

During your time at the University of Michigan, you'll spend time developing your moral agency as you continue to learn and grow academically. You'll learn to identify ethical situations and figure out the different paths or courses of action you can take to resolve them. You'll also work to improve your motivation to choose ethical values over other kinds of values and have the courage to follow through with them (Bertram & Gallant, 2020).

Choosing ethical values over other values can often take time as individuals learn why it's important to prioritize one over the others. This can be especially true in instances where your personal relationships (e.g. friends, significant others, etc..) or even you are struggling and reaching out for support.

Remember that one of the primary purposes of our community is learning. By providing material or information to another person to use you are undermining their learning and creating an unfair academic advantage in their course(s). This includes whether or not you provided the material with the purpose to use it deliberately or not.

The following are example cases presented to the Office of Student Academic Affairs, as they relate to Aiding in Academic Dishonesty:

Example #1

A student is struggling to complete her most recent lab work for an Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB) course. She reaches out to a friend who took the course the year before to see if she still has a copy of her completed lab work. The friend indicates that she does and sends the student a copy of the lab work in its entirety.

The student reviews the material provided by her friend, but to her dismay notices that the lab is not the same as the one she is tasked with completing. Without any other ideas, the student attempts to finish the lab to the best of her ability. However, when she goes to submit it she accidentally submits her friend's incorrect version.

When reviewing the assignment, the instructor not only notices this error, but is also able to recognize the other lab from their course last year. Looking over the submissions from previous students, they are able to determine the friend that provided the student a copy of their lab.

All of the evidence is submitted to the Office of Student Academic Affairs. In her meeting with them, the student indicates her error and accepts responsibility for her actions. Both the student and her friend are issued a warning for their actions and the instructor gives the student a zero on the lab.

What could the student have done differently?

1. Ask for help! Instead of immediately reaching out to a friend for a copy of their work, the student could have contacted her instructor and discussed what she found difficult about the assignment. The instructor might have been able to provide her with greater clarity that helped her finish the assignment.
2. Be Honest. If the student noticed her mistake initially and reported it to the instructor rather than hoping they wouldn't find it, things might have ended up differently. Being honest and transparent is an important part of maintaining academic integrity.

Example #2

A student is working on a paper for his anthropology course and struggling to explain how the concepts as outlined in the course relate to the prompt. He's been working on it for several days and it still isn't quite right. With the deadline coming up, he decides to ask his roommate who took the course a while back if he remembers the assignment.

The roommate does remember the prompt and shares the paper he originally submitted for it so the student can look it over and generate ideas. Unbeknownst to the roommate, the student submits the paper as his own instead of continuing to struggle with writing the paper.

While reading the paper, the instructor finds some of the arguments familiar. They go back and review previously submitted papers and discover that the student's paper is identical to another paper submitted a few semesters ago.

The instructor arranges a meeting with the student to discuss these similarities and whether or not the work was the student's own. During the meeting, the student indicates that it is his own work and is unsure why there are similarities to a different paper. They also indicate that they do not know the other student.

The instructor leaves the meeting with lingering concerns and submits the information and evidence to the Office of Student Academic Affairs. The Coordinator of Academic Integrity meets with the student who reiterates that the information is his own and that he does not know the other student.

The Coordinator then meets with the roommate, who indicates that the two students are roommates and that he shared the original paper with his roommate to help him generate ideas. He did not know, or intend to have, his roommate use his paper in its entirety.

After these meetings the Office of Student Academic Affairs finds the student responsible for academic misconduct. For the roommate, who unknowingly aided in academic dishonesty, they issue a warning and they encourage them to consider the types of information they share in the future with other students.

What could the students have done differently?

1. Seek out help. The student was definitely struggling with the material and how to effectively answer the essay prompt. He could have reached out to the instructor or graduate student instructor (GSI) to better discuss it and gain a better understanding of the material.
2. Be cognizant of the type of material you are sharing. Discussing ideas and concepts with a peer furthers both student's understanding of the material. Sharing a paper in its entirety, simply provides the answer and doesn't increase someone's understanding of the material.

Outside resources and references:

Bertram Gallant, T., & Stephens, J. M. (2020). Punishment Is Not Enough: The Moral Imperative of Responding to Cheating With a Developmental Approach. *Journal of College and Character*. 21(2): 57-66.