

## Addressing Academic Misconduct: Q&A

**1. Do I need to discuss the offence/penalty with the student before recording the incident in the Student Conduct Database?**

No. A student is entitled to the opportunity to respond to the allegation before a penalty is imposed. This has been built into the new process. When faculty report the incident by entering it into the Student Conduct Database, the first Notification (called Notification of Academic Misconduct) will provide the student with that opportunity.

**2. Why can't I see whether a student has a prior record for academic misconduct?**

Faculty are the issuing authority on an academic penalty. An academic penalty includes warning, resubmission of assignment (with or without mark deduction), partial or full mark deduction, grade deduction or failing grade in the course.

A student's prior record (whether they have one or don't have one) is not relevant to whether misconduct has occurred in the current instance. The faculty member should base this decision on its own merits.

The academic penalty should be determined by the faculty member on suspected academic misconduct before them. The faculty member is not responsible to assign progressive discipline based on prior conduct. Whether progressive disciplinary penalty is warranted will be determined by the Academic Administrator (Chair, Dean or Vice President, Academic) in the form of Administrative Penalty (over and above the academic penalty).

An exception to this may be if the instructor has determined to report the student for an incident of academic misconduct (for offences such as plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration) in which the instructor is prepared to allow for resubmission of the work. If the instructor wishes to allow for a resubmission in the case of a first offence, the instructor can reach out to the Chair or Academic Integrity Coordinator to determine whether the student has already completed the Academic Integrity Workshop.

**3. Why can't I just handle a "warning" informally without entering it in the database?**

Informal warnings undermine the process that is in place to ensure that students are held accountable in a transparent manner, that there will be consistency in the application of the policy, and that the student is referred for participation in the Academic Integrity Workshop.

**4. How much time do I have to report a suspected incident of academic misconduct?**

Instructors are not required to first discuss the issue with the student before entering it into the Student Conduct Database (as this opportunity is provided in the first notification that the student receives). Thus, notification via the Student Conduct Database should be issued as soon as possible so that the matter can be addressed expeditiously. General good practice is to enter the incident in the within 3 days of suspecting that academic misconduct has occurred.

## 5. How do I determine which penalty to apply?

Generally, there is a range of penalties that may apply to an academic offence. Refer to the [guidelines](#) to review general best practices.

Although each incident will be reviewed by the instructor on its own circumstances, faculty will want to ensure they are applying principles of fairness as they exercise their discretion. In other words, students with similar offences in similar circumstances should be treated similarly.

Instructors will have the opportunity to adjust the penalty within 10 days of entering the incident on the Student Conduct Database. There may be factors that an instructor did not know about at the time of original entry that may lead them to adjust the penalty (within the appropriate penalty range).

Recall, also, that an instructor is basing the penalty only on the circumstances before them and not basing it on whether a student has a prior record for academic misconduct. Despite this, there may still be mitigating or aggravating factors in the case that may be taken into consideration in assigning the academic penalty. Some of these may be known to instructor at the time of initial reporting or may become known to them during the 10-day period before an academic penalty is issued/finalized.

Mitigating factors that may indicate a penalty in the lower range:

- It is a relatively minor infraction
- The student is in their first semester of studies
- Although the misconduct is clearly set out in the policy and in the onboarding academic integrity training for students, the instructions provided by instructor left room for confusion
- The student freely admits to the misconduct and demonstrates remorse

Aggravating factors that may indicate a penalty in the higher range:

- It is a relatively serious infraction
- The offence involves a breach of the integrity of the assessment itself/ability to safeguard the assessment (uploading/sharing/releasing the assessment or portions of the assessment)
- The offence involves deliberation or an elaborate plan to deceive
- This is the second academic misconduct in the same course where sufficient time has passed since the first offence such that the student should have clearly known better
- The student denies the offence in the face of clear evidence to the contrary or takes steps to avoid accountability
- The course or assignment involves outcomes pertinent to ethics or professional responsibility

If at any time during the reporting process you have questions, or would like to discuss penalty ranges, contact the [Academic Integrity Coordinator](#).

**6. What is the difference between a mark penalty and a grade deduction?**

The significant aspect in distinguishing these two penalties is whether the penalty impacts just the assessment (mark penalty) or whether it further impacts the student's final grade in the course (grade penalty).

The weight of the assessment may be a relevant factor in determining which penalty to impose (see below).

A **mark penalty** impacts the mark on the assessment. It may be a partial or full mark penalty. A full mark penalty results in a zero on the assessment.

A **grade penalty** impacts the student's final grade in the course and may include a mark penalty.

If a grade penalty is assigned, this means that the student's final grade will be dropped one level at the end of the semester. The grade penalty assures that a student who has received this penalty cannot end up with an "A" in the course.

Application of the grade penalty works as follows. The student's grade is calculated based upon the total calculation of all grades (including any mark penalties) and in accordance with weights set out in the course outline. This determines the final grade. A grade deduction is then applied:

- A student who scores an "A" in the course, will end up with a final grade of "B"
- A student who scores a "B" in the course, will end up with a final grade of "C"
- A student who scores a "C" in the course, will end up with a final grade of "D"
- A student who scores a "D" in the course, will end up with a final grade of "F"

A grade deduction is a more serious penalty than a mark penalty because it is usually in addition to a mark penalty. Therefore, grade deduction may be appropriate in cases of high stakes/summative assessments where there are significant aggravating factors. It is for this reason that Academic Administrators can apply a grade deduction as an administrative penalty. A grade penalty can be an academic penalty assigned by an instructor or an administrative penalty issued by the Chair.

Using grade deduction to apply a more serious penalty is not appropriate for pass/fail or satisfactory/unsatisfactory courses and, in these cases, "Failing Grade in the Course" should be considered instead.

**7. When should you consider issuing a grade deduction instead of a mark penalty?**

A grade deduction may be appropriate in cases where the assessment is a low-stakes formative assessment. For example, a mark penalty on a low stakes assessment of 4% means that a student can complete the course and receive a final grade of "A" even if they received a full mark penalty (zero on the assignment) for academic misconduct. It should generally be avoided that a student cheats in the course and ends up with a final grade of A.

**8. Am I required to provide opportunity to resubmit work?**

No. However, resubmission of work is strongly encouraged in cases where an instructor is satisfied that the student honestly did not know that they were plagiarizing or, in the case of unauthorized collaboration, did not know they could not work with another. Presumably, this would mean it is the student's first offence. For this purpose, the instructor has the discretion to ask their Chair or the Academic Integrity Coordinator whether it would be appropriate to provide student with resubmission opportunity.

**9. Am I required to get authorization from my Chair to assign a failing grade in the course as a penalty for academic misconduct?**

Faculty are the issuing authority on academic penalties that range from warning to a failing grade in the course. Faculty have the discretion to assign the appropriate penalty and should be judicious in this regard. A failing grade in the course should be issued only for very serious offences. Instructors who are unsure about whether a failing grade penalty is appropriate may wish to discuss it with their Chair.

**10. Why can't I assign a warning for plagiarism?**

Warning is appropriate in less serious violations where there is no associated mark penalty or deduction. It would not be appropriate to award marks for plagiarized work. Some instructors consider a zero on a formative assignment of nominal weight to be a warning. However, the zero given makes it a mark penalty. If plagiarized work is submitted, the minimum "penalty" should be resubmission of assignment.

**11. What should I do if I want to change the offence or penalty after I enter it into the Student Conduct Database?**

You have 10 days from the original entry of Notification of Academic Misconduct to change the offence and/or penalty or add/change any information to the original entry. If you need a penalty or offence changed after the Notification of Academic Penalty has been issued, contact the Academic Integrity Coordinator. For instructions on how to change the entry within 10 days, see [How to Update Complaint Elements Within 10 Days](#).

**12. What is the difference between cancelling a penalty and withdrawing a penalty?**

If you suspected academic misconduct but decided to withdraw it after hearing the student's response, you should "withdraw" the incident. If the entry was entered in error, as in sent to the wrong student, you should "cancel" the incident.

**13. What should I do if I want to change, cancel or withdraw the entry after the 10 day period?**

Contact the [Academic Integrity Coordinator](#).

**14. If this is the second academic misconduct incident by the same student in my course, should I increase the penalty?**

You may. See guidelines for appropriate range of penalty for any given infraction. If you have already reported a student for academic misconduct, and an academic penalty was issued, you may use your discretion to issue a more serious penalty for a second offence in the same course. If the incidents occurred within a short period (i.e., the second incident occurred before the first incident was finalized), you may consider issuing the same level of penalty and allowing the Chair to determine whether to apply an Administrative Penalty.

**15. What happens if a student does not respond to the Notice of Academic Misconduct?**

A Notification of Academic Penalty will be issued 10 days after the entry is made.

**16. Are there educational opportunities for students who have been issued an academic penalty?**

Apart from a very serious first-instance violation that results in an administrative penalty for dismissal, all first-offence penalties require the student to attend a mandatory Academic Integrity Workshop. This program will commence in the Winter 2022 semester and will include all students who received an academic misconduct penalty in the Fall 2021 semester.

**17. I am reporting a student for academic misconduct on a final exam. What should I do about entering a final grade for this student in SIS?**

Enter a grade of “I” in the final grade report. “I” indicates incomplete. Following final decision/resolution of the incident, the grade can be changed accordingly.

**18. Will I receive a notification if the Chair or VPA issues an Administrative Penalty for the incident?**

Yes. A copy of the Notice of Administrative Penalty is provided to the issuer of the academic penalty.

**19. I am concerned that if I report the incident, the student will appeal. What should I do?**

Whether or not a student appeals should not be a factor in determining whether you report the incident. The issue is whether you have probable grounds to suspect that the student has committed academic misconduct.

An appeal is part of any good process (indeed, required by law) to ensure fairness in the application of disciplinary or punitive measures. A student has the right to appeal both academic penalties and administrative penalties. While the right to appeal is automatic, only a very small percentage of students who receive an academic penalty for academic misconduct file an appeal.

For more information about how appeals work, refer to [Student Conduct Notifications on the St. Clair College – Academic Integrity website](#).