

# AP.9 ACADEMIC STANDARDS

## AP.9 Academic Standards

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## AP.9 Academic Standards

As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:

- **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
- **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, co-authored pieces, and project reports.
- **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including

free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.

Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations can be found at the Academic Standards website. (<https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/>) Consequences of violations may include grade sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community.

The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.

George Mason has an office that addresses issues related to research misconduct. Those incidents are investigated through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance. For more information, see University Policy 4007 (<https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/misconduct-in-research-and-scholarship/>) or contact the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance via their website at Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (<https://oria.gmu.edu/topics/research-misconduct>).

## AP.9.1 Violations

### AP.9.1.1 Unauthorized Assistance

Unauthorized assistance in an academic context means using, accessing, or providing assistance to others when such assistance is not permitted per the university, course, or assignment instructions/policy. Unauthorized assistance may also include submitting academic work that was created, in whole or part, using unauthorized material. Certain departments may include requirements that go beyond what is mentioned, including a prohibition of sharing files, and the requirement to keep work secure. Examples of unauthorized assistance include but are not limited to:

- Benefitting or attempting to benefit from unauthorized assistance
- Providing unauthorized assistance
- Unauthorized use of artificial intelligence software, generative or otherwise
- Submitting work that was done, in part or whole, by someone else
- Compensating someone else to do work and/or academic outsourcing
- Making an unauthorized record of (e.g. photo, screenshot, download) and/or posting (such as on a public website or in group messenger apps) exams or academic content
- Submitting work as one's own that was obtained from unauthorized websites (Including Quizlet, Chegg, Course Hero, etc.)

**AP.9.1.2 Fabrication**

Fabrication in an academic context refers to providing false information in completing academic work. Examples of fabrication include but are not limited to:

- Providing a false excuse for missing a test, assignment, or class
- Fabricating or providing false sources, data, information, documents, and/or official correspondence. This may include, but is not limited to, referencing material that does not appear in the indicated source
- Providing false or altered documents in response to an Academic Standards violation

**AP.9.1.3 Plagiarism**

Plagiarism in an academic context refers to using other individuals' ideas or words without appropriate attribution or credit. It also includes reusing one's own work that has already been submitted for a class or published without permission from the current instructor and/or without proper citation. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- Submitting another's work as your own, either in whole or in part
- Misrepresenting authorship (i.e. leaving author names off a document or giving authorship credit that is not warranted)
- Failure to attempt to cite sources using required citation standards, including both in-text/in-presentation citations and full reference lists
- Using portions of one's old work for new assignments without advance permission from the current course instructor and appropriate attribution. (self-plagiarism)

Plagiarism does not include mistakes in the format of a citation if the student has indicated the materials quoted or relied upon and the source of the materials.

**AP.9.2 Student Responsibilities**

Students must abide by the academic standards defined in this policy and by the institution. This includes adhering to course-specific policies regarding scholarship and academic work. Students who are found in violation of Academic Standards are subject to sanctions by the University.

Students who are referred to the Office of Academic Standards (<https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/>) are subject to the following honesty statement throughout the entire case resolution process, including any appeal process:

George Mason University students pledge to conduct themselves in accordance with the Academic Standards the institution upholds. It is expected that all information presented in this process is true and correct. George Mason University students who willfully and knowingly provide false information in the process will be referred again to the Office of Academic Standards. Students who admit to a violation of a university policy unrelated to Academic Standards will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct (<https://studentconduct.gmu.edu/>).

Any student referred for violating Academic Standards is not allowed to drop or withdraw from the course until the case is resolved. If a student is found in violation of the Academic

Standards policy, they cannot withdraw from or drop the course in question.

**AP.9.3 Faculty Responsibilities****AP.9.3.1 Reporting**

Any referrals to the Academic Standards Office (<https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/>) should be made within six weeks from initial discovery of alleged misconduct. Individuals who require an extension on reporting due to material collection must contact the office directly for guidance.

It is the professor's responsibility to provide all the material necessary to support the referral. The Academic Standards Office (<https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/>) does not investigate cases and does not gather materials to support referrals. If the office receives material that are not sufficient to understand or identify the nature of the alleged violation, the professor will be notified and given the opportunity to amend their submission with materials that provide a clearer view of the allegations. Faculty must submit the requested materials within five business days of the Academic Standard's Office (<https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/>) request for additional information. If additional information is not provided to support the allegation, the referral may be dismissed without a hearing.

The Academic Standards Office (<https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/>) reserves the right to dismiss referrals without a hearing when (1) the materials provided do not clearly outline the alleged violation, (2) there is insufficient material to support the allegation, or (3) the referral is not made in a timely manner.

**AP.9.3.2 Grade Updates**

The professor is responsible for updating the student's grade after the case is referred to the academic standards office is complete, including any relevant appeal period. The professor will be notified after the resolution of the case regarding the grade assigned according to the university sanctioning matrix. If a case is not resolved by the time grades are due, the professor shall insert a grade of HC into Banner. Upon resolution of the case, the professor will work with their department and the Registrar's Office to complete the necessary paperwork to update the student's grade.

**AP.9.3.3 Educational Requirements**

While cases are being investigated, faculty are expected to continue to teach referred students and assign earned grades to any submitted assessments/assignments as long as the student is enrolled in the class. Should the student be involved in another alleged violation, the faculty member should refer the student through the referral portal on the Academic Standards website. Even after a sanction that results in a failure of the class, faculty are also expected to teach referred students and assign earned grades to any submitted assessments/assignments as long as the student is enrolled in the class.

**AP.9.4 Sanctions**

George Mason uses an institutional sanctioning matrix to assign grade-related sanctions, educational sanctions, and potential institutional separation depending on the violation level. The sanctioning matrix is the definitive document outlining what sanctions, including grade sanctions, will occur if a student is

found in violation of the institution’s Academic Standards and will not be deviated from.

**AP.9.4.1 Level Definitions**

*Level 1 Violations*

Level 1 violations are defined as incidents that are not considered egregious as defined below. A referral will be sanctioned according to the Level 1 Sanction matrix if all the following conditions are met:

- The violation is not considered egregious.
- The individual has no previous record with the university of violating academic standards or a former academic integrity violation.
- The student is either
  - An undergraduate with 59 or fewer credits or less than one year of coursework at George Mason OR
  - A non-Doctoral (e.g., JD, PhD, EdD, etc.) graduate student in their first semester of study

*Level 2 Violations*

Level 2 violations are defined as being of a more serious nature and merit a more severe institutional response. A referral will be sanctioned according to the Level 2 sanctions if at least one of the following conditions is met:

- The violation is **egregious, as determined by the Academic Standards Office**. Examples of egregious violations may include
  - A substantial or significant portion of the assignment was copied, plagiarized, and/or the result of cheating
  - Fabricated evidence (e.g., submitted edited screenshots as evidence for a grade adjustment, fake doctor’s notes, falsified internship updates, impersonation, falsified evidence submitted as part of an academic standards case)
  - Fabricated project data
  - Providing or attempting to provide financial compensation in exchange for academic work (e.g., contract cheating)
  - Failure to include a co-author on a manuscript submitted for presentation or publication
  - Multiple, separate violations related to the same assignment
  - The violation had an impact on individuals who were not involved in committing the offense, such as a collaborative project
  - Violations involving elements of professional credentialing
- The individual has a previous record of violating academic standards or academic integrity.
- The student has sufficient experience within the academic environment that a violation would be considered more serious.
  - Undergraduates who have been at George Mason for at least a year and have more than 59 credits of completed coursework
  - Graduate students beyond their 1st semester of Graduate study

- Any violation committed by a Doctoral or other post-graduate (e.g., PhD, JD, EdD) student

**AP.9.4.2 Typical Academic and Educational Sanctions**

Violations of Academic Standards are sanctioned using a common matrix. Sanctions include both educational and administrative components. The sanctioning matrix is the definitive document outlining the minimum mandatory sanctions, including grade sanctions, that will be imposed if a student is found to have violated the institution’s Academic Standards.

Student violations of Academic Standards are sanctioned according to following matrix:

<b>Academic Standards Sanctioning Matrix</b>			
<b>Level</b>	<b>Violation Number</b>	<b>Undergraduate Student</b>	<b>Graduate Student</b>
Level 1	1st	1. 0% on the assessment and an additional letter grade reduction in the final course grade.	1. 0% on the assessment and an additional letter grade reduction in the final course grade.
	1st	2. Educational Interventions*	2. Educational Interventions*
Level 2	1st	1. Failure of relevant Course or Assessment (comprehensive exams, dissertations, thesis, etc.)	1. Failure of relevant Course or Assessment (comprehensive exams, dissertations, thesis, etc.)
	1st	2. Educational Interventions*	2. Educational Interventions*
	2nd	Suspension for one semester	Suspension for one semester
	3rd	Suspension for one year	Permanent dismissal
	4th	Permanent dismissal	

*\*Educational Interventions may include online learning modules, visits to the Writing Center, or other programs to assist the student in understanding and remediating the violation. These will be determined by the Office of Academic Standards.*

*\*\*The violation number includes all violations of Academic Standards and the Honor Code.*

In some cases, violations of Academic Standards rise to a level that warrants a pause or removal from studies on the first violation. Examples of violations that can lead to suspension or permanent dismissal on the first violation include, but are not limited to, contract cheating, dishonesty on credentialing exams, improper use of restricted lab facilities, and other exceptionally egregious violations.

### **AP.9.5 Record Keeping and Reporting**

An academic standards referral is part of a student's educational record and is subject to guidelines put forth by the Library of Virginia (GS-111 (<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/sites/default/files/2025-12/GS-111.pdf>)) and laws and statutes put forth by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Please note that the retention length in Virginia is a minimum suggestion and maximum retention length may vary from institution to institution; Academic Standards records at George Mason University are kept for ten years. Educational records are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (F.E.R.P.A.). As such, only the student has the right to access them. A student may sign a waiver allowing access to a third party for a specified time. Without a waiver, the Academic Standards office does not share information with anyone who does not have an educational need to know.

The records of any student found to have not violated academic standards or whose case is dismissed will not be reportable.

Resolutions that result in altered grades and/or educational sanctions do not have transcript notation. However, a resolution that results in a suspension or permanent dismissal will be noted on the student's transcript with an academic standards designation. A transcript notation will be made if a student withdraws from the university while under investigation for academic dishonesty.

If a student applies for a graduate program, internship, or job that requires a background or records check, OAS will not share information protected by F.E.R.P.A. without a signed waiver from the student.

Record retention schedules adhere to all federal, state, and institutional regulations and cannot be amended or altered by the Academic Standards Office or George Mason University.