



**Academic Behavior Code
Survey Results and Recommendations
September 2010**

**Prepared by the Academic Judicial Committee Task Force
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BACKGROUND:

Since Fall 2009, members of Academic Judicial Board (AJB) have been engaged in discussions about the use and effectiveness of Muhlenberg College's Academic Behavior Code (ABC). AJB faculty members, at the request of Dean Carol Shiner Wilson, initiated a process that intended to gauge student and faculty perceptions about the efficacy of the current ABC. An AJB Task Force was created to conduct a study of the extant ABC and offer recommendations that would allow for modifications of the ABC, if needed. The AJB Task Force members are Kelly Cannon, Chrysan Cronin, Michele Deegan, Laura Garland, Amy Hark, Mohsin Hashim (Chair), Susan Kahlenberg, Louise Shive and Carol Shiner Wilson (ex-officio). The Task Force Members of AJB met with Gary Pavela (Director of Judicial Programs, University of Maryland and past President of the Center for Academic Integrity) in Fall 2009 to discuss issues related to academic integrity on our campus. The AJB Task Force was entrusted by Dean Wilson to use survey and pre-survey focus groups to gather and analyze information in the Spring semester of 2010 and prepare a report in the summer of 2010. AJB members conducted two student and two faculty focus groups. In addition the entire student and faculty bodies were invited to take an online survey in April 2010. The survey was designed by the AJB Task Force to assess student and faculty awareness and understanding of the ABC, as well as perceived strengths, weaknesses and importance of the existing code and the academic judicial process. The focus group scripts and survey were approved by the College's IRB.

STUDY METHODS:

During the Spring 2010 semester, the Task Force invited faculty and students to attend pre-survey focus groups. Two faculty and two student focus groups were held in March. Students learned about the Focus Groups through the campus Facebook page, the Muhlenberg Weekly and word of mouth. Faculty were invited by the Provost to participate. Student AJB members helped to craft the focus group script and administer the Focus Groups. Twenty three students and fifteen faculty/staff participated in the Focus Groups. (See Appendix for Focus Group Script)

A separate faculty and student survey was created following feedback from the Focus Groups. (See Appendix for surveys) The survey was available on-line using surveymonkey.com, in April. Both surveys yielded a good response rate of 516 (38%) students and 96 (50%) faculty. There was a gender bias in both the student survey (73% female) and the faculty survey (56% female). First-year students (31%) and Associate Professors (33%) constituted the plurality of respondents in the respective surveys. The distribution of respondents across class year (students) and rank (faculty), however, was not skewed heavily in favor of any one cohort.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- i. **Awareness, Discussion and Use of ABC [Student Q1, Q2, Q3, Q8, Q9; Faculty Q1, Q2, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17]:** The student survey found that the students are aware of the ABC: 65% of respondents were very aware and 32% were somewhat aware of the ABC at Muhlenberg College. Most students learn about the ABC from faculty. For example, when asked about source and depth of knowledge about the ABC [Q2], 46% of the student respondents stated that they “learned a lot” and 47% “learned some” about the ABC from faculty. Only 25% cited First Year Orientation and 20% cited FYS/Writing Assistant as sources where they had “learned a lot” about the ABC. Given the relatively even distribution of student respondents across class years, it appears that the knowledge gathered about academic integrity in the first year at Muhlenberg is sustained across their college experience. To further support faculty as the point of information for the ABC, 85% of respondents stated that they had “learned little or nothing” about the ABC through the Writing Center, and 72% stated that they had learned little to nothing through the campus website. Furthermore, 72% stated that they “learned little or nothing” through the Dean or other administrators.

The faculty survey results suggest that faculty learn about the ABC from multiple sources. Fifty-seven percent of respondents learned about the ABC through Deans or other administrators; 45% learned through other faculty; and 41% cited the Faculty handbook. Only 9% learned about the ABC at the New Faculty Orientation, while 13% learned about it through their Department Chair, and 6% learned about it through the College website.

To learn more about discussions of the ABC on campus, faculty and students were asked about whether faculty discuss specific aspects of the ABC in class. We asked about each ABC violation including cheating, collusion, falsifying information and helping or hindering other students. Regarding cheating during exams, students reported that 42% of faculty never or very seldom discuss these policies. However, of the faculty responding, 87% reported that they do discuss policies regarding cheating: 42% reported that they discuss their policies regarding cheating during exams at the start of the semester, and 45% of faculty reported that they are mentioned in the syllabus or course outline. In fact, only 21% of faculty respondents stated that they do not discuss policies regarding cheating during examinations with their classes.

Regarding collusion, 56% of student respondents reported that faculty never or very seldom discuss their policies on this violation, while 37% of faculty stated that they discuss these policies at the start of the semester and 32% of faculty mention that these policies are included in the syllabus or course outline.

According to both surveys, falsifying information was the least discussed by faculty as 70% of students responded that faculty never or very seldom discuss policies regarding providing false information, while about one-half of the faculty discuss this violation: 28% of faculty reported that they discuss these policies at the start of the semester and only 23% of faculty reported that they include these policies in the syllabus or course outline. About 46% of faculty reported that they do not discuss policies regarding providing false information in their class.

Less than half of the student respondents (46%) reported that faculty “often” and “very often” discuss their policies regarding plagiarism. About 35% stated that faculty seldom/sometimes discuss their policies concerning plagiarism. Among the faculty respondents, about 51% stated that they discuss their policy on individual assignments, 60% state their policy on the syllabus, while 55% talk about it at the start of the semester. Only 2% of faculty do not discuss their policy on plagiarism at all. It appears that faculty are not consistent on how they discuss with their students this very important policy. This provides us with the opportunity to think about whether we need to formulate and present a universal policy on plagiarism across and within departments.

Lastly, 61% of students reported that faculty never or very seldom discuss their policies regarding helping or hindering other students with their class, while only 36% of faculty reported that they do not discuss such policies with their class.

Regarding ABC compliance, while 72% of faculty respondents required “often” or “very often” that students identify that they are in ABC compliance when taking exams or completing assignments during class time, only 40% of students reported that faculty always require them to sign that they are in ABC compliance in such circumstances. According to students, 57% of faculty sometimes require them to sign that they are in ABC compliance. There appears to be an inconsistent implementation of this policy among faculty, which was highlighted in one focus group in which faculty participants stressed that making students say that they are in compliance with the ABC creates a feeling of mistrust.

In addition to compliance questions, we also asked faculty the degree to which they discuss their views on the importance of academic integrity with their students. Survey results suggest that 73% of faculty discuss their views on the importance of academic integrity with their students. 66% of faculty remind students periodically about their obligations under the ABC while 54% provide information about cheating/plagiarism on course outline or assignment sheet. As a safeguard against ABC violations, 67% of faculty change their exams regularly and 67% closely monitor exams while 80% note clearly their expectations on how work is to be completed (i.e. as individual

vs. group) and 76% note the ABC in their syllabi. While these data suggest that most faculty are discussing academic integrity and work to prevent it, one area of concern is the use of the digital drop box. For assignments accepted via email or digital drop-box, 35% of faculty and 40% of students reported that they never ask for or are asked if they are in ABC compliance.

The aforementioned discrepancies between student and faculty responses regarding cheating, collusion, providing false information, helping or hindering other students warrants a serious discussion at the College. Of particular concern is the fact that a significant portion of the faculty never or very seldom discuss policies regarding providing false information or helping or hindering other students. It appears that faculty discussions with students about the ABC tend to focus on cheating and plagiarism. Regarding information dissemination about the ABC, it is clear that the College web site, FYS/Writing Assistants and the Writing Center are underutilized resources.

- ii. **Perceptions about and Evidence of ABC violations [Student Q4, Q5; Faculty Q3, Q4]:** Faculty perceive that violations of the ABC occur more often than students do. 63% of faculty respondents stated that cheating during exams occur seldom/sometimes, while only 48% of the students felt so. 53% of faculty responded that plagiarism takes place seldom/sometimes, while 47% reported such. 47% of faculty and 39% of students responded that collusion occurs seldom/sometimes. 51% of faculty and 32% of students felt that false information is provided by students seldom/sometimes. 48% of faculty and 38% of students thought that students are helping or hindering other students in completing assignments or taking exams.

Data on actual witnessing (“evidence”) of violation of ABC also show discrepancies among faculty and students. While about 6% of faculty responded seeing student(s) cheat during exams several or many times, 27% of students responded so. This may indicate that there is a lack of vigilance on the part of faculty during exams. 32% of faculty noted that they have seen students plagiarize several or many times, while 14% of students reported so. This may not be surprising, since students do not have to complete assignments in front of their classmates. While only 14% of faculty reported confirmed collusion several and many times, the corresponding figure for students is 30%. Faculty were more likely to have witnessed plagiarism (29%) versus 14% of students. On the other hand, students were more likely to witness students helping or hindering others, (13% of faculty versus 38% of students). It is interesting to note that while students more frequently witness cases of ABC violation, faculty perceive that they occur more frequently than students do.

When students knew of a violation of the code, 56% of them stated that they would not report a student the incident. The remaining 44% would report such violations to the professor or administrator. It would be interesting to compare

this with actual data on student-reported ABC violations. We doubt that students report the high levels of ABC violations that they witness in the classrooms. Perhaps more disconcerting is the discrepancy among faculty between the high perception of the last two categories of ABC violation (providing false information; helping or hindering other students) and the lack of discussion about them in class.

- iii. **Sources of ABC violation [Student Q6; Faculty Q10, Q11]:** Survey results suggest that faculty perceived plagiarism as the most frequent occurrence of an ABC violation appears to be plagiarism. While 68% of faculty said they have seen plagiarism only 19% of students reported that students have paraphrased or copied a few sentences from a hard copy source “more than once.” Similarly, 69% of faculty but only 16% of students reported that students have paraphrased or copied a few sentences from an electronic source “more than once.” 65% of faculty respondents cited the internet or other electronic means as the source of such violations.

Students probably have detailed knowledge of their own actions, while faculty are observing a larger number of student work. This may partially explain the wide discrepancy between faculty and student reporting. It may, however, also point to a lack of knowledge and/or greater acceptability among students of paraphrasing/material without acknowledging the source appropriately.

- iv. **Reaction to ABC violation [Student Q7, Q13, Q14; Faculty Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q18, Q19]:** One area of discretion among faculty is how to react to an assumed violation. There appears to be agreement that some reaction is needed. For example, 71% of faculty respondents indicated that their “most likely reaction” to a student violating the ABC in their course would be to “fail the student on the test or assignment”. Additionally, 64% of faculty respondents would “report the student to the Dean of the College for Academic Life” for such a violation. 52% of faculty would “reprimand or warn the student” and 31% of them would “lower the student’s grade.” 24% of the faculty respondents reported that they would “require the student to retake test/redo assignment, while about 12% would “fail the student for the course.” Only 3% would “do nothing about the incident.”

Students and faculty diverge on what they deem to be appropriate sanctions for students after a first violation of the ABC. 83% of faculty suggested that the student should fail the assignment, while only 58% of students agree with this sanction. Only 20% of faculty and 3% of students feel that violators should fail the course. Neither faculty nor students recommend expulsion (0 and 0.6% for faculty and students respectively). Large proportions feel that a conversation is warranted (60% faculty and 88% students). It should be noted that a conversation does not preclude more serious sanctions. Both faculty (39%) and students (45%) agree that a first violation warrants completion of

an on-line tutorial to learn about how to avoid violations of the code in the future. It is interesting to note that more students support the idea than faculty. For a second violation, 69% of faculty and 51% of student respondents felt that failing the course was the appropriate sanction while only 35% of faculty and only 12% of students recommended a semester's suspension. Finally, 17% of faculty and only 2% of students deemed that expulsion was an appropriate sanction for a second violation. It is not surprising to see that both faculty and student support for strong sanctions grew with a second violation. Faculty, however, were in support for much severe sanctions than students.

However, faculty were not in agreement regarding when to report a violation of the ABC. It should be noted that 37% of faculty have ignored a suspected incident of ABC violation in his/her course. The primary reason cited (78% response) was a lack of evidence/proof. The secondary reason (31%) was that the cheating was trivial/not serious. 57% of faculty respondents referred a suspected case of ABC violation to his/her Chair, Dean or someone else. Of those that did report, 84% were satisfied or very satisfied by the way the cases were handled. This suggests that faculty do not perceive the academic judicial process as cumbersome. The next section deals more with student and faculty perception about the academic judicial process.

- v. **Knowledge and Perception about Academic Judicial Process [Student Q10, Q11, Q12, Q15; Faculty Q12, Q13]:** 32% of students are somewhat aware and 19.5% are not aware of the College Academic Judicial Process. 41% of students are somewhat aware of it. The most commonly cited sources of information where students “learned some” about the Academic Judicial Process are First Year Orientation (46% response), other students (45%), student handbook (37%), faculty (36%) and FYS/Writing Assistant (33%). Only 16% learned some from the campus web site. 6% of student respondents learned some from the Writing Center. Faculty received their information on the Academic Judicial Process from Deans and other administrators (52% response), other faculty (47%), Faculty handbook (35%), and Student handbook (33%). Only 6% of faculty used the campus web site for such knowledge.

Regarding perceptions of the Academic Judicial Process, 49% of students and 42% of faculty respondents are not sure whether the Academic Judicial Process is fair and impartial while 37% of students and 42% of faculty responded that they think it is fair and impartial. 44% of students and 53% of faculty are not sure whether faculty members are vigilant in discovering and reporting suspected cases of academic dishonesty. Such large levels of uncertainty about the fairness/impartiality of the Academic Judicial Process and the faculty's vigilance in ensuring academic integrity is a source of concern for the College community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations are based on AJB Task Force members' analysis of the survey and focus group data. These recommendations are intended to aid the Dean of Academic Life, AJB and other pertinent bodies to continue their work to improve the efficacy of the current ABC. The recommendations are listed below:

We recommend implementation of the following beginning in Fall 2010:

- Change the name of the ABC to the Academic Integrity Code.
- At an upcoming faculty meeting report key findings of our study to the faculty and invite them to a reception where we will discuss the study results and larger concerns about academic integrity on campus.
- Work with Writing Center faculty and other student resource administrators (tutors, mentors, and writing assistants) to ensure that students are well versed in the ABC so that they can be used as a source of education about the Code to other students.
- Have an AJB member attend a meeting of Dept Chairs to discuss the Academic Behavior Code and Judicial Process. Also, we will offer to attend departmental meetings if invited.
- Discuss the findings of the study to student groups on campus (student government, tutors, RA's).
- Work with OIT personnel to relocate the ABC to a more prominent position on our website such as the current student and faculty and staff pages in the table of contents labeled "Get Academic."
- Post this report online.
- Provide an example of a letter that a faculty member would submit to the Dean of the College for Academic Life if s/he believes there has been a violation of the Code.
- Review language in the College Catalog for possible revision.
- Involve AJB faculty in AJB student training sessions.
- Establish a faculty mentorship to help new AJB faculty members learn about the academic judicial process.
- Begin work on a Muhlenberg specific online tutorial, which will be required for all students to take in their first year; but available to anyone on campus.