

## *Academic Honesty Policies at WMU*

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There are all sorts of rules that affect how you live, such as what side of the road you are allowed to drive on, what is considered socially acceptable and perhaps, when you were younger, what time you had to be home at night. In most cases, the rules are communicated to you and you are expected to follow them, and if you don't, there is a sanction of some sort.

Similarly, Western has rules, codes and policies in place that articulate what our academic community considers acceptable and unacceptable conduct on campus. These are the rules set out in the Student Code of Conduct and in the Undergraduate and Graduate catalogs. The policies cover various areas of college life, such as academics, shared living, on-campus conduct, and community expectations.

The underlying purpose of the university's policies is to ensure that all members of the university community are treated fairly and with respect. This is why they set standards for what is considered acceptable behavior – both in and out of the classroom – and give students an idea of what they can expect from other students and faculty.

Academic honesty policies are aimed at honoring the values of **respect**, **honesty** and **fairness**. These values are foundational to creating a good learning environment, and learning is, of course, the point of college.

### *So why do we have these rules in place?*

Besides making sure that we have a good learning environment, following the rules gives us a sense of **belonging** – we are part of a learning community that values academic honesty and integrity. Your responsibility for understanding and following the rules shows that you are willing to be a member of this community. This is the same with following rules in other contexts. The rules in your household are applicable to members of your house, and following them is effectively a sign that you agree to be part of that household.

Having rules also gives people an idea of how they can expect to be treated. For example, social rules generally tell us that, when meeting someone for the first time, punching them in the face is a bad idea. So if we all accept and follow this rule, when I meet someone for the first time, I can reasonably trust that I will not get punched in the face. These rules are useful for making sure that things such as meetings and new encounters start off on a good note.

Similarly, having a student code gives us an expectation that we will be treated **fairly** and with **respect**. For you to be treated **fairly**, your professors have to trust that your work is your own, in order to have a baseline upon which they can judge your work. Conversely, you expect that your professors will give you a grade that they believe you deserve, and you trust that they will grade you **fairly**.

### *Is it more than the rules?*

But is there more to academic honesty than simply following the rules? Yes! We hope that academic honesty is not just something you feel like you are compelled to do by being at Western. College is not just about going to classes and doing your work (although, of course, these are very important!). You are also developing social and academic skills that will serve you well for the rest of your life.

So the rules that define academic honesty are based on principles that are valued outside of just college life. Principles of **honesty**, **fairness** and mutual **respect** are important in all aspects of society, and if you can master them in an academic background, you will be set to uphold these principles after college.

We hope that your time at Western is rewarding. When you graduate, you will be leaving with more than just a diploma. If you embrace the principles underlying the academic honesty rules, you will also be leaving as a better-rounded individual who has a sense of integrity, both in the classroom and beyond.

### *Discussion questions*

1. We have rules in many aspects of life. Can you think of an example of when *not* having rules would be better than having rules? Why or why not?
2. The policies at WMU cover a range of topics, from academic honesty to how you should live with roommates in the residence halls. What kind of things should university rules include, and what kind of things should they leave up to students?
3. One aspect of having rules that has not been discussed very much so far is the prospect of sanctions. That is, if you do not follow the rules, there are consequences. What kind of purpose do sanctions serve? Why do you think we have them? Should we follow the rules because there is a threat of sanctions, or for some other reason?
4. The concept of rules and policies is almost always bound up with the concept of fairness. You probably have, at some point, thought a rule was unfair. What does a rule need to be like in order to be fair and promote fairness at the same time? Should you follow a rule even if you think it's unfair?

### *Examples*

1. Jeff had planned to study for tomorrow's physics test after work tonight, but his supervisor has asked him to work a few hours overtime because the guy on the next shift called in sick. Jeff really needs the extra money to pay off the textbook charges on his credit card—and more than that, he needs to stay on his supervisor's good side so that he can keep his job between now and Christmas break. But if he does work tonight, Jeff knows he'll never be ready for tomorrow's test. Gambling that his physics professor will not ask for a doctor's note—she never has before—Jeff sends her an e-mail claiming to have a fever and asking if he can take the test later in the week “because I'll need to go to the Health Center in the morning.”

***What kinds of violations of university policies has Jeff committed? What could have been done differently to avoid this? What is the function of the policies in these situations?***

2. Suppose two students are writing research papers for a history course. On a visit to the library they both come across the following excerpt from a compilation, *Napoleon: The Final Verdict*, copyrighted in 1996 by Arms & Armour Press. The passage refers to the closing stages of the Battle of Waterloo and was written by Andrew Uffindell.

*The original*

At this stage many a general would have broken off the battle and retreated. But Napoleon could not afford a single setback for it would destroy his reputation and embolden the political opposition in Paris. He had no choice but to stake everything on an attack by his Guard against Wellington. To boost his army's flagging morale, Napoleon sent messengers around the battlefield falsely to announce that Marshal Grouchy was arriving. This ruse was risky for if Napoleon's troops discovered the truth, the sudden disillusionment would shatter the army. But Napoleon was a gambler, and the cheers of "Vive l'Empereur! Soldats, voila Grouchy!" certainly galvanized his army into a renewed effort in support of the guard attack.

*Example A*

All seemed lost for Napoleon, and many a general would have broken off the battle and retreated. Yet, he could not afford do to so as a single setback would destroy his reputation and harden the political opposition in Paris.

*Example B*

According to Uffindell, all seemed lost for Napoleon, and "many a general would have broken off the battle and retreated. But Napoleon could not afford a single setback for it would destroy his reputation and embolden the political opposition in Paris." (186)

***Which is the better example? Why? What violations of university policies are being committed? What principles in the policies are being undermined? How do university policies help to foster good academic scholarship?***

*The examples come from Creighton University's handbook, Learning in the Academy: An Introduction to the Culture of Scholarship, available at: [www2.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/docs/LearningInAcademy.pdf](http://www2.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/docs/LearningInAcademy.pdf).*