

Case* #14: Using a programmable calculator

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Allegation: A student is accused of programming formulas for a final exam worth 50% into a scientific calculator. Students were only allowed to bring non-scientific calculators into the exam. The course instructor believed this was cheating. According to the university's Academic Calendar section 5.16.1 "Cheating on examinations, assignments, reports, or other work used to evaluate student performance. Cheating includes, among other things, copying from another student's work or allowing one's own work to be copied, submitting another person's work as one's own, fabrication of data, consultation with an unauthorized person during an examination, use of unauthorized aids, or submitting work prepared in collaboration with other member(s) of a class, when collaborative work on a project has not been authorized by the instructor."

Background: The student is a third-year student in a third-year course who has not previously been accused of academic misconduct. Because this is a final exam and worth over 25%, the allegation has been submitted to the Faculty's Academic Integrity Committee. The course instructor noticed the scientific calculator while walking around the room and confiscated it; the instructor also replaced the exam booklet with a fresh one and told the student to continue with the exam without the calculator. Upon further investigation, the instructor found that a set of formulas used in the course had been programmed into the calculator. With a TA as a witness, the instructor took photos of the calculator showing the formulas alongside the examination answers.

At the meeting with the Academic Integrity Committee, the student was presented with the evidence provided by the provided by the course instructor. The student was given the opportunity to explain his side of the story and he admitted to the offense.

Decision: The Academic Integrity Committee determined that the student was guilty of cheating on the final examination and imposed a sanction of receiving a grade of 0% on the portion of the examination completed prior to being caught with the calculator. The remainder of the exam was graded as usual.

Rationale: Because it was a first offence, the Committee decided that a fair penalty was a zero for the portion of the examination in which the cheating occurred. The student was reminded that any subsequent offences would result in a more severe penalty.

* Case studies are based on examples of common problems with academic misconduct. All names and identifying information have been removed.