

Serious Academic Misconduct Interviews for ADTL panels

Serious Misconduct Cases involves acts in which a student deliberately attempts to gain an advantage in an assessment task. This could include contract cheating, fabricating references, falsifying a medical certificate, and plagiarising multiple times. These cases are assigned to Associate Deans Teaching and Learning to lead a panel with another senior academic in the School and the Manager, Learning Support in the Centre for Learning and Teaching (or their respective nominees). Interviews are designed to be **exploratory** and may take **up to 60 minutes**.

Given the complex nature of contract cheating cases, **it is recommended to invite the Unit Coordinator or another discipline expert to attend and ask foundation content related questions only** (i.e., they do not form part of the panel). This assists the panel in determining the extent to which a student understands the work that they have submitted.

If a Serious Academic Misconduct case has been assigned to you via email, use the following steps as a template for meeting with students:

- 1) Start the interview by introducing yourself and confirming the purpose of the meeting. If you would like to record the meeting, permission must be requested from the student if it occurs via MS Teams. It is good practice for them to use a camera for online meetings so you can verify their identity.
- 2) Record the name of the student's support person if they have one present. They can assist the student in responding, however you can insist you also need to hear directly from the student in the conversation. If the student does not have a support person present, let them know that they are allowed to have one. If they'd like one, you'll need to reschedule. Otherwise, otherwise the meeting can proceed.
- 3) Show the student the material in question and explain your concerns. Use the following guide for questions you can ask:

Interview guide

What was the process you went through to complete this assignment?

For *contract cheating* cases:

- How long did it take you to complete this assignment?
- Do you have earlier draft versions that you can share with the panel?
- Can you explain these concepts or terms used in your assignment?
- How did you find the references used in your assignment?
 - *It is worth checking whether the references used are accessible via the ECU library/Google Scholar, are related to the assignment, and whether the cited sentences match with the content in the source)*
- Did you ask anyone else for assistance with it?
- Did you use any online sources or tools to write parts of this assignment?

For *fabrication/falsification* cases:

- This reference does not exist when I search for it through the ECU library or via Google. Can you please explain where you found it?
- This data that you have gathered suggests that it has been fabricated. Can you explain what your process was to collect it?
- The evidence from your exam attendance/video submission indicates you may not be the person who participated in this assessment. Do you have an explanation for this?
- The medical certificate submitted shows that it was changed (or the clinic confirmed it is fraudulent). Why did you use this document for an extension?

For <i>plagiarism</i> cases:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your record indicates that you are not a new student and that you may have already had previous academic integrity conversations about plagiarism before. Were there reasons why you did not reference or paraphrase correctly in this assignment? Have you sought assistance with referencing and paraphrasing from ECU librarians or learning advisers?
Did you contact your unit coordinator or tutor for help?
Did you access any other ECU support services?
Was there anything else happening in your life that impacted your ability to complete this assignment?

The [TEQSA investigator guide for contract cheating](#) may also be a helpful tool for aspects of the assignment you'd like to ask in the interview. Similarly, checking the MS Word metadata of a student submission can also provide some insights into how the document was constructed (e.g., original author and document creation date, total editing time, last editor etc.)

- 4) Explain the [possible outcomes](#) (as detailed in the Academic Misconduct Procedures) and that they will receive a notice about it to their ECU email account within 7 days. Explain to the student that a decision will be made by the panel after the interview has concluded.
- 5) Invite any final questions and thank them for attending.

These interviews can be distressing for some students. In these moments it is important to be kind, offer them a moment to collect themselves if needed, and redirect to appropriate [support services](#) as required. You may also decide to follow up directly with the [ECU student success](#) team afterwards to see if an officer can contact the student to check on their welfare.

Making a decision

After the meeting, the panel must decide whether Serious Academic Misconduct has occurred. The balance of probabilities must be applied – this means that the panel needs to assess the likelihood that the student completed the assignment honestly or not. Students should be given the benefit of the doubt if the panel is unsure (i.e., the outcome would be ‘No Misconduct’). However, if it seems highly likely that the student did not complete the work, a finding of academic misconduct should be applied.

In determining an appropriate outcome, consider the extent of the misconduct and fairness for other students. For example, if a student committed contract cheating and received 0 for the assignment as a penalty, then it is the same outcome for another student that took may have taken the honest approach and submitted nothing. It is for this reason that a unit fail is normally the minimum penalty applied to contract cheating cases.

There may be other mitigating contextual factors that the panel may consider (e.g., health or family issues), however it is not expected that these factors would excuse committing an act of academic misconduct or mean the penalty should be reduced.

The panel may also decide that misconduct has occurred, but it is not as serious as first believed. In this situation the case could be downgraded to Concerning Academic Misconduct. If this is the case, make this selection in the Academic Integrity Management System and choose the appropriate outcome(s) for Concerning Academic Misconduct. The student does not need to be reinterviewed.

Finalising the case

After a decision has been reached, as the Panel lead (normally the ADTL) you should use the link in your email to access the case in the Academic Misconduct Management System. Input relevant details, including a summary of the meeting and the outcomes you've decided.

It is important to provide a detailed summary of the interview discussion and outcome reasoning, as if the case is appealed the Student Appeals Committee will be well informed as to the rationale for the decision.

Once this has been submitted, you will receive an e-mail from academicintegrity@ecu.edu.au with suggested wording to send to the student advising them of the case decision and outcomes applied (usually within 48 hours). You can customise /contextualise the email, and then send it to the student as a formal advice.