Student Senate on Academic Integrity

Assessment and Proposal Document

New Jersey Institute of Technology
11/23/2010

This assessment and proposal was drafted by the Student Senate Ad-hoc Committee on Academic Integrity
Executive Summary:

New Jersey Institute of Technology’s Student Senate, representing the entire undergraduate student body, has compiled this proposal in response to the issue of academic integrity at NJIT.

At the beginning of the Fall 2010 semester, the NJIT Student Senate was discussing pressing issues facing the University. The one topic that surfaced consistently was the issue on academic integrity. In response to this issue, we’ve assessed the situation and are offering this proposal.

Within this proposal, the Senate Ad-hoc Committee on Academic Integrity will deliver key strategic recommendations to be implemented based on our surveying of students, evaluation of professors vigilant in addressing cheating, and expert advice from administration.

Accepting the following recommendations will increase student satisfaction and will likely lead to an increase in student retention. Students will benefit greatly from a culture that does not tolerate cheating, and our degree will not be devalued based upon stigmas that all of our students are cheaters. In addition, graduating NJIT students will enter the workforce with a strong set of morals and ethics, allowing them to excel in their respective professional environments while reinforcing the NJIT reputation among companies and corporations who make an investment in hiring NJIT alumni.
Our Assessments:

Senator Assessment on Academic Integrity

Executive board members, class presidents, college representatives, major representatives, and senators-at-large were instructed to evaluate and document specific instances of cheating that they, or their constituents, had witnessed at our University. Additionally, they were asked to find out if the situation was confronted by either a faculty member or student.

The reports have indicated that student’s methods of cheating are sometimes easy to prevent, sophisticated, or daring. The chart below depicts what we believe to be the most common forms of cheating:

![Methods of Cheating Chart]

The majority of these situations resulted in the cheater(s) not being confronted or penalized. After analyzing who should be responsible to confront these instances, the Senate overwhelmingly said, although it is a collaborative effort between faculty and students, the faculty should be the first line of defense. Our further assessments help support this idea and understand the intricacies of addressing specific instances of cheating.
Student Survey on Academic Integrity

The next step in our assessment involved direct engagement of our constituents through surveys. Our questions did not simply ask if people have witnessed cheating because we are well aware that it is happening. Our questions were crafted to see what our students thought about the issue on academic integrity, and to find out if they shared the same ideas about why these specific issues are not being confronted.

Data collected and portrayed in this portion of our assessment is based upon the responses of 578 undergraduate students at NJIT.

1. If cheating stopped completely, how would that affect grades?

The first survey question yielded interesting results and could be deciphered from the chart below:

![Chart showing survey results]

It is concerning to see that more than half of the surveyed students believe grades would decrease if students weren’t cheating. Our analysis has brought us to these short-term and long-term conclusions.

Short-Term Effect: Students are so dependent on cheating that they would not be able to maintain their current grade point averages.
**Long-Term Effect:** If students are not cheating the only way for them to pass would be to study more, this in turn, would increase the performance and grades of students.

2. **Why do you believe certain professors do not enforce cheating policies?**

Another important question we posed was “Why do you believe certain professors do not enforce cheating policies?” We had given a common set of options to choose from but also a chance for the student’s to give an option not listed. The table below deciphers our results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why do you believe certain professors do not enforce cheating policies?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our “Other” category included answers such as: too many students do it, professors don’t want poor evaluations, my professor’s enforce the policy, and professors don’t have time to report it.

We want to make it clear that students understand addressing a particular instance of cheating could be a very difficult situation. Professors and teacher assistants may be unsure if they are handling the situation correctly. If they are not made aware of some best practices to utilize to address cheating, they will be reluctant to approach it.

For example, if a professor notices a student taking an exam for someone else, what course of action should they take to address the situation? Do they approach the student at that moment in front of the class and tell them they’ve been caught? Or do they wait until the test ends to subtly inform them on what they’ve observed? Though extreme, this is till realistic, and if
faculty is aware of practices that work best, they may be more confident they are addressing the situation safely and appropriately.

*Additional questions and results from our survey can be found at our website – senator.jit.edu*

**Proposal and Strategic Recommendations**

1. **Online Virtual Workshop for Faculty and Teacher Assistants**

   Our first recommendation would be to implement an online virtual workshop that displays best practices to faculty, and teacher assistants, on how to address specific situations of cheating. The Academic Integrity Ad-Hoc Committee had instructed the Senate to recommend professors that are vigilant in addressing cheating. At this time, we are in the process of evaluating these professors and identifying some common best practices they use in specific situations. The data gathered from these evaluations will be used to formulate the workshop, along with additional expert advice from other NJIT faculty and administration. This goal could be completed by forming a task force comprised of faculty and students to ensure execution and proper implementation of the workshop.

   *Additional results from our professor evaluations can be found at our website – senator.jit.edu*

2. **Online Virtual Workshop for Students**

   As mentioned earlier, we understand that this issue is a collaborative effort by both faculty and students. We suggest creating an online virtual workshop for students that highlights ethical standards for academic integrity, and how being academically dishonest hinders growth individually, and as a University. The Student Senate would assist in dedicating resources to ensure this workshop is effective. Perhaps incorporating the virtual workshop into Freshmen Seminar courses would help introduce this aspect of our culture to new students.

3. **Recruiting Additional Student-Proctors**

   After garnering feedback from students, faculty, and administration, we feel that having more proctors during an exam will discourage students from cheating. Perhaps allowing students to get service credit for proctoring exams would give us a large pool of applicants to choose from. Their presence alone would surely be effective in stopping students from cheating, and would not be an expense to the University.
4. Eliminating Academically Dishonest Students from Course Evaluations

Our final recommendation is to prohibit students from completing a course evaluation if they were convicted of being academically dishonest in that course. The evaluation should be viewed as a privilege for students who put a sincere, honest effort, into the course. Additionally, since our University has a structure that rewards faculty on a merit-base, we want to ensure that professors who report cheating are protected from bias evaluations. After all, professors who are vigilant in reporting cheating are assets to the University, and crucial to the success in providing a sound ethical environment. The Senate would ensure that any changes in regards to this matter would be addressed in the University Code on Academic Integrity.
Conclusion:

For us to truly ensure that this issue is addressed we need to alter the culture of our University. Students cheat because they are collectively under the impression that it is socially accepted. We understand that just implementing procedures and workshops will not solve the issue of academic integrity as a whole, but it is a step in the right direction.

The Student Senate is looking forward to working with faculty and administration in ensuring that these recommendations are wisely implemented.