



Faculty Forum

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Toward a Student-Centered Administration **Brian Railsback**

Two weeks ago, the university Citizenship & Civility Committee met and an interesting thing happened. Discussion involved getting students engaged in a campus-wide effort but because of scheduling no students could be there. Then the possibility of the committee members stepping back and letting students take their place emerged. Though the original committee members will be involved in a mentoring role, the students will take the lead in making efforts regarding civility in particular work for other students.

I hope what happened at that meeting can become the norm at WCU.

Many years ago the academy made a shift to a student-centered classroom, allowing students to engage in classroom projects and discussion in a way that fostered more involved and responsible learners. Now it's time for a student-centered administration. Students need to be more involved in making decisions about how their university is managed and sometimes they need to be asked to take the lead in solving important issues for the university.

WCU is well-positioned to let students lead. The Division of Students Affairs has carefully developed student leadership in several ways (new SGA constitution, the Freshman Leadership Institute, the Leadership Minor—a partnership with the College of Education and Allied Professions). Since 1997, students have been called upon to lead The Honors College through their Board of Directors. The student leaders are here.

With a lot of new key administrators and a new strategic plan, this year is a great time for WCU to become a national model for a student-centered administration. Across the board, students should become major players in setting university direction and policy (rather than token members on committees and boards).

Relinquishing some power to students might be scary. Things might get messy or move in directions that are surprising. Imagine, though, what all of us could learn. The more we can truly partner with students and let them have a real say, the more pride they will have in their institution. WCU will feel to them more like *their* university.

Academic Dishonesty

Catherine Carter

I'd like to talk about academic dishonesty. Not how prevalent it is (fairly[1]); nor how unfortunate and morally bankrupt it is (very); but about the fact that WCU has a clear and detailed policy about academic honesty, and a clear and detailed process to address it. This wasn't always the case. In my early years at WCU, there was no single register of Academic Integrity Policy (AIP) violators, and no clear process for addressing violations. Sometimes instructors assigned the sanction; sometimes Department Heads took a hand; sometimes cases were reported to Student Affairs, sometimes not. Identifying a second offense was dicey at best. But the process has improved immensely: as we see from the Department of Student and Community Ethics' site, <http://www.wcu.edu/26163.asp>, instructors detecting academic dishonesties are supposed to a) report them to their DH; b) meet with the student and inform him/her orally and in writing of the violation; c) assign a sanction, which the student may accept or not; and d) fill out the Academic Integrity Policy Violation form, in which the student either accepts allegation and sanction, or requests a hearing with the Academic Integrity Board. There are more details, but this is the basic process. If there's already a violation on record, the instructor does not assign the sanction; then this becomes a university matter, and a serious one.

The policy also stipulates that intention is irrelevant. We don't have to go through the painful dilemma of deciding whether the student "really meant" to do it or not; the only question is whether she did it. However, cases of academic dishonesty still sometimes—perhaps often—go unreported, and this is not good for the students, the University, or fellow faculty and staff. If they're unreported, how do I know about them? The same way you do. Perhaps I report a student for a violation of academic integrity and document it; he makes counterclaims about his character and history and intentions, and tells me accusingly that Good Professor So-and-So gave him or her the chance to "fix" the work, rather than reporting it to DSCE. Or maybe when I come dragging back from an AIB hearing in a state of deep despond, a colleague says, "That's a coincidence—I'm just struggling with a case myself," and, can you believe it! it's the same student. I have sat in AIB hearings knowing full well that the student has committed other violations, unable to bring them in evidence because they weren't formally reported, or because the instructor who detected them didn't want to testify. Formal reports are evidence of a student disposition toward dishonesty; anecdotal isn't.

There are other ways in which underreporting may come to light; but the point here is threefold. One is that, perhaps out of mercy, perhaps out of weariness, instructors aren't reporting all our plagiarisms and academic dishonesties—even though university policy makes it clear that we should. Two, some unknown number of the students who tearfully swear that they've never done such a thing before, and never will again...well, they're lying, and with considerable facility. All that distress is connected to the sanction, not to the "careless error" they say they've made.

Three, they're able to remain in the University, modeling unethical behavior for other students, in part because of this underreporting. And then I, or someone—it's often an English professor—has to go through the painful, difficult process of the first-offense hearing, listening to angry

parents allege that we're gratuitously trying to destroy their innocent darling...perhaps because one of our colleagues didn't report it the first time, or the third.

I know it's tempting to give in when the student sobs that this will destroy his life, and begs us to please, please give him another chance. No one wants to destroy lives. No one wants to look a weeping student in the eye and say, "I am legally and ethically obliged to report this no matter what it does to your career as a nurse, or a teacher, or an engineer"...though we are. And, probably, no one really wants to assemble the documentation point by point and cart the wagonload of evidence over to DSCE.

But I'm asking you, fellow instructors, to do it anyway—the first time and every time, except perhaps in the first drafts of the first papers of the first freshman classes, when students really may be still learning what academic dishonesty is. Why?

- Because students don't learn that WCU *is* serious about academic dishonesty if only some of us walk the walk. Non-reporting may well read as encouragement.
- Because in a really first-time case, the sanction can be as mild as the professor wishes. If, for instance, we list the sanction as a rewrite of the assignment, this doesn't destroy lives, or even grades...but it does leave a record which will be very important the next time. If the student never does do it again, there's no harm done. And the student learns something.
- Because no matter how the student weeps and begs (one memorable plagiarist showed me his Eagle Scout card as evidence of his sterling character) the odds are at least fair that it's *not* her first offense, it's not a careless error, and that the student subscribed to the dangerous belief that it couldn't hurt to try it on. If she's caught, she knows that groveling will probably result in a chance to do it right. But how many students do you think have sat in my office, stared at absolutely irrefutable documentation, and said, *Gee, you know, I took the easy way out and I shouldn't've?* One... in thirteen years. The academically dishonest always say they didn't mean to. They just got sleepy and forgot to "go back" and "put in" the citations or quotation marks (very poor practice in itself), or they were so stressed that they simply *had* to cut and paste from Wikipedia, rather than ask the prof an e-mail for an extension. They *all* say they've never done it before. This claim is not a reason not to report the violation: it's standard operating procedure.
- Because in not reporting, not to put too fine a point on it, you're very likely hanging a fellow instructor out to dry. It's much harder for a student to claim she didn't know, or he didn't mean to, or she never did it before, if the record is there. And it's equally hard for the faculty member who does report it to prove the truth if the record isn't. I've been hung out to dry more than once of recent years—inadvertently, to be sure, but it's no more pleasant for that. First offense hearings are ugly; student and parents are furious at what seems like gratuitous torture, the reporting instructor feels all the pangs of the unwilling torturer, the AIB has heard these same tears and excuses dozens or hundreds of times...and all this may well be the unnecessary price of an earlier instructor's impulse to mercy.
- Because if our students don't learn this here—even if they learn it the hard way—we're hanging *them* out to dry. Imagine what will happen to the engineer who composes her technical manual from pieces of other companies' manuals for similar technology, or the nurse whose

patient report copies his roommate's, or the teacher who fails her own student for plagiarism and then is caught—maybe by that student's parents—not citing her own material. It'll be worse than anything that happens to them here. Letting students get to that point is what really destroys careers.

So, please: report your academic dishonesties—which are not limited to great chunks of text swiped word for word from online, and which do include egregiously improper citation. Send a united message that academic dishonesty is unacceptable. If you need help documenting violations, or composing the letter to the perpetrator, or just moral support in the process...well, call me, okay? I know that not every department is as used to doing this as English, and if I can, I'll help.

[1] Estimates of college students who have committed academic dishonesty at least once range from 30% to nearly 98%:the website PlagiarismdotOrg lists a series of such estimates at http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_facts.html.

Carrot and Stick Mark Mattheis

Often valuable lessons are learned early in life. Third grade math class struck home for me the concept of "carrot and stick". By the door hung the enforcer, a plank of poplar with a rope through the handle and the room number burned into the business end. On occasion it was put to use, always out of sight of students, but the procedure reverberated to all ears up and down the hallway. Recess was the carrot. Do your work, don't mess about, and you get to go outside and swing.

There were variations on this theme with the use of gold stars, free milk tokens, or pounding the erasers against the wall outside. Good carrots. Effective sticks were nose in the circle, dunce stool, and the worst, a ruler across the knuckles. Whack. When flicked by an experienced wrist a piece of wood twelve inches long, one inch wide including the brass edge, would always motivate a student to pay attention and perform up to standard. It was also a handy way to remember the "pledge of allegiance" minus two words, which was conveniently printed on the back.

I am your new faculty fellow for publications. It is my duty to promote productive discussions on issues that effect and influence our performance as educators. This is your publication and all material written, spoken, recorded, or etched on the business end of a board may be submitted. When called upon to do so I will present topics that may elicit a visceral response. I stir the pot. This month we have two articles that show how our interactions with students can be considered a carrot or a stick. Both are useful tools when applied appropriately. Today's news on plagiarism reminds us that we must always remain vigilant. We must also make room for new ideas; the ingredients that help us grow.

Submit your articles, ideas, or diatribes and lets keep the kettle full of nutrients for the mind, strength for the body, and levity for the soul.

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