

QUESTION: *Plagiarism cases at our university are reported to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Responding to what she sees as students' nonchalant attitudes toward plagiarism reports, a department chair asked if cases could also be reported to professors in each student's major. If anyone knows about legal implications of this action, I would appreciate getting the information.*

RESPONSES:

At Drake University, all violations of academic integrity are reported to the dean's office of the student's college. Instructors who suspect a violation can inquire at the respective dean's office if a previous violation has occurred. Our procedure has been vetted by our university counsel.

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At Stephen F. Austin State University, violations are reported to the Dean of the college in which the student's major is located. After the second violation, the file is turned over to student judicial affairs for a hearing and punishment.

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I would think that an instructor's duty is to evaluate a student's plagiarism or dishonesty case without prejudice, and, therefore, without knowledge of any other cases in which the student is or has been involved. If an instructor finds that a student has plagiarized or otherwise violated the rules of academic honesty, that should be reported to a more central level where records are kept. If the person at that level determines there is a pattern of academic dishonesty, then procedures should be in place to take appropriate actions such as placing the student on probation or dismissing the student. At Towson University, that central level is the Office of Judicial Affairs (which was recently renamed the Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education!).

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At Texas A&M International, faculty report violations of our honor code to the chair, the dean, and the judicial officer for Student Affairs. The judicial officer works with an Honor Council, which is composed of three students (elected) and four faculty members (3 elected and 1 appointed by the Provost). The Honor Council hears appeals and recommends, when appropriate, either remedial action such as a workshop on documentation or academic sanctions beyond grade penalties for the course in question. The Honor Council maintains a record of such cases so that repeat offenders may be identified. For cases of plagiarism, faculty notify students via official campus e-mail of the plagiarism, of the grade penalty, and of their right to appeal within 3 days of the e-mail. Faculty then submit hard copies of the student's work and the evidence of plagiarism to the chair, dean, and judicial affairs officer. Most of our faculty use Turnitin to catch cases of plagiarism. A&M System attorneys have not seen a problem with our procedures.

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I'd guess that sharing the information with all professors in the student's major department would be contrary to FERPA restrictions, but I would certainly advise checking with your legal office. At Northern Illinois U, reported plagiarism cases become part of the student's file, and are available to those who have access to that file (department advisor, college advisor, judicial affairs, registration and records) but not to all faculty in the student's major department.

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At Missouri State faculty have the option to fail the student and assign a grade of XF, which indicates on the transcript that it was an F due to an academic integrity violation. This is seen by most faculty as a last resort and there are a series of steps available short of the XF. In all cases faculty are encouraged to notify the Provost's Office so that repeat offenders are more likely to be

noticed. This is especially helpful when a student appeals some disciplinary step claiming theirs was a first offense and it turns out there have been several previous allegations or actions.

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