

Case* #8: Cheat Sheet

By Vanessa Theophille and Alyson King

Allegation: Student A brought unauthorized test materials into a final exam worth 40% of his final grade. The instructor felt that this constituted as cheating according to the university's Academic Calendar. This is defined as: "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: According to the Report on Academic Misconduct, Student A had been told he was allowed to bring a formula sheet into his exam. The formula sheet was only to include specific formulas clearly outlined by the course instructor. Student A chooses to include other notes in order to help him remember the steps to using these formulas to solve problems. At the end of the examination, the course instructor collected all cheat sheets and noticed that Student A had included a small amount of unauthorized material on her formula sheet. The course instructor notified both the student and Academic Advising. The instructor did not meet with the student as there is concrete evidence that a violation of the exam protocol took place.

Because the exam was worth 40% and was a final exam, it was a major academic offense. The case was sent to the Faculty's Academic Integrity Committee.

At the meeting with the Academic Integrity Committee, the student took full responsibility for his actions as he knew this was cheating. The student explained he was having problems understanding the course materials. He demonstrated that he understood why cheating was wrong and promised to not cheat again; the student also agreed to meet with the Student Success Centre in order to receive additional support with course work. It was the student's second violation of academic integrity; the first offence was a lesser academic offence.

Decision: The Academic Integrity Committee determined that a grade of 0% was an appropriate sanction for the offence.

Rationale: The Committee took into consideration the fact that the formula sheet contained only a small amount of extra information. However, because the misconduct occurred during a final examination and because it was a second academic misconduct, it was determined that a more severe penalty was appropriate. The penalty for the first offence was a warning that formula sheets for tests were only to contain approved information. Since the student repeated the same type of action on this second offence, the Committee believed that he had not learned from his previous misconduct and that a more serious penalty was appropriate. A grade of zero on an exam worth 40% of the final grade was considered a significant penalty since it would be difficult to pass the course without that grade.

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