

Academic Integrity Advising at Rhode Island College

Introduction

After a hearing in front of the Academic Integrity Board (AIB), students found to have committed an academic integrity violation may be assigned an Academic Integrity Advisor (AIA), who is a RIC faculty or staff person who volunteers to coach a student in academic integrity and related issues. The purpose of the following information is to inform the Rhode Island College (RIC) community of the Academic Integrity Advising program.

The Academic Integrity Board

The Academic Integrity Board hears cases of violations of academic integrity at Rhode Island College. Each case is as unique as the student in front of the Board. Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to: cheating on a test; cutting and pasting material from the Internet without crediting sources; using another student's project and claiming it as his or her own; taking photographs of test questions and distributing them to others; manufacturing observations; and more. A violation incident is reported to the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) by the professor of the course in which the violation took place. When a student commits more than one violation, or if the violation is egregious, the student must appear before the Board.

After reading about and listening to all evidence in a case, the Board determines whether the student is found to have committed an academic integrity violation, and, if so, will determine a penalty. The Board has several options which include but are not limited to: academic probation, suspension, expulsion, and work with an AIA. In its quest for answers and reasons for violations, the Board almost always discovers a student needs to improve his or her understanding of academic integrity and ways to demonstrate academic work with integrity. However, the Board discovers much more.

Decisions of the Board

Using a holistic paradigm of looking at the student and the factors involved in the incidents, the Board often finds the student needs assistance in a variety of dimensions. Although the Board believes all RIC students must be held to an honest and ethical level of academic work and all RIC students are accountable and responsible for their own work, there are often additional circumstances involved in a violation. For example, a student possibly experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is unable to focus and manage time properly and, in addition, may not fully grasp how to properly cite a paper when information is obtained from Internet sources. In another case a student may be overwhelmed by a recent breakup and lack the mental health skills to manage stress and keep academic priorities in order. A student may have never been given the training to properly compose a research paper. A student may have difficulties with the English language. A student may need to learn the importance of ethics in the workplace. A student may need help in reading. A student may have been unclear as far as the parameters of "group work", or a student may have needed clarification on how to complete a difficult assignment but never dared to ask the professor. There are many reasons for academic integrity violations, including outright deception and dishonesty.

Academic Integrity Advising

The Board works together to determine the most appropriate penalty and prevention. For example, in the first case above, the Board will design a personalized and multifaceted prescription. It will suggest mental health counseling. It will also place the student on academic probation and assign the student an AIA. The role of the AIA is to help the student prevent academic integrity violations in the future. The route to that end is as varied as the student assigned to an AIA.

The AIA program is successful in great part because it is a personalized one-to-one -arrangement. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Board discusses the needs of the student and thinks of a faculty or staff member who best suits these needs. The Board contacts the faculty or staff person to determine the person's interest and availability in the case. If agreeable, the student is then instructed to contact the AIA to make arrangements for an initial meeting. After the initial meeting the AIA will determine the course of the advisement sessions and work the student will perform.

The work the student performs for the AIA is determined by the AIA based on case evidence and further interaction with the student. The AIA creates a relevant and personalized program, and determines the timeline for program. The AIA sets the meeting dates and work deadlines. Normally work can be completed during the course of a semester, but some cases have required more time. This is up to the AIA. The AIA works on a volunteer basis, and inconveniences and burdens should be minimal. Students who do not satisfactorily complete the program with their AIA are unable to graduate, and may experience further sanctions determined by the Board.

Academic Integrity Work

The AIA may work closely with the AIB to determine the best route to take with the student. The Board is able to share possible approaches based on past cases. Most AIAs find the best route is a multi-faceted approach. Some of the work assigned by AIAs in the past include but are not limited to: completion of the Indiana University Plagiarism Tutorial; research and written abstracts of professional papers on ethics in a relevant profession; papers relevant to the student's academic program; demonstration of proper citation; demonstration of good time management; papers reviewed by the Writing Center; papers turned into the AIA in stages according to a strict timeline; written reflections on real-life cases of ethical violations viewed online; papers written about academic integrity; and, student assessment and restructuring of related aspects of life.

Although most AIA's appreciate information and ideas about past case direction and structure, the AIB hesitates to guide the AIA too much, as the AIB trusts the AIA will use professional expertise to take the best approach with the assigned student after initial meetings and information gathering.

Conclusion

The RIC AIA program is in its developmental stages, and although it appears to be very successful so far in preventing re-occurrence of academic integrity violations, more research, recruitment, education and evaluation is needed. The Board will follow through on this process in the coming years to develop an innovative and helpful program. More information regarding the Academic Integrity Board can be found at <http://www.ric.edu/Academic-Integrity-Board/Pages/default.aspx>