

2E: The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, staff and students.

2.E.1. Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.

WSC faculty are expected to demonstrate ethical teaching and research practices. Upon hiring, faculty must sign an oath based on the [SBHE Policy 610: Oath for Teachers](#), which was adopted in WSC policy; this complies with [North Dakota Century Code section 15-10-13-2](#) requirements. By signing the oath, the faculty member swears to uphold the United States and North Dakota Constitutions as well as the execution of duties to the best of their ability. Faculty are expected to follow SBHE policies and WSC policies and procedures at all times. These policies and procedures create standardized, ethical processes for all academic affairs. The [SBHE 400-series of the policies and procedures](#) contains general processes for all employees to create a culture of shared ethical standards.

Ethical conduct by faculty members is also ensured by regular classroom observations, standardized syllabi, and student surveys. [WSC Policy 604.4: Faculty Evaluation](#) and [WSC Procedure 604.4](#) of the same name outline the processes by which faculty will be observed in the classroom. The Faculty Observation Form can be found in the college website's [Employee Forms](#) area. The institution uses a standard syllabus from one class to the next to provide consistency for students and to ensure that the same verbiage is used to explain academic affairs processes to students. WSC Procedure 604.4 also notes that student surveys will be conducted by students to ensure that ethical conduct and academic integrity in the classroom is maintained.

Though WSC is primarily a teaching college, research is guided by the college's [Institutional Review Board](#) (IRB). By WSC Procedure [477](#), the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) leads the group as the chair; the IRB includes the chair, three department chairs or faculty from different academic departments, and one community member who is not affiliated with the institution.

2.E.2. The institution provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students.

Quality instruction at WSC is guided by Course Outcome Guides (COG). Each course at the college is tied to a COG, which explains the topics covered within the course, the expected assessment tasks, and the learning outcomes for the course, the program, and the institution. The COG ensures that learning outcomes are clearly communicated to students and that instructors are teaching the same material from one section to the next while preserving their right to academic freedom. COGs are meant to be assessed annually by full-time faculty within the four academic departments on campus to address changes to content areas and maintain high standards for classroom experiences.

Several supports exist at WSC to ensure quality, integrity scholarship. First, each program is assessed by a cross-divisional committee that points out a program's strengths and weaknesses to discuss its continued viability on campus. Second, all career and technical education programs must meet annually with an advisory board comprised of local and regional experts to anticipate industry trends and revise program content accordingly, thus ensuring the high-quality, up-to-date curricula. Third, Quality Matters provides a framework for effective online instruction; the Distance Learning committee is continuing its work to create an assessment tool for online courses at WSC that aligns with Quality Matters criteria; in the future, WSC plans to have some online classes marked as Quality Matters certified courses. Finally, external reviews of specific programs, such as Nursing and Massage Therapy, are conducted by state boards or outside accrediting bodies to provide another layer of feedback to ensure that scholarship at WSC upholds a high standard of integrity.

2.E.3. The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources.

WSC faculty and staff promote ethical research for students. Policies and procedures govern the ethical conduct of research and study for both students and employees of the institution, such as [WSC Policy 620: Copyright](#) and [WSC Procedure 485: Academic Integrity and Dishonesty](#). The [Student Code of Conduct](#) lists the general responsibilities to which students must adhere, one of them being upholding academic integrity across campus. Students discuss academic integrity in first-year orientation courses at WSC, and orientation materials show students how to ethically [use research materials from the Learning Commons](#). Further lessons about ethical research standards are taught in ENGL 110: College Composition I, ENGL 120: College Composition II, ENGL 125: Professional Writing, COMM 110: Fundamentals of Public Speaking, and more. Throughout these courses, students practice academic writing while ethically supporting their ideas and appropriately citing sources. Ethical research and scholarly activities across campus reinforce these lessons to ensure that the college upholds high standards of academic integrity.

Expectations of academic integrity and ethical use of research materials are posted across the WSC campus. Signage in the Communication Lab explains plagiarism to students and how they can prevent it in their written work. Signage in the Learning Commons also explains copyright law and fair use for those students who are printing and copying research materials. Again, this ensures that WSC promotes ethical research behavior.

Two areas of growth for WSC's academic integrity lie with artificial intelligence (AI). As an emerging technology, AI writing tools require faculty to think nimbly to address what is and is not considered academic dishonesty; largely, this distinction has fallen to individual faculty members. Instead, WSC will create a formal policy regarding AI and its relation to academic integrity. The University of North Dakota and North Dakota State University have hosted AI trainings to explain how AI can be used responsibly in the classroom and discuss AI and academic integrity, so more faculty participation in these trainings would also help to address this issue.

2.E.4. The institution enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

Breaches of academic integrity and their consequences are clearly explained to students at WSC and documented by the institution. A whole section of the WSC standardized syllabus explains student academic integrity for students; it also explains breaches of academic integrity: academic dishonesty, cheating, plagiarism, and self-plagiarism. This section of the common course syllabus echoes a section of the [WSC Course Catalog](#) by the same name. Breaches of academic integrity and their consequences are also explained in orientation materials on the [Learning Commons](#) webpage.

To ensure that written work does not breach academic integrity, faculty have digital tools to aid in evaluating students' work. First, [SafeAssign](#) is a tool within the Blackboard Ultra learning management system that can identify breaches of academic integrity by storing previously submitted assignments at the college and comparing archived assignments to newly submitted ones. The SafeAssign tool can also detect plagiarism from online sources, wherein the tool highlights parts of a written assignment and provides a link to the suspected source of the online plagiarism. Several faculty members have turned to online plagiarism detection tools to corroborate their findings in SafeAssign.

One area that causes concern for academic integrity at WSC, and across the world, is artificial intelligence (AI) writing tools, such as Google Bard, ChatGPT, and more. Some faculty invite the use of AI writing tools in their classroom, whereas other faculty have a zero-tolerance policy for written work created with an AI writing tool. Currently, WSC has no formal policy or procedure governing student use of AI writing tools, but it is likely that the NDUS and SBHE will create one. WSC faculty have utilized online platforms to scan and detect student work that may have been generated by AI writing tools; for now, individual faculty members are creating their own AI writing tool guidelines for their respective classes and communicating those expectations to students.

Breaches of academic integrity are handled at the instructor's discretion, and every suspected breach is documented through reports filed in [Maxient](#) software and filed with the VPAA. For example, in Spring 2024, a student who was reported by faculty to have plagiarized and used AI-generated writeups in several courses was placed on academic suspension. Prior to the suspension, instructors discussed the breach with the student both in person and in writing; the student was directed to discuss academic dishonesty with an English instructor by writing an essay that addressed their academic dishonesty.

Sources

- SBHE Policy 610: Oath for Teachers
- North Dakota Legislature website, “ND Century Code Section 15-10”
- North Dakota University System website, “400 Series – Academic Affairs”
- WSC website, “Policies”
- WSC website, “Procedures”
- WSC website, “Employee Forms”
- WSC IRB Form Final.pdf
- WSC website, “Student Code of Conduct”
- WSC Learning Commons website, “Academic Integrity”
- WSC website, “Catalog 2023-24.pdf”
- WSC website, “Learning Commons”
- Blackboard website, “Blackboard SafeAssign”
- WSC website, “Academic Integrity Reporting Form”