

# 1

## Academic Integrity

What is the meaning of the phrase *academic integrity*?

### Reading 1

#### Harvard Investigates ‘Unprecedented’ Academic Dishonesty Case

Gov 1310 – Final Exam

April 26, 2012

##### 1 Exam Protocol

- Students will submit their exams using the “Exam Dropbox” found on the front page of the course site. Student are responsible for ensuring that their exam has been properly uploaded. Paper copies of the exam are not required. Please place your last name in the file name. For example, “Platt Exam.docx”.

The exam is due by 5pm (eastern standard time) on Thursday, May 3, 2012.

The exam is completely open book, open note, open internet, etc. However, in all other regards, this should fall under similar guidelines that apply to in-class exams. More specifically, students may not discuss the exam with others—this includes resident tutors, writing centers, etc.

From: “Harvard Investigates ‘Unprecedented’ Academic Dishonesty Case,” Rebecca D. Robbins, *Harvard Crimson* ([www.thecrimson.com](http://www.thecrimson.com)), August 30, 2012. Used with permission.

Harvard College's disciplinary board is investigating nearly half of the 279 students who enrolled in Government 1310: "Introduction to Congress" last spring for allegedly plagiarizing answers or inappropriately collaborating on the class's final take-home exam. Dean of Undergraduate Education Jay M. Harris said the magnitude of the case was "unprecedented in anyone's living memory."

Harris declined to name the course, but several students familiar with the investigation confirmed that Professor Matthew B. Platt's spring government lecture course was the class in question.

The professor of the course brought the case to the Administrative Board in May after noticing similarities in 10 to 20 exams, Harris said. During the summer, the Ad Board conducted a review of all final exams submitted for the course and found about 125 of them to be suspicious.

Platt declined *The Crimson's* request for comment.

If found guilty of academic dishonesty, students could be required to withdraw from the College for a year, among other possible sanctions.

The final examination in "Introduction to Congress," which included three multi-part short answer questions, a bonus short answer question, and an essay question, came with the instruction: "The exam is completely open book, open note, open internet, etc. However, in all other regards, this should fall under similar guidelines that apply to in-class exams. More specifically, students may not discuss the exam with others—this includes resident tutors, writing centers, etc."

Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Michael D. Smith sent an email to all faculty members about the case, and Harris also sent a message to the student body and their parents on Thursday. That letter said that all students who are under investigation have been contacted.

Harris said the College's unusual step of announcing the investigation was intended in part to launch a broader conversation about academic integrity.

"It's something that I think was obviously not going to stay secret, clearly, and nor do we want it to," Harris said. "I think it's important for us to be able to take an event like this and teach it, treat it as a teaching opportunity."

A junior government concentrator who took the class last spring said she suspected that Government 1310 was the course in question when she received Harris' email Thursday. Though she said she followed the exam instructions and is not being investigated by the Ad Board, she

said she thought the exam format lent itself to improper academic conduct.

"I can understand why it would be very easy to collaborate," said the student, who was granted anonymity by *The Crimson* because she said she did not want her name associated with plagiarism allegations. "It was almost like a science exam that you take in person, but at home . . . Many of the questions were, 'Find the answer and basically say why this is the way it is.'"

Grades for Government 1310 were calculated solely based on four equally weighted take-home exams, each worth 25 percent of the final grade, according to the course syllabus.

In Q Guide evaluations, students gave Government 1310 a score of 2.54 out of a possible 5. The average score for social science courses was a 3.91.

A number of Q Guide reviews written by students spoke critically of the course's organization and the difficulty of the exam questions.

One reviewer wrote, "There is also very little structured support outside the course for exams (such as availability of TF office hours over the weekend and a study session for the final exam)."

Another student wrote that he or she joined about 15 other students at a teaching fellow's office hours on the morning of May 3, just hours before the final take-home exam's 5 PM deadline.

"Almost all of [the students at office hours] had been awake the entire night, and none of us could figure out what an entire question (worth 20% of the grade) was asking," the student wrote. "On top of this, one of the questions asked us about a term that had never been defined in any of our readings and had not been properly defined in class, so the TF had to give us a definition to use for the question."

That same student also expressed frustration that Platt had canceled his office hours the morning before the exam was due. In a brief email to the class just after 10 AM on May 3, Platt apologized for having to cancel his office hours on short notice that day due to an appointment.

*Rebecca D. Robbins is a staff writer.*

Glossary

<b>allegations</b>	accusations, charges
<b>allegedly</b>	supposedly, purportedly
<b>anonymity</b>	not identified by name, hidden identity
<b>frustration</b>	feeling of disappointment or weariness caused by unsatisfied desires
<b>launch</b>	to introduce, inaugurate
<b>plagiarizing</b>	using someone’s words and ideas without citation
<b>sanctions</b>	penalties, punishments
<b>TF</b>	Teaching Fellow, a postgraduate student who is given tuition and expenses for teaching duties

Discussion of Reading 1

These questions, which test your reading comprehension, involve a detailed examination of Reading 1. While many of the answers are found in the text, some questions require critical thinking and analysis. Discuss the answers to these questions with your classmates.

1. Describe the purpose of the investigation by Harvard College’s disciplinary board into the final take-home exam in Government 1310 (Spring 2012).
2. Why did the professor of the course bring the case to the Administrative Board?
3. What is a possible sanction for students guilty of academic dishonesty?
4. What instructions were given to the students for the final exam in Government 1310?
5. Why did Dean of Undergraduate Education Jay M. Harris announce the investigation?
6. What score did students give Government 1310 in their Q Guide evaluations?
7. What criticisms did students have about the exam?
8. Write a one-sentence statement of the main idea of the article in your own words.