

Policy on Academic Integrity and Documentation

Academic Year 2007-2008

To the Air Force Academy Faculty and Cadet Wing

The faculty of the Academy recognizes the importance of designing academic policies that aid in a cadet's development toward becoming an officer of character. The purpose of this policy is to provide more specific guidance on academic integrity policies as they apply to the subject of documentation. This policy supplements, but does not replace, the Academics with Honor letter, Faculty Operating Instruction 36-173, Academic Practices and Procedures, USAFAI 36-157, Violation of Academic Standards, and the Air Force Academy Faculty Handbook, and will be reviewed annually. All faculty members, as well as cadets, are required to comply with this policy on academic integrity. Faculty members, upon approval by their Department Head, may supplement this policy by making more restrictive guidelines. Any such deviations must be given to the cadets in writing, with a copy to the Dean. Furthermore, any such deviation will be specific to that particular course or assignment and should not be construed by cadets to imply authorization to deviate from this policy in any other course or assignment.

Academic integrity is comprised of two key elements: academic excellence and academic disclosure. Academic excellence entails doing one's best on every assignment and ensuring that all work is done properly. Giving one's self enough time to review all work for mistakes, omissions, and proper citations is an important aspect of this concept. Too many penalties for violating academic standards, in addition to Honor Code violations, have stemmed from a cadet's failure to manage his/her time properly.

Academic disclosure involves many concepts, such as documentation, attribution, and plagiarism. Documentation is the written acknowledgment of all resources, including those authorized and unauthorized, used in accomplishing graded work. It is required on all graded assignments, except random, no-notice homework collections and personal journals. In addition, individual instructors may require a cadet to identify the contributions of others in drafts submitted only for review.

Documentation requires cadets to give proper credit when it is due, and allows the faculty to provide honest, accurate feedback to help cadets learn and develop. By submitting academic work to be graded, the cadet (or cadets in the case of a group assignment) has represented it to be the cadet's (or cadets') own work, except as documented. Remember, the standard for all course work at the Academy is "individual effort," unless otherwise specifically authorized. It is not necessary to document individual team member contributions to group assignments or help from an individual cadet's instructor, unless the instructor specifies otherwise. If no help was received, even though it was authorized, cadets will write "Documentation: None" on their work to give a positive indication to their instructor that they did not simply forget to document. Cadets will only use "Documentation: None" after carefully considering whether any resources were used.

Missing and vague documentation (e.g., I got "help" from...) is unacceptable and should be returned ungraded since the assignment is actually incomplete. Documentation must be made to such a degree of specificity and accuracy that the reader of the documentation statement knows clearly who gave the assistance, what assistance was given, and where in the assignment the assistance was given. In describing what assistance was given, cadets will be as specific as possible. Upon timely resubmittal with

clarified documentation, an academic penalty may be applied and is appropriate to emphasize that vague documentation is unacceptable.

Instructors may also decide to award less academic credit to a cadet who relies excessively on published material to accomplish the assignment. For example, extensive use of a problem solution from a published solution manual, a theorem proof from a published text, or a literature critique from Cliffs Notes®, even if properly documented, may deserve little or no academic credit. Using unauthorized resources, even though documented, should also receive an academic penalty.

Attribution is the method or manner by which a writer correctly identifies which words, thoughts, or ideas are his or hers and which are those of someone else. Unintentional misattribution of sources may be the result of "sloppy scholarship" or laziness, or failing to uphold the standards of "academic excellence," and will likely result in an academic penalty. The attribution standard for all papers in all core courses is the Modern Language Association (MLA) standard. The MLA standard is encouraged for papers in other courses, but Department Heads may specify other subject-specific standards or style manuals. For graded homework other than papers, Department Heads will establish an attribution standard that will be specified in writing in the syllabus or particular assignment.

There are many definitions of plagiarism, but most of them deal with the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving proper credit. Specifically, plagiarism is the intentional, knowing, or reckless failure to document or correctly attribute the words, ideas, key terms, research, or information of another in a graded work that tends to gain, or results in, an unfair advantage for the submitter. Plagiarism is not only a violation of academic integrity, it also will result in the case being referred through the Honor System in accordance with applicable procedures, since plagiarism entails an attempt to deceive, gain an unfair advantage, or receive undeserved credit. The appropriate authorities in the Honor System must still determine independently whether the requisite act and intent is present to find a cadet in violation of the Honor Code.

Other service academies and institutions of higher learning have provided excellent guidelines to follow to prevent poor documentation, misattribution, and even plagiarism. This approach, which is listed below in modified form, now reflects the guiding principles on academic disclosure for cadets to follow in all academic courses.

1. Budget your time to avoid last-minute mistakes. Failure to manage your time properly in regard to academic assignments may result in poor documentation, misattribution, or possibly plagiarism. Saying "I forgot to put in my citations" or "I gave you my draft rather than my real paper" because you are printing or forwarding the assignment at the last minute are not valid excuses.

2. Unless specifically excepted by this policy, give the appropriate credit and citation for everything used or borrowed from others, including their thoughts and ideas. In the academic setting, cadets will inevitably use the concepts, words, diagrams, and work of others. Cadets should take these resources and develop them, but should not compromise their academic integrity by failing to indicate clearly where their work, ideas, or words end and those of someone else begins. Citations must guide the reader clearly and explicitly to the sources used, whether published, unpublished, or electronic. A source must be cited each time a cadet borrows from it.

A single citation, concluding or followed by extended borrowing is inadequate and misleading. All use of another's words, even if constituting only part of a sentence, must be clearly noted with quotation marks (or in block quotation form) and specific citation.


3. Paraphrase properly. Paraphrasing is a tool for conveying or explaining a source's ideas and requires a citation to the original source. A paraphrase captures the source's meaning and tone in one's own words and sentence structure. In a paraphrase, the words might be those of a cadet, but the ideas are not. Paraphrasing should not be used to create the impression of originality, and proper attribution to the original source must be given.

4. Extreme caution should be used when using web-based sources, including Internet sites and electronic journals. Web-based information, even if anonymous, must be appropriately cited. Do not cut and paste or otherwise take material from websites without proper citation. On this note, the practice of large-scale cutting and pasting from an electronic source with the intent of later returning to put in citations has historically been shown to be flawed. This has led to many academic integrity and Honor Code violations.

5. Do not submit your previously used work for credit, unless specifically authorized to do so. Previously submitted work has been reviewed by an instructor, with feedback given, even if only a grade. You should not receive credit more than once for the same work. Certain courses may allow you to build upon work you have previously done, such as a computer program, lab report, or draft of a paper.

6. When in doubt, always document. Always err on the side of caution.

No policy or guideline can cover every potential academic integrity situation that may arise. The spirit of academic integrity, however, is doing one's best in completing a task and giving due credit to those who deserve it.


DANA H. BORN
Brigadier General, USAF
Dean of the Faculty