Frequently Asked Questions By Faculty About Academic Misconduct

How do I report an alleged violation of University Rules to the Office of Academic Affairs?
By visiting our website and following the referrals link. You can make behavioral referrals to Judicial Affairs and academic misconduct referrals to Academic Affairs. The information we MUST have to process a case is the student's full name and M number along with a detailed account of the behavior in question and any supporting documentation necessary to prove the case. You can email academic misconduct referrals, drop them off in person to our office, or send them to Academic Affairs, CAB 111.

Academic Misconduct

Am I required to report all cases of academic misconduct that I encounter?
Although not required, it is highly encouraged! See below.

Why can't I just do what I want to the student and not go through the judicial process for academic misconduct?

a. The Office of Academic Affairs enters all alleged academic misconduct violators into a database. This way we can keep track of how many times an individual student has been referred. Faculty members typically do not know if a student has previously been accused or found responsible for academic misconduct by another instructor in another class. In other words, we are able to track if we have a student who made a one-time mistake or a student who consistently makes the same “mistake” across campus.

b. The judicial process allows a certain amount of protection to you as a faculty member. All students are required by law to have due process protection rights in cases of misbehavior, including academic misconduct. This due process is guaranteed through our office and shifts the burden to us to manage the student and subsequent case.

How much evidence do I need to accuse a student of academic misconduct?
Generally, if you are suspicious, you have enough evidence to make a referral, although the student may ultimately be found not responsible for a rules violation. We believe students who go through the process are positively influenced regardless of the outcome. The larger the amount of concrete evidence available, the increased chance that the student will be found responsible for violating our rules. Cases of plagiarism should be submitted with a copy of the sources the paper was plagiarized from. Crib notes, cheat sheets, etc. should also be turned in as evidence. The stronger the evidence, the quicker the case is typically resolved.

What happens when I refer a student for academic misconduct?
The student will be sent an email and a letter from Academic Affairs informing them that they have been accused of violating the University's academic misconduct policy and informing them of their scheduled meeting time with a member of the Academic Affairs staff. If the student does not attend the meeting, a hold is placed on their student account preventing the student from making any changes to their schedule and/or registering for new classes.
During the meeting, the student is notified of their rights in the process, the procedures, and the evidence that is against them. If the student accepts responsibility, the case is handled administratively. If there is a discrepancy of facts or the student feels they have been erroneously accused, a hearing before the University Academic Misconduct Committee may be arranged at the discretion of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

The instructor will be notified of the finding at the conclusion of the disciplinary process via email. If it is an administrative hearing, that notice comes fairly quickly. If the case is referred to a committee, the time required to complete the case will vary. If the instructor is not notified, it means the case is pending and/or there has been some other kind of delay. If a faculty member has questions about the case, they can always contact the office to determine the status of the case.

**Will a student found responsible for academic misconduct automatically fail the course?**
The faculty member determines the grade the student receives if the student is found responsible for academic misconduct. It is important to be consistent with the action stated in your course syllabus. You may choose to penalize the work in question, deduct points from the total grade, allow a rewrite, and/or fail the student for the class.

**Will I be able to find out what happens to the student I refer?**
Yes and no. We will inform the instructor of whether or not the student was found responsible for a rules violation. We are not permitted to release all sanctions due to FERPA restrictions. We ARE permitted to release disciplinary sanctions on a need-to-know basis. For example, if a student is placed on probation, required to do community service, and restricted from being present in the building where you teach, we would be permitted to tell you that the student is not permitted to be in the building where you teach. We would not be able to tell you that he/she is on probation and performing community service. Decisions on what information may be released are made on a case-by-case basis.

**When a student is found responsible for a rules violation, are they automatically suspended or expelled from MTSU?**
No. We deal with violations on a case-by-case basis. Suspension and expulsion are two possible sanctions, but other sanctions may also include a written reprimand, probation, and/or various educational sanctions such as research assignments and papers. For academic misconduct cases, if we are dealing with an inexperienced student, the sanctions are lighter than they are for a seasoned student. It is important to note that if we recommend a sanction of suspension or expulsion in an administrative hearing, the student may choose to accept that consequence or an alternate adjudication method. In other words, a student has to agree to a suspension or expulsion in the administrative meeting.

**Will this process require a lot of my time?**
Typically, it only requires the amount of time that it takes for you to fill out the referral form and gather any supporting information/documentation. At times, a staff member may call or email you for additional details and information. If the case goes before the University Academic Misconduct Committee, you will be asked to appear as a witness. The majority of our cases are handled administratively without going to a committee hearing.

**What should I do if a student I referred drops the course?**
You should still refer the student. Our office will still follow up on the case.
**Am I required to meet with the student?**

It is always best to communicate clearly with your students including your concerns. If you decide to send a referral, you should attempt to inform the student of the allegation and notify the student that the information has been forwarded to the Office of Academic Affairs. In cases of academic misconduct, we highly recommend the faculty to meet with the student as we believe this is where the real learning occurs for the student. Should you decide to meet with the student, you are required to comply with the following procedures:

1. the student will be provided notice that he/she is believed to have committed an act or acts of academic misconduct in violation of University rules;
2. the student will be presented with all evidence in the knowledge or possession of the instructor which tends to support the allegation(s) of academic misconduct; and
3. the student will be given an opportunity to present information on his/her behalf.

**Is the student allowed to stay in class while the case is under investigation?**

YES. The student may stay in class pending a hearing if the faculty member determines that the student's presence in the class does not interfere with the instructor's ability to teach the class or the ability of other class members to learn.

**Can I permanently remove a student from class?**

You are authorized to TEMPORARILY remove a student from class. It is best to discuss the removal with the student and explain the basis for the temporary removal. If you wish to remove them PERMANENTLY, you must make a referral through our office and indicate that you want the student permanently removed. You must also clearly instruct the student to NOT RETURN to class until the case is resolved through Academic Affairs.