

REPORT TO THE FACULTY ON ACADEMIC HONESTY VIOLATIONS AT NEW MEXICO TECH

2015 - Spring 2019

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In my role as Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs (AVPAA) I enforce Tech's honesty policy for cases involving undergraduate students, while the Dean of Graduate Studies does so for graduate students. The details of our honesty policy are found in the Student Handbook. This brief report concerns honesty policy violations involving undergraduate students, which are much more common than for graduate students.

I focus on the time period ranging from 2015 to the Spring semester of 2019, in part because in 2015 Tech had more documented cases of honesty violations than at any time in the school's history (Fig. 1). Starting in the Fall semester of 2015 the Dean of Graduate Studies and I undertook a series of interventions to try to reduce the number of violations, including: presentations to the Faculty Senate, presentations to student groups, emails to faculty and students with accompanying informational files, and an attempt, together with the members of an Honor Code Task Force, to establish an honor code for students, faculty, and staff. Thankfully, perhaps in part due to these interventions, the alarming upward trend we saw in 2015 did not continue, and the situation has improved. However, we did have a relatively large number of cases reported last spring, so I am not claiming victory yet.

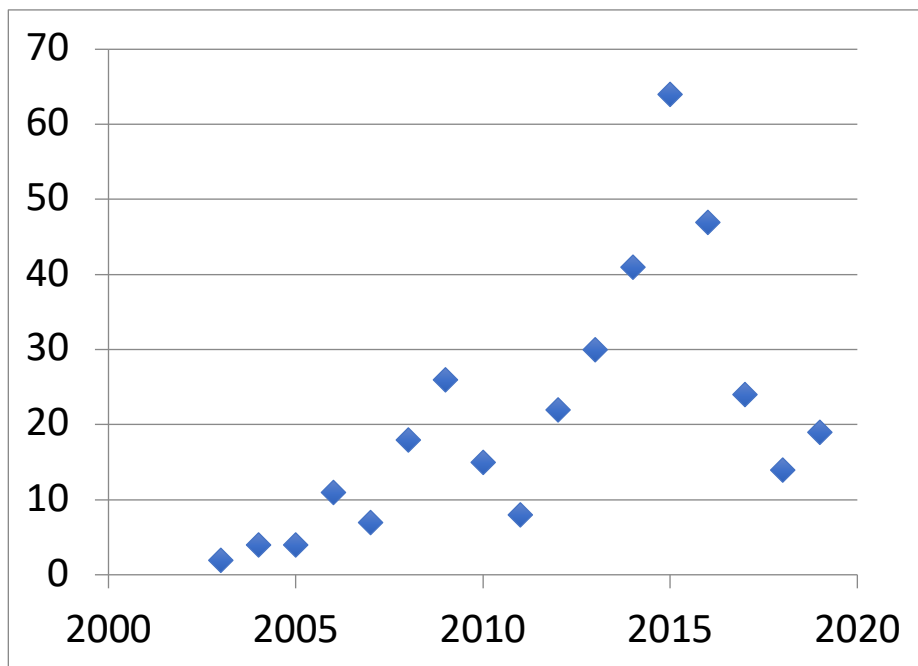


Figure 1. Total number of undergraduate honesty violations per year. Note that the number for 2019 will increase as summer and fall cases are not yet entered.

The most common types of violations of the honesty policy involve copying or otherwise using unauthorized material to complete homework or laboratory assignments (Table 1). Cheating on exams or quizzes, either by looking at another student’s exam, a cell phone, or unauthorized notes, is the next most common category. Plagiarism on papers is relatively uncommon, perhaps because students are aware that it has become very easy to catch using anti-plagiarism software or searching for suspect strings of text using Google search. A few students are caught forging signatures (often their advisor’s) and a few are reported for helping other students to cheat.

TABLE 1. TYPES OF HONESTY POLICY VIOLATIONS AT NEW MEXICO TECH

Violation	Fall 15	Spr 16	Sum 16	Fall 16	Spr 17	Sum 17	Fall 17	Spr 18	Sum 18	Fall 18	Spr 19	% Cases
Copying Homework or Lab Material												
From on-line source	35	0	0	21	2	0	6	0	0	0	16	52
From other students	14	8	0	8	1	0	4	0	1	2	3	26
Aiding others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Copying Exam/Quiz Answers												
From on-line source	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	4
From other students	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	5
Aiding others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Illegal notes	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Forged Documents or Sgnatures	0	3	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5
Plagiarized Papers												
From other student(s)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	2
From on-line sources	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Total	51	15	0	32	6	0	18	10	1	3	19	

Penalties for violating our honesty policy are assigned by the instructor, and are most commonly a zero for the assignment/exam. In cases where I determine that the student has repeatedly violated our honesty policy I impose a more severe penalty, usually an F for the class, but in some cases, suspension with a permanent notation on the student’s transcript that it was for honesty policy violations. Since I became AVPAA in 2015 I have only had to suspend two students for such repeated violations.

Last year we began using a cloud based system (Maxient) to manage honesty violation cases. Reporting cases is now done on-line, through a link to the reporting interface on NMT’s Academic Honesty and Research Misconduct Resources web page (https://www.nmt.edu/academicaffairs/avpaa/academic%20_honesty.php).