

Interviewing Students regarding Academic Misconduct

A Quick Guide for ECU Staff



Interviews are an important part of an academic misconduct investigation. It gives the Designated Officer (DO) an opportunity to talk with the student about the alleged act of academic misconduct. It also gives the student an opportunity to explain their case or circumstances, as well as present further information for consideration.

It is important to remember that while academic misconduct is a serious matter, it can be daunting for a student to learn they are being investigated and asked to attend an interview. Please consider the welfare of the student at all stages of the interview process.

Organising an Interview

The DO will receive an email from the University Academic Integrity Management System (UIMS), indicating that an alleged case of academic misconduct has occurred and requires investigation in conjunction with relevant evidence. The DO is responsible for investigating the allegation, seeking additional information as required before contacting the student to arrange a date and time to attend an interview. When e-mailing the student, the allegation details and supporting evidence should be included.

Interviews should occur as soon as it is practical, but no longer than 28 days after the case has been lodged. The DO can decide on whether the interview will occur face to face, by phone or by web conference/video. However, student preference should be considered when making that decision. If after taking reasonable steps to contact the student for an interview and they fail to respond, then a DO can proceed with the investigation and decide on an outcome without completing an interview.

The student is allowed to bring a support person (such as a friend or family member) to the interview, as long as they are not a lawyer. They can only advocate for the student with the permission of the DO. The DO can also bring another staff member, but only to observe or to take notes. The purpose of this staff member's role should be explained to the student briefly at the interview.

For interviews that require a Panel, one panel member may attend the interview. However, they are responsible for reporting back to the other panel members for consultation and discussion before an Outcome is decided.

During the Interview

An interview record will become available when the DO is advised of the case. It should be completed after the interview and returned by e-mail to the student with the case decision. This ensures that there is a consistent approach across ECU and that a record of the interview exists for any appeal process.

At the start of the interview, the DO should first explain the purpose of the meeting and the evidence provided that supports the allegation of an academic breach or academic misconduct, notwithstanding that this will have been included in the initial e-mail to the student. Students should be invited to explain their case or circumstances. DOs should be compassionate and understanding, particularly for 'New to ECU' students in the case of an academic breach. However, cases of concerning and serious academic misconduct must still be investigated objectively and have appropriate decisions and Outcomes applied in consideration of the evidence presented.

Tip for Supporting Students

Before the student arrives, consider the layout of the room so that the student feels comfortable. Some students may feel less anxious by the interviewer sitting adjacent at the corner of a table, rather than on opposite sides. Other students may feel more relaxed sitting closest to the door or by having a glass of water available.

These examples should be considered so it is easier for students to present their case.

At the end of the interview, thank the student for attending and advise them that they will receive an email about the decision and Outcome within 7 days in their ECU student email account.

After the Interview

Within 7 days of the interview a decision should be made by the DOs as to the intended Outcome. At this stage the DO should consult with the Student Academic Integrity Coordinator (SAIC) to seek details of any prior validated instances of academic misconduct (not applicable for Unit Coordinators). The resultant decision and Outcomes will be recorded in the

UIMS by the SAIC and the Student must be notified in writing (e-mail to the student's e-mail address). Note the wording for the student outcome e-mail will be provided by the SAIC, and the DO sends the Outcome e-mail.

In order to avoid any bias, DOs are not permitted to know the details of a student's past history of academic misconduct during an investigation. When it comes to deciding an Outcome, however, all DOs that are not Unit Coordinators must email academicintegrity@ecu.edu.au with the current UIMS case number to find out if there have been any previous findings of academic misconduct as this will impact the Outcomes that should be applied.

DOs should refer to Attachments D-G in the ECU Academic Misconduct Procedures for a list of Outcomes relevant to the form of academic misconduct and accounting for prior offences. Please note the examples provided in the attachments and any mandatory Outcomes that must be applied. For panel decisions, all panel members must be consulted before Outcomes are decided.

Appeals

A student has the right to appeal a decision if they believe they did not have an opportunity to present their case, the decision was affected by bias or discrimination, or the Outcome was excessive. Students can appeal either the finding of academic misconduct or the Outcome imposed to the Student Appeals Committee. DOs may be asked to attend a Committee meeting about the case or present further information.

It is important to note that appeals are an important part of the academic misconduct process, and appealing is a legitimate right for the students to exercise. It should not necessarily be viewed as an indictment of a staff member; it is an opportunity to continue to develop positive and consistent processes and to work out how appeals could be avoided in the future.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I am on leave and unable to conduct an interview?

Refer the matter back to the SAIC. The case can then be assigned to another appropriate staff member, such as another Unit Coordinator or Associate Dean.

What if there is a conflict of interest, my employment changes or the investigation seems more serious?

Refer the case back to the SAIC who will re-allocate the case.

I want to impose a resubmission for an assignment as an Outcome. What is the timeframe?

There is no definitive timeframe but consider the context of the assignment and the student situation. As a general guideline, 7 calendar days is appropriate for an undergraduate coursework student and 10 calendar days for a postgraduate coursework student.

Do I need to find out if a student is New to ECU?

The SAIC will determine whether a student is 'New to ECU' before assigning a case to a DO.

Relevant Definitions

DO	A designated officer (either individual or panel) that decides the Outcome of an academic misconduct case, e.g. Unit Coordinator or Associate Dean.
Student Academic Integrity Coordinator	An ECU staff member that oversees the workflow of academic misconduct cases in UIMS. Contact details: academicintegrity@ecu.edu.au
UIMS	ECU's academic integrity management system.
New to ECU Student	A student who has been enrolled for two or less teaching periods, has not been previously committed an act of academic misconduct, and is not a PhD, Masters (Research) or Honours student. DO's assigned to investigating these students are Unit Coordinators.
Outcome	A course of action, direction, result, or penalty referred to as an 'Outcome' in ECU's Academic Misconduct Procedures.

For support and resources refer to the Staff Academic Integrity Website: <https://intranet.ecu.edu.au/learning/academic-integrity/overview>

ECU's relevant Rules, Policies and Procedures are also accessible from the landing page of this website.