3) Refer the Case to SJA.

Referrals can be made to SJA via a memo sent through interdepartmental mail, by e-mail to sja@ucdavis.edu, or in person (3200 Dutton Hall).

- Your Name and contact information for the referring party
- The student(s)' name(s) and ID numbers
- Name and course number of the class where suspected misconduct occurred
- A brief description of the situation detailing your concerns and the results of your inquiry

- Copies of all materials you collected during your inquiry (delivered in person or to SJA via interdepartmental mail).

After receiving a referral, SJA sets up a disciplinary file and contacts the student. You will be given the name and contact information of the SJA Officer handling the case and may contact him or her if you have any questions or wish to discuss the matter at any time. As the referring party, you have a number of responsibilities after making the referral:

- Inform the student that you have referred the case to SJA and that SJA will contact him or her within a few days.
- After your initial interview, avoid a prolonged discussion or e-mail exchange with the student. You may tell the student that it is not appropriate to continue discussing a case after it has been referred to SJA.
- Evaluate the student's performance on subsequent assignments with impartiality.
- Do not assign a grade to the work in question until the matter has been resolved in SJA.

RESOLVING THE CASE

Referred students must meet with a Judicial Officer to discuss the concerns. If the student fails to do so, SJA will place a hold on the student's records. During the meeting with the Judicial Officer (Informal Disposition), the student is informed of the concerns and allowed to respond to them. Most disciplinary referrals (>97%) are resolved through this informal process when the student, instructor, and SJA reach mutual agreement on a resolution. If this is not possible, then the case may be referred to a hearing panel including faculty and students to determine the appropriate resolution.

Due to SJA's educational approach, a student is usually not removed from school after a first offense unless the violation was particularly serious or the student has a prior disciplinary record. Rather, he/she is placed on a disciplinary probationary or deferred separation status. Often the student is also referred to a writing specialist at the Learning Skills Center and may be required to complete community service or another learning project.

If the case cannot be resolved informally, it may be referred to a formal hearing in which you and the accused student will present evidence to a panel of students and faculty who will decide the matter and recommend sanctions. You will be consulted before any decision is made to send a case to a formal hearing. Only a small number of cases require formal hearings.

Grading

The guidelines for grading a student who has been found to have committed academic misconduct balance several important goals: recognizing that misconduct has occurred, treating the student fairly, and standardizing the treatment of violations across campus.

- By campus-wide policy, the grade a student receives for plagiarized work is considered separate from any disciplinary sanctions imposed by SJA.
- After referring a case to SJA, do not assign a grade to the work in question or for the course until the matter is resolved. If the quarter ends prior to resolution, give the student a 'Y.'
- In virtually all cases, a grade of "F" (a "0" on a standard 4-point or 11-point scale) should be assigned to the paper. If you and SJA determine that the plagiarism was a genuinely unintended and minor misuse of sources, you may (at your discretion) have the student rewrite the assignment for partial credit.

- By campus-wide policy, a student found to have violated rules of proper academic conduct on an assignment does not automatically fail the course. The student fails the course only when the average of all the student's grades for the course falls below the passing level.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

If a student plagiarizes on a draft, must I report it to SJA?

Not necessarily. If you suspect academic misconduct on a draft, take this opportunity to educate the student about plagiarism and appropriate citation conventions.

If a student admits to misconduct in our interview, may I give him or her a failing grade on the assignment and not report the case to SJA?

No. Even if the student admits to misconduct you must still refer the case to SJA and wait for the case to be resolved before assigning a grade for the assignment and the course. In order for there to be equitable treatment for all students, it is necessary that the centralized reporting and adjudication through SJA be consistently utilized.

How long will it take SJA to contact the student and resolve a case after I refer it to them?

SJA contact the student via e-mail within two days of receiving a referral. The amount of time required to resolve the case depends upon the nature of the charge and the degree of cooperation from the student and referring party. On average, cases are resolved in 2-3 weeks.

What if I'm not happy with the way SJA resolves the case?

SJA does its best to keep the referring party informed during the disciplinary process so that an instructor can voice any concerns prior to the resolution of a referral. In fact, SJA welcomes any feedback about the disciplinary process before, during, or after any disciplinary referral.

Can the student take legal or administrative action against me if I refer a case to SJA?

The best protection for an instructor dealing with suspected misconduct is to follow established University policies and procedures. The University administration will support and defend these policies, and courts rarely interfere when a University follows its own established procedures (which means making a referral to SJA when you suspect a violation). Cases in which students file administrative grievances are very rare. Cases in which students seek legal remedies are even rarer. This should not discourage an instructor from confronting academic dishonesty. By referring the matter to SJA for resolution you are ensuring that the student's due process rights are protected.

If you have questions that are not addressed in this brochure, please contact SJA at **752-1128** or sja@ucdavis.edu, or consult the SJA website: <http://sja.ucdavis.edu>.

This brochure was written and edited by: Tiffany M. Aldrich, English Department; Donald J. Dudley, Student Judicial Affairs; Joaquin B. Feliciano, Graduate Group in Ecology; Gary Sue Goodman, Composition Program; Jared Haynes, Composition Program.