QMUL School of Mathematical Sciences
2021/22 Academic Misconduct Guidelines for Staff

Due to our exams being online, and given our ample experiences from the last academic year, we can anticipate many instances of academic misconduct from students.

However, even in light of this, it is essential to keep in mind that in cases of academic dishonesty, the burden of proof is on us. In other words, we must proceed very carefully with these cases, and we cannot afford to falsely accuse students.

This document gives some guidelines for staff dealing with academic misconduct cases arising from our online exams. Most of the focus will be on how to investigate cases.

Main People

The following will be primarily involved with academic misconduct investigations:
- *Academic Misconduct Officer:* Oliver Jenkinson
- *SEB Chair (UG):* Arick Shao
- *SEB Chair (PGT):* Rosemary Harris

1. The General Process

The general procedure for dealing with academic offences is as follows.

First, *before marking your exams*:

(0) Check contract cheating sites for questions from your exam (see the start of section 3 for a list of sites). If you find anything, then you can check if any students copied solutions from these sites.

Next, if you discover instances of cheating in the above or when marking the exam, then the process for dealing with this is as follows:

(1) *Inform the Academic Misconduct Officer and the SEB Chair.* Give a clear, detailed description of the allegations. The *Academic Misconduct Officer* will then advise on which cases likely meet the standard of proof that is required for a formal case.

(2) For the cases that you and the *Academic Misconduct Officer* decide to take further, then *contact the affected students*, inform them of your suspicions, and obtain their explanations.

(3) *Gather evidence*, and put this in a shared (OneDrive) folder.

(4) Fill out an *academic offence form*, and send this to the *Academic Misconduct Officer*. Share the folder containing the evidence with the *Academic Misconduct Officer* and the *SEB Chair*.

After all the above steps:
- If the School goes forward with formal charges, then the *Academic Misconduct Officer* will forward the form and evidence to the *Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office*.
- At this point, the student(s) will be formally charged, and their marks will be withheld.
- Eventually, the *academic misconduct panel* will issue a decision, based on the testimonies of students, the lecturer, and other investigating staff.

See the upcoming sections for further details on the above points:

1.1. The Academic Offence Form

The *academic offence form* can be found on the *QMPlus Staff Intranet*, under the *Exams* section.

Most of the form should be self-explanatory. A few clarifying points are included here:
- Student ID number/name: It is fine to charge multiple students on a single form. (If you do so, then the allegations will have to be described individually for each student later.)
- Nature of the offence: This is probably one of the following:
  - Collusion: Students working together on exam questions or copying off each other.
  - (Attempted) contract cheating: Outsourcing exam questions to some paid service (e.g. *Chegg.com*, *XpressTutor.com*), and copying solutions obtained from these services.
- Title of Assessment: "Final exam" or "Final exam, LSR".
- Description of Allegations: The main point is to be *very clear and detailed in presenting the allegations and evidence*. In particular, this will need to be clear to members of staff and the academic misconduct panel who are not familiar with your module.
  - If multiple students are charged on this form, then specific allegations for each student should be described individually here.

1.2. Contacting Students

You should, in your investigation, contact students and obtain their views on the matter.
- This can be done via e-mail, an interview, or both (for more complicated cases).
- *You should never reveal to any student the identities of any other students that are involved.*

In particular, when you e-mail the students, you should:
- Inform them of what the suspicious parts are, and which exam questions these involve.
- Ask them for their explanations of what happened.
- Let them know that they have not yet been formally charged.

At this point, you can also interview students via MS Teams:
- The goal is the same as for e-mails – obtain students' views for what could have occured.
- Two members of staff (including the module organiser) need to be present. The *Academic Misconduct Officer* usually serves as the second interviewer.
- The module organiser should take the investigative lead; the second interviewer should take a neutral role to ensure consistency of all the interviews.

The key task is to look for valid alternative explanations for these allegations, that is, for ways that this could have not been an academic offence. For example:
- For a bookwork-type question (e.g. "give a proof", "state a definition"), a student could have obtained a solution from an online source – in general, this is not forbidden.
- For a computation question, students could have used various online calculators or apps.

1.3. Gathering Evidence

In general, "evidence" for an academic misconduct case could include the following:
- The exam itself and its solutions.
- Students' submitted exam scripts.
- E-mail correspondences with students, if relevant (e.g. students addressing the allegations).
- Data collected from websites such as *Chegg.com*.

The evidence that is required depends on the nature of the offence:
- *Collusion cases:* See Section 2.1 for details.
- *Contract cheating cases:* See Section 3.1 for details involving *Chegg.com*.

The evidence should be placed in OneDrive folders, and then shared with the *Academic Misconduct Officer* and the *SEB Chair*:
- Usually, it is best to put evidence for each student in a separate folder.
- For collusion cases, you can put evidence for all students involved in a single folder.
- If you present any of the evidence to a student (e.g. in interviews), then make sure that any other students' identities are properly redacted.

2. Collusion

Collusion cases are especially difficult, as students will almost always deny accusations regardless of how obvious the collusion may seem. (In particular, students gain no benefits from confessing.) These tend to end up being your word against those of the students.

Because of the lack of definitive evidence, these cases often require a considerable amount of work. Furthermore, since the burden of proof lies on the School's side, there will likely be many instances of probable collusion that the School cannot pursue.

2.1. Collecting Evidence

Here, we detail the evidence that is usually collected for collusion cases.

(a) *Academic Offence Form*: As mentioned before, the actual allegations need to be clearly stated on the form, separately for each student. Moreover, the form should detail the following:
  • Which students colluded together, and on which problem(s)?
  • How did they collude? What is the evidence for this?

(b) *Copy of exam and solutions*: This will need to be sent to the *Academic Misconduct Panel*.

(c) *Students' scripts*: The students' exam scripts should also be sent to the panel.
  • It would be more useful to only have the parts of the exams in which collusion is suspected.
  • For more contentious cases, you may also need to have a side-by-side comparison of the students' answers to a question.

(d) *E-mail correspondences*: Keep track of all e-mail correspondences with students.
  • You may have to organise these into a single file, as part of a report.

2.2. The Investigation

It is our responsibility to be fairly sure of guilt before making formal allegations and pushing for penalties. Again, we cannot afford to make false allegations.
  • In particular, once an *academic offence form* is submitted to the panel, students' marks are withheld until the case is concluded. This could delay students' results for months, and it could also delay graduation for final year students.

When interviewing students, ask how they could have innocently produced the suspicious outcome.
  • Be particularly mindful of any explanations that could clear students.
  • If such explanations do arise, then we will need to act on that.

3. Contract Cheating

There are several websites on which students can have their exam questions answered for them.

(a) *Chegg.com*: This monthly subscription service is the most popular such platform. Here, students can upload "homework problems" to the site, and their hired tutors will usually provide solutions within an hour of the upload. (The solutions are not always correct, and sometimes quite bad, but are usually enough to pass an exam.) Note there is a partial paywall in place – you can view all the posted questions, but you cannot see the tutors' solutions unless you pay the subscription fee.

(b) *Bartleby.com:* This is like a "light" version of *Chegg*. This works quite similarly to *Chegg,* but is less widely used. As a result of this, there is usually a longer turnaround for solutions to be posted to *Bartleby*. However, students are generally aware of *Bartleby*, so this is worth checking.

(c) There are many other sites that operate a model similar to the above:
  - *Gauthmath.com*
  - *Brainly.com*
  - *Numerade.com*

Finally, students could also post their exam questions on free forums, such as:
  - *StackExchange*
  - *Reddit*
  - *The Student Room*

3.1. Collecting Evidence (*Chegg.com*)

The good news is that allegations involving *Chegg.com* are usually much easier to pursue:
  - There is more concrete evidence to collect, due to the paper trail on *Chegg.com*.
  - In light of this, students often will confess to misconduct once the evidence is presented.

There are generally two ways to make use of the information from *Chegg.com*:
  (a) Showing a student copied from a solution posted on *Chegg.com*.
  (b) Showing a student uploaded an exam question to *Chegg.com*.

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This proceeds like a collusion investigation, but is more direct, since there is no need to determine who copied from whom. The evidence required is analogous to points (a)-(d) in Section 2.1:
  - URL of the page on *Chegg.com* containing the exam question.
  - The solution obtained from *Chegg.com*.
  - Demonstration of similarities between the students' solutions and that found on *Chegg.com*.

(b) Showing a student uploaded an exam question to Chegg.com.

Chegg.com is somewhat helpful with assisting universities in academic misconduct investigations. They have usually responded fairly quickly with the relevant data (but the information is usually in an inconvenient format). The general process here is as follows:

Step 1: At the end of the exam period, the *Academic Misconduct Officer* or *SEB Chair* can send all URLs of exam questions (see Section 3.2) to *Chegg.com*. They will soon send a spreadsheet with details of all the queried pages (e.g. name, e-mail, IP address, question asked, solution given).

Step 2: For each entry in the CSV file:

    (a) If there is an e-mail address given, you can try to match that to a student in your module. (In most cases, students are wise enough to use a separate burner e-mail with *Chegg.com*, so this is usually not very helpful.)

    (b) If an IP address is given, then you could try to match this with data in the QMPlus logs; see Section 3.3 for details on how to do this. This seems to no longer be possible; as of this academic year, QMPlus no longer logs IP addresses correctly.

Step 3: If needed, you should organise the details collected (IP addresses, QMPlus logs, etc.) into a report that can be shown to the accused students in interviews or to the *academic misconduct panel*.

3.2. Collecting Evidence (Other Sites)

You can also attempt to collect similar evidence from the other contract cheating sites listed above. However, these sites tend to be less cooperative than *Chegg.com*.

- From past experience, if you contact *Bartleby.com* regarding exam questions, then they will share the solutions (usually behind a paywall), but they will not share further data.
- In general, the other contract cheating sites will only remove the offending exam questions when asked, but will not share any further information.

3.3 Appendix: Finding Your Exam on *Chegg.com*

As mentioned before, you should check websites such as *Chegg.com* for your exam questions prior to marking. Below are some more detailed instructions for doing this on *Chegg.com*.

- A similar process should also work for other contract cheating sites (and even using your favourite internet search engine may find some hits if the questions are distinctive enough).

Step 1: Search *Chegg.com* for questions from your exam.

- Go to the main homepage, https://www.chegg.com, and type some key phrases from your exam questions into the search page.
- For exams in the traditional format, you can use the style file template to your advantage. In particular, a search for *"Question X [Y marks]"* plus a key phrase often produces results.

Step 2: For any exam questions that you find, click on that result to go to the page dedicated to the question. Copy down the URL of that page.

- Once you submit the search query, Chegg then displays a list of all search results. If you see one matching your exam question, then click on it to go to its page.
- On the dedicated page, you can also see if a solution has been posted. However, unless you are subscribed (payment required) and logged in, you cannot view the solutions. (Let the *Academic Misconduct Officer* or *SEB Chair* know if you need a screenshot of a solution.)
- The bottom of the page sometimes contains "recommended links". These often lead to other questions from the same exam.

Step 3: After finishing your search, send to the *Academic Misconduct Officer* and the *SEB Chair* a list of all the URLs that you found.

3.4 Appendix: Dealing with QMPlus Logs

As of this academic year, this no longer works, since QMPlus does not log IP addresses correctly.

The following is a step-by-step guide for accessing IP address data on QMPlus logs:

- Go to your module page on QMPlus.

- Go to the *"Settings"* subwindow on the bottom right, and click on *"Reports" => "Logs"*.
- In the "Choose Which Logs …" window, leave everything unchanged, except for the "All days" dropdown window – change this to the date of the exam.
- Clicking "Get these logs" gives you a CSV file to download. This contains all the QMPlus events for your module on the exam date.
- Repeat this process for the day before the exam, and for the day after the exam.
- You can now compare the IP addresses in these logs with those in the *Chegg.com* data. If there are matches, then you know who posted the exam questions on *Chegg.com*.