

Academic Integrity Subcommittee of the Senate

Committee on Academic Development and Procedures

Meeting: 21 October 2024, 1.30-2.50pm

Present: Gavan Watson (chair), Erin Meger, Kelley Packalen, Brian Frank, Katie Zutautas, Sylvie Garabedian, Dreyden George, Emils Matiss, Claire O'Brien (secretary).

Regrets: Norma Barrett, Heather Trojek, Melissa Seal, Rebecca Coupland.

The chair welcomed Dr. Erin Meger, a new faculty member representative on the subcommittee.

Subcommittee member Kelley Packalen acts as Special Advisor to the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning) on academic integrity. She drafted the proposed changes to the AI Procedures (that were shared with the subcommittee ahead of the meeting) following consultation and discussion over the past 18 months with Academic Integrity Leads and Assistants. Dr. Packalen summarized the four main areas for discussion today:

- 1) Categorization of findings of departure from academic integrity as Level I or Level II. Associated with this, the length of time that records of Level II findings should be retained.
- 2) Cross-faculty coordination procedures.
- 3) Potential change in who can impose a sanction of course failure: AI Lead rather than an instructor.
- 4) Addition of a "middle ground" review by the AI Lead prior to sanctioning, in a limited number of cases where this may be necessary.
- 5) Addition of further restrictions to what a student can do once an academic integrity investigation has been launched. Namely, not apply to have the course marked on a pass/fail basis, and not apply for credit standing in the course.

Other more minor edits are proposed throughout the procedures that are outside of these main categories. Dr. Packalen invited subcommittee members to use the comment function to make comments and changes on these in the shared document.

1) Categorization of Findings as Level 1 and Level 2.

Dr. Packalen noted that faculty, students, the Ombudsperson's office and AI Leads have all identified inconsistency in how findings are categorized across the university. The levels denote the seriousness of the finding. Level I findings, which are first-time departures and generally more minor, are kept separately from the student's main file and only consulted if a student has a second finding of departure from AI. Level II findings are kept on a student's record throughout their university career and for ten years after graduation. Some faculties have categorized findings this way for many years. Others began in 2021/2022 when required by the latest revision to the procedures. While criteria for making the decision are included in the procedures, it is the case that some may conclude a finding is Level 1 and some Level 2 using those same criteria. Some AI Leads

see the categorization as a penalty in itself, and others see it as a record-keeping decision. The categorization of a finding is not open to appeal.

There was consensus at the meeting, reflecting consensus among the stakeholders Dr. Packalen has worked with, that the current retention period for Level II departures (10 years post-graduation) is too long. The subcommittee discussed what retention period would be appropriate. Factors raised were:

- Implications of retaining Level II finding post-graduation. A limited number of institutions ask the applicant's home Faculty if they ever had an academic misconduct issue. This is by no means common practice. The requests usually come from American law schools, medical schools and police academies, but not all of them do these checks for academic misconduct. Professional bodies may also seek information on a graduate's ethical misconduct during their time at Queen's. This information is only released with the student's permission. If permission is not given, the university would not complete the check for the requesting body, which may preclude the applicant from applying.
- Members discussed the roles that findings of departure from AI serve in encouraging learning and personal growth, and accountability for academic misconduct. Comparison with the non-academic misconduct process, which promotes restorative justice, was made. Fairness was considered both from the point of view of students looking to learn and move on from an earlier departure, and of other students competing for the same opportunities who have not had a finding of departure from academic integrity. Only Level II findings are kept with the student's file. These are more serious and/or repeated findings.
- Our peer institutions have a range of approaches to retention of AI findings – from a certain number of years after the student's departure, to permanent retention.
- Would we consider the retention length differently if a student takes a long gap from studies, then returns to graduate, than if they graduate? In the wider context of record retention (not academic integrity-related), if a student leaves Queen's for 5 years, their student record is destroyed, even if they later return to the university.
- A student member favoured a 3- or 5-year retention period post-graduation and highlighted that clear guidelines on categorization of findings are needed. Another student member is currently considering a 1-year period and would like to consult other students on this. The AMS observer indicated he would be in favour of a 3-year period. Several members expressed a preference for a 5-year period. One noted that the seriousness of Level II findings contributed to their preference for a 5-year period.
- As the discussion concluded, the subcommittee was considering a retention period in the zone of 3-5 years post-graduation. Further feedback can be communicated to Dr. Packalen or left as comments in the shared document ahead of the next subcommittee meeting.

2) Cross Faculty Coordination

Dr. Packalen has discussed this topic extensively with AI Leads. They agree that prior to the 2021 revision of the AI Procedures there was not enough consultation between faculties where there was misconduct by a student from one faculty in a course offered by another faculty. The goal of consultation is to establish if a sanction imposed in the course faculty would have unintended

consequences in the student's home faculty – for example, impacting their academic progression. However, following the procedural revision, there is now too much consultation. AI Leads support appropriate consultation, but the level of communication required - between AI Leads (usually Associate Deans) – is difficult to maintain while dealing with sanctions in a timely manner. AI Leads support the current proposal (as outlined in the procedures section 5). They all agree that they want to be consulted if a student may fail the course due to a sanction.

Dr. Packalen gave an example from her own Business course, which includes Engineering students. An Engineering student plagiarized in an assignment worth 40% of the course mark. Given the opportunity to resubmit, the student plagiarized again in the resubmitted assignment. A failure in the course would be a reasonable sanction for that behaviour. But Dr. Packalen was aware of other factors; this was the last course the student required in a stream, they had no opportunity to retake it, and it would have stopped them graduating. These are the kinds of scenarios where the home AI Lead would want to be consulted on the sanction.

3) Assignment of Sanction of Failure in the Course, or Sanction that leads to Failure in the Course

There was discussion of how the language of 'likely' to fail could be open to interpretation. One way to reduce that would be to set a threshold of course grade reduction that would most likely trigger a course failure – for example, 40%.

It was noted that it is rare for instructors to impose a sanction of straight failure (grade of zero) in the course. Loss of course marks is a more common sanction; if the penalty is significant enough, failure becomes a likely outcome. AI Leads were clear that they would like to assign the sanction for the first type of failure, but did not want to sanction the second type. The subcommittee agreed that we must be careful not to treat each of these cases with too much inconsistency.

It was also noted that in a professional program, ethical behaviour may be one of the course expectations. If a student had a finding of departure from AI in the course, they would fail that expectation and therefore the course. That is more of an academic decision than a sanction for the departure, but the end result for the student is the same.

It was pointed out that it could be difficult for instructors to understand the threshold of where the student is at risk of failing, when assigning a sanction. One challenge is what happens when the departure is on the first assignment of the course, so the ultimate impact is unknown at the time of assigning a sanction. One suggestion was that the sanction for a first departure shouldn't result in failing a course unless approved by the AI Lead.

In conclusion, Dr. Packalen noted that we do not have an agreed way forward on whether a sanction of course failure (whether explicit or resulting from a large grade deduction) should continue to be an instructor-decided sanction, or only assigned by the AI Lead. Discussion will continue on this.

4) "Middle Ground" Review.

Dr. Packalen highlighted section 3.4.4 of the procedures and talked about the history of "de novo" appeals, that are no longer included in the AI Procedures. While the elimination of these appeals is generally positive with regard to procedural fairness, on rare occasions it had an incidental benefit

of giving the appeal decision-maker the chance to resolve procedural issues that may have arisen when an instructor was inexperienced in dealing with academic integrity matters.

Under the current procedures, AI Leads can receive a finding on which to assign a sanction, where they see problems with the finding itself. They may feel that the finding would be overturned, if the student were to appeal. Therefore, the creation of the middle ground review outlined in the shared document is proposed. This review would be envisaged in a small number of cases.

The subcommittee viewed the new procedure as reasonable. Members will revisit the specific language in the shared document.

5) Restriction on Allowable Actions once an Investigation has begun. Possible Restriction on Designation of Course as Pass/Fail, and on Application for Credit Standing.

Under the current procedures, a student cannot drop a course if they are being investigated for a possible departure from academic integrity in that course. The proposed change is to extend the restrictions so that once an investigation begins, a student would not be able to appeal for credit standing in that course or apply to take it as a pass/fail course. Both of these actions would mask any potential grade sanction.

Members discussed the existing restriction on dropping the course. A faculty member described a scenario where students require a high grade in certain courses to progress in their program. In cases where a student has a minor first-time departure, she may be open to allowing them to drop the course. Right now, the student is locked in to completing the course, knowing they cannot achieve the grade they'd need to move forward. This creates a difficult, disengaged situation for both student and instructor.

There was a suggestion that the inability to drop could be considered as a sanction option for Level I findings and be mandatory for Level II findings. Alternate views were also put forward, recognizing that dropping the course allows students to effectively erase a sanction. The meeting time elapsed before discussion on this item could be concluded.

The chair closed the meeting, concluding that further conversations and comments in the shared document were welcomed over the next weeks. Dr. Packalen will produce a revised draft of the procedures. Once this subcommittee comes to a consensus on changes it considers appropriate, we will talk about next steps, including consultation. The Senate Committee on Academic Development and Procedures has delegated authority to approve revisions to the AI Procedures on behalf of Senate.

The meeting was adjourned at 2.50pm.