

## Academic Integrity: End of Semester Suggestions

With the end of semester approaching, and anxieties over final exams and papers increasing, it seems an appropriate time to offer some background information and practical suggestions for establishing and maintaining academic integrity in the classroom. Academic integrity is an issue that is closely associated with the process of testing and grading, because no system of evaluation is fair unless all students are assured of their ability to compete equally for grades. According to recent studies completed at Rutgers, a high percentage of undergraduates had cheated at one time or another during their years at the university. While instructors generally do not want to view their students with undue suspicion, ignoring the realities of the situation only complicates the problem. The key to issues of academic integrity is, of course, prevention, and so as an end of semester reminder TapTalk offers some strategies for maintaining academic integrity in your class, recitation, or laboratory section.

### Term Papers/Research Papers

The research paper can be an opportunity for students to become familiar with library resources and the process of original scholarship, or it can be an occasion for dishonesty. Legends abound about recycled papers available at fraternity houses, but the more current threat is the Internet, where thousands of research papers are available for free or for a relatively small fee. To avoid receiving these purloined papers, and to reduce other forms of plagiarism, take some time to ensure that your students submit their own work.

- Develop good topics: essay questions that are specific, and directly related to work done in class, are the most successful. Do not let students choose alternate topics without explicit permission from you.
- Don't use the same essay topics every semester, and choose topics that will definitely require the use of current research.
- If practical, have students submit drafts, outlines, and/or working bibliographies for their papers. A cursory review of the material is generally all that is necessary, and the process itself will force students to produce original work.

(continued on page 2)

## News and Announcements

### Ask TAP

The Teaching Assistant Project is now offering a new service on our website (<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>). The service, called "Ask TAP," allows TAs to submit questions about instructional issues, practical teaching suggestions, or other aspects of TA life. Once received, the questions will be responded to promptly by members of the TAP staff. In the forthcoming months a list of "frequently asked questions" will also be posted on the website.

### Videotaping & POP: Resources for Next Semester

TAP offers several resources to help TAs improve their teaching skills. The Peer Observation Program (POP) pairs TAs together to watch and comment on each other's teaching styles. TAP will also videotape your class, recitation, or laboratory session, and arrange to review the tape with you. For information, visit the TAP website (<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>).

### TA Forum

*TapTalk* needs TA Forum submissions for the three forth-  
(continued on page 3)

## Academic Integrity: End of Semester Suggestions

(continued from page 1)

- Another possibility is to meet with students to discuss the papers they plan to write or the drafts they have written. In such a context it is difficult to present a plagiarized paper as one's own work.

If, after all this, you think a student has submitted someone else's work as his or her own, you must act. First, try to find the source if it is a clear case of plagiarism; without discovering a source, you will have a difficult time proving plagiarism. If you are unable to locate the source, show the paper to another instructor or faculty member who is familiar with the topic and may be able to help. If you still have doubts about the paper's originality, speak to the student. You might ask some specific questions about the paper, what the student means by certain words and phrases, or ask questions about some of the sources cited in the paper. Do not accuse the student directly of cheating; instead, explore the situation with statements like "I was interested in your claim..." "I was puzzled by..." "Can you explain to me..." etc. In the absence of a satisfactory re-

sponse, or in any suspicious case for which you have not received an adequate explanation, refer the matter for review to the appropriate member of your department.

### Tests and Exams

The prevention of cheating on exams and tests requires different tactics than those provided above for research papers. The issues are often logistical ones, and you will find that taking some reasonable precautions will discourage most of your students from cheating.

- Don't use the same exams or tests every semester. Besides indicating a disengaged teacher, it makes it too easy for students to get copies of old exams or tests.
- If possible, use short answer or essay exams rather than relying solely on true/false or multiple choice questions. If you do use multiple choice or true/false questions, make several different versions of the exam, with the order of the questions scrambled. Printing the exams on multiple colors of paper is also useful.
- After preparing a test or exam, take care to keep it in a secure place. Do not leave tests lying around the office or in your departmental mail box.
- On the day of the exam, ask students to seat themselves in alternate seats and rows, when possible, so that they will not be tempted to cheat.
- Set definite rules for what students can and cannot bring to their desks: writing implements, note paper, dictionaries, etc. Ask them to leave all other books, bags, and materials at the front or sides of the room, and urge them not to bring valuables to the test.
- If students are permitted to bring calculators into the exam, decide in advance if there are any restrictions: are programmable calculators allowed? Will students be allowed to share calculators?
- Distribute blue-books to the students yourself. Have students begin writing on page two, or six lines down on the first page—whatever you choose to prevent them from substituting pre-written tests. In addition, put some sort of distinct mark on the blue books you hand out (a line in red ink on the inside back cover, for instance) to ensure that books have not been smuggled in. When correcting the test, add a mark with a distinctive ink at the end of each answer so that additional information cannot be added once the test is returned to the student.
- Walk around the classroom during the exam. Never leave the classroom unattended. If you sit down, do so in the back of the room.

If you find clear evidence of cheating on an exam or paper, remember that you are obligated to report the case to the faculty

TapTalk is produced by the  
Teaching Assistant Project (TAP),  
Graduate School—New Brunswick.

Editor:

John Scanlon

Letters, submissions, calendar items,  
and suggestions for articles should be  
directed to the Editor.

TapTalk

25 Bishop Place

New Brunswick, N.J. 08901

(732) 932-7747

tapweb@rci.rutgers.edu

(continued on page 4)

## Notes on the Undergrads: Students with Disabilities

Changes in Federal Law over the last 20 years have opened up opportunities in higher education for people with serious disabilities. Today, any institution that receives federal funding must make its programs accessible to those with disabilities. Since Rutgers complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the number of disabled students at the university has sharply increased. TAs, as instructors at Rutgers, have a responsibility to see that the rights of these students are not violated.

Some TAs may feel uncertain about how to work with disabled students. The key is to remember that disabled students are students first and disabled second. Listen to your students; they are often their own best advocates, and will know the techniques and accommodations that best suit their needs. Be careful to treat these students fairly: neither avoid them nor single them out for special treatment, and take care not

to insult them by treating them as unusual or by patronizing them.

A sensitive and perceptive teacher can greatly reduce the obstacles a disabled student faces. Remember that while in some cases the student's disability will be obvious, in many others you will never know about it unless the student tells you. Make it easy for a student to tell you. At the beginning of the semester, make a general announcement inviting students to visit your office or to speak with you after class about any questions or problems they may foresee in your course. Create an atmosphere in which students will feel comfortable speaking to you about their disabilities, and demonstrate a willingness to help them in whatever way you can. As a member of your class, a disabled student should be held responsible for the same material as the others. You may and should, however, make what the University calls "reasonable and appropriate accommodations" to assist the student in completing the course requirements.

What kinds of assistance or accommodation should you expect to arrange? This will vary according to the student and should be determined by the student's ADA

coordinator: all colleges have a coordinator to assist students in securing the proper accommodations. (You can find out his or her name by calling the dean of the college or the school, or by contacting the Office of Student Rights Compliance: <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~polcomp/>) For students who have not yet met with their college coordinator, they should be directed to the appropriate person to secure the proper documentation. After meeting with the student, the disability coordinator will write to you verifying that the student has a disability and describing the necessary accommodations. A student with a hearing problem may simply ask you to reserve a desk near the front of the classroom. Some students may need to tape-record lectures or to have someone take notes for them. Others may require longer times for exams or labs. By working together—you, the student, and the ADA coordinator—a solution will be found that works best for all involved.

### Announcements

*(continued from page 1)*

coming spring issues. The Forum is designed to give Rutgers TAs a space to write, in the form of a column, article, or opinion, about their teaching experiences. If you are interested in contributing, please contact the editor.

### Get In Touch!

Tap Office:

<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>

Graduate School - NB:

<http://gsnb.rutgers.edu>

TA Helpline: 932-11TA

## Integrity (continued from page 2)

member responsible for the class (in the case of a recitation or lab section) or to the department chair. You are required to report any incident of suspected academic dishonesty. The student will get a fair hearing, but if found guilty will be penalized. The academic dishonesty of a single student is unfair to other members of the class, and it is your obligation to protect the rights of honest students. If you need assistance with the interpretation of the Academic Integrity Policy or the Code of Student Conduct, do not hesitate to call the TA helpline (932-11TA), or submit your questions to Ask TAP (<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu/asktap.html>).

## TAP Calendar

- 12/5 *Dissertation and Thesis Workshop*: 1:00 p.m.<sup>1</sup>
- 12/13 Regular Classes End
- 12/15- Final Examination Period
- 12/22
- 12/23 Winter Recess Begins
- 1/16 Spring Semester Begins
- 1/24 *Dissertation and Thesis Workshop*: 10:00 a.m.<sup>1</sup>
- 2/8 *Dissertation and Thesis Workshop*: 1:00 p.m.<sup>1</sup>
- 2/20 *Dissertation and Thesis Workshop*: 10:00 a.m.<sup>1</sup>

1. Please call 932-7034, or email Barbara Sirman at [sirman@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:sirman@rci.rutgers.edu), if you plan to attend a workshop.

### Teaching Assistant Project

Office of the Dean  
Graduate School-New Brunswick  
25 Bishop Place  
New Brunswick, N.J. 08901-1181  
(732) 932-7747