

## **Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry Programs Position on Academic Standards**

The Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry Programs maintain the highest academic standards and abide by the general Standards of Behavior (Section III) and expectations of Professional and Ethical Conduct (Section VI) outlined in the University's Student Code. The Programs also take measures to ensure that the Standards of Academic Performance (Section IV) and Academic Conduct (Section V) are met. The attached document, Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry Programs' Policies and Procedures, describes these measures.

### **Unacceptable Academic Performance**

Unacceptable or incomplete academic performance include but are not limited to: 1) failure to pass all courses (including core, elective and remedial) with a grade of B- or better; 2) a cumulative GPA of less than 3.0; and 3) unsatisfactory completion of laboratory rotations. Unacceptable academic performance could lead to a maximal sanction of dismissal from the Program.

### **Academic Misconduct**

In a research environment, there is an absolute need for trust between a student and their mentor, consequently the Program takes cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Cases of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to: 1) plagiarism, 2) cheating, 3) misrepresenting one's work, 4) fabrication or falsification of information, 5) disobeying any rule specified by the Program Rules for Exams and Homework Assignments (see below), and 6) intentionally helping, or attempting to help, another person commit an act of misconduct.

Students committing misconduct can expect up to three levels of sanction; sanctions imposed by the instructor(s), sanctions imposed by the Program, and sanctions imposed by the University. An instructor may impose a maximum sanction of failing the student in the course. The Program could expel the student from the Program, and the University could expel the student from the University or even revoke a previously awarded degree. For each level of sanction, the student has the right to appeal. All cases of misconduct will be documented in the student's file.

### **Program Rules for Exams and Homework Assignments**

The following rules apply for all exams and written assignments unless specifically contradicted by the course instructor.

- 1) A student must work entirely alone.
- 2) A student may not share information about any aspect of the exam with any student who has not already taken the exam this year, or its equivalent in future years
- 3) A student must direct all questions concerning the exam or homework assignment to the course instructor or teaching assistant.
- 4) It is the student's responsibility to obtain clarification from the instructor if there are questions concerning these requirements.
- 5) A student may not plagiarize

## Definitions

Since many graduate students are funded by training and research grants and must abide by federal standards, it is important to know the definition of scientific misconduct as the government defines it.

1. **National Academy of Sciences Definition of Misconduct in Science** - Misconduct in science is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, in proposing, performing, or reporting research. Misconduct in science does not include errors in the recording, selection, or analysis of data; differences in opinions involving the interpretation of data; or misconduct unrelated to the research process. All students should be familiar with the rights and responsibilities articulated in the Student Code, University Policy 6-400 (<http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html>). The following definitions, found in Section I.B. are particularly important to academic conduct within the Programs:
2. **“Academic Misconduct”** includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information, as defined further below. It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct.
3. **“Cheating”** involves the unauthorized possession or use of information, materials, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise, or the unauthorized communication with another person during such an exercise. Common examples of cheating include, but are not limited to, copying from another student's examination, submitting work for an in-class exam that has been prepared in advance, violating rules governing the administration of exams, having another person take an exam, altering one's work after the work has been returned and before resubmitting it, or violating any rules relating to academic conduct of a course or program.
4. **“Misrepresenting One's Work”** includes, but is not limited to, representing material prepared by another as one's own work, or submitting the same work in more than one course without prior permission of both faculty members.
5. **“Plagiarism”** means the intentional unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person's work in, or as a basis for, one's own work offered for academic consideration or credit or for public presentation. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, representing as one's own, without attribution, any other individual's words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression.
6. **“Fabrication or Falsification”** includes reporting experiments or measurements or statistical analyses never performed; manipulating or altering data or other manifestations of research to achieve a desired result; falsifying or misrepresenting background information, credentials or other academically relevant information; or selective reporting, including the deliberate suppression of conflicting or unwanted data. It does

not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data and/or results.

7. “**Academic Sanction**” means a sanction imposed on a student for engaging in academic or professional misconduct. It may include, but is not limited to, requiring a student to retake an exam(s) or rewrite a paper(s), a grade reduction, a failing grade, probation, suspension or dismissal from a program or the University, or revocation of a student’s degree or certificate. It may also include community service, a written reprimand, and/or a written statement of misconduct that can be put into an appropriate record maintained for purposes of the profession or discipline for which the student is preparing.

## **Academic Misconduct**

The Programs take cases of academic misconduct very seriously. As found in the definitions above, cases of academic misconduct include such things as (1) plagiarism, (2) cheating, (3) misrepresenting one’s work, (4) fabrication or falsification of information, (5) disobeying any rule specified by the Program Rules for Coursework, and (6) intentionally helping, or attempting to help, another person commit an act of misconduct. The Program faculty reserve the right to use electronic software to scan reports and proposals for evidence of plagiarism.

## **Resolving Academic Misconduct Issues**

The Programs and University encourage informal resolution of minor problems involving academic standards. Students are urged to discuss problems with the involved instructor(s) and/or their academic advisor. Faculty may place letters of concern of conduct in the student’s file if warranted.

A more formal process is required when there is a serious violation or if a student is charged with a second instance or multiple instances of academic misconduct. This process, detailed in the Policies and Procedures section of this document, provides the framework with which violations are reported and adjudicated by Program faculty. All accusations of cases of misconduct that are verified in the Program review process will be documented in the student’s file.

## **Student Pledge**

I pledge to follow and promote these standards while a student in the Program. I will strive to achieve academic excellence through diligent work, seeking help and guidance from Program faculty, and by conscientiously attending to any remedial work required. I will not commit acts of misconduct and will promote the Program’s position by maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct.

I have read and understand the *Molecular Biology Program’s Position on Academic Standards*. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the *Interdepartmental Programs in Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry Policies and Procedures* and that it is my responsibility to read, understand and follow the rules described therein. I further agree that it is my responsibility to ask questions about anything I do not understand.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Combined Programs in Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry Policies and Procedures**

The policies and procedures addressed in this document describe the Programs' implementation of the Standards of Academic Performance (Section IV) and Standards of Academic Conduct (Section IV) described in the University's Student Code. Communication between students, the faculty and the program office must be through email with the appropriate parties cc'd and only using utah.edu email addresses. If requested, recommendations from the ASC and decisions from the Program Director can be also provided to the student in hard copy. All actions are to be included within the students file held in the Program office.

### **Purpose**

The Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry Programs take matters of academic misconduct very seriously because absolute trust is required for successful academic research and training, and because integrity and reputation are the currency on which scientists are evaluated and rewarded.

Scientific misconduct can seriously harm both education and research, and can ruin careers and institutional reputations. To assure academic integrity, the Programs have established the following internal procedures that implement the University's Student Code. To ensure that the student has adequate counsel, the student's academic advisor will serve as an advisor and advocate for the student throughout any misconduct proceedings.

### **Informal Resolution**

The Student Code and the Programs encourage informal resolution of minor problems involving academic standards. Students are urged to discuss problems with the involved instructor(s), their academic advisor, the Program Director, and/or the Dean. However, with serious violations or cases of multiple instances, a more formal resolution is required.

Standards of Academic Performance (see Section IV of the University Student Code)

### **Instructor-Initiated Academic Actions**

As written in the Student Code (A), faculty members are qualified professionals capable of judging the academic performance of students in their courses. The instructor has the right to

assign any final grade (including credit/no credit and pass/fail) that they feel appropriately reflects the student's performance in the course. The student has the right to appeal this grade but only on the grounds that the grade assignment was "arbitrary and capricious" (as defined in the student code). Appeals for grade changes must be made in writing to the Chair of the Curriculum Committee, who, in consultation with the faculty member assigning the grade and, if need be, in consultation with the Program Director, has the final decision on the assigned grade.

### **Program-Initiated Academic Actions**

The Program office will monitor student's progress throughout the year and inform the student, the student's advisor, the chair of the Advising committee, and Program Director of perceived failures to meet Program-defined academic performance standards. These failures may include but are not limited to: 1) failure to pass all courses (core, elective and remedial) with a grade of B- or better; 2) a cumulative GPA of less than 3.0; and 3) unsatisfactory completion of laboratory rotations. If it is determined that the student has failed to meet the relevant academic standards of the Program, the Director will inform the student in writing of any academic action which may include probation, loss of financial support or dismissal from the Program.

### **Standards of Academic Conduct (see Section V of the University Student Code)**

The Programs have a specific process to report, evaluate and act upon accusations of academic misconduct. All faculty and students should be familiar with this process which is detailed below. The Programs utilize a neutral committee to act as an intermediary in such disputes, the Interdepartmental Programs Academic Standards Committee (ASC).

### **Interdepartmental Programs Academic Standards Committee**

At the beginning of each academic year, the Directors of the Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry graduate programs will appoint a four member Academic Standards Committee (ASC). This committee is distinct from the colleges' Academic Appeals Committees and is designed to advise the Program Directors and assure that uniform standards are applied across departments and colleges for all Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry Program students.

### **Committee Composition**

The committee will consist of three faculty members with at least one from each of the two Programs, as well as one senior level graduate student from one of the participating departments. All members have equal votes. The Chair of the ASC will be assigned by the two Program Directors and will remain the chair through all proceedings of students from either Program. If a faculty member on this committee is perceived to have a conflict of interest in the case (from the point of view of that faculty member, the ASC or the student) then another faculty member from that Program can replace them for the case review.

## **Reporting and Resolution of Actions of Academic Misconduct.**

Instances of academic misconduct in the Programs invariably stem from class work in the first-year curriculum. However, any suggestion of misconduct performed during a student's research rotations would follow the same reporting protocol and timeline.

- 1) *Identification of Misconduct:* When a faculty member becomes aware of some form of academic misconduct, the first action should be to make sure it is not a misunderstanding that can be resolved by the Informal Resolution process described above, allowing the student to respond to the allegation from the faculty member. The faculty member is encouraged to consult with the Program Director to learn of historical precedence involving similar cases to help promote equity across courses. Within ten (10) business days after the discussion with the student, the faculty member should provide written notification (email) to the student of any academic sanctions to be levied. Copies should also be submitted to the Program office, the student's academic advisor and to the Chair of the Curriculum Committee. Sanctions may include requiring the student to rewrite papers or retake exams, assigning a reduced or failing grade for the activity, failing the student in the course or recommending the student's expulsion from the program. If the student is willing to accept the sanction, then that should be noted in the student's file. The only exception to this process is a recommendation of expulsion which is automatically referred to the ASC committee.
- 2) *Appeal of Sanction:* The student has the right to appeal the faculty member's recommended sanction. The student must notify the faculty member who recommended the sanction, the Program Office, the student's academic advisor and the chair of the Curriculum Committee (all by email) within ten (10) business days of the receipt of the email announcing such sanctions, that the student intends to appeal the sanction. At that time the Program Office will immediately forward the pertinent information to the ASC for their review. Also all recommendations for expulsion from the Program (whether the student accepts or appeals the sanction) must be forwarded to the ASC for review. The ASC has twenty (20) business days from receiving the intent to appeal from the student to meet and generate a recommendation to the following discussion, the complainant and student will be asked to summarize their positions and the committee will then adjourn for deliberations. Within the twenty (20) business days that the ASC committee reviews the case, the committee chair will issue a written recommendation to the Program Director for action. This ASC report will also be included within the student's file.
- 3) *Resolution of Appeal:* The Program Director, after receiving the ASC recommendation, may then choose to accept that recommendation, accept the recommendation of the faculty member that brought the complaint (if it varies from the ASC recommendation) or choose a third, alternative resolution. This decision made by the Program Director cannot be appealed by the program faculty or the ASC and must be made ten (10) business days after receiving the ASC recommendation. If the Director chooses to not

accept the recommendation of the ASC committee, then a written explanation for that decision must be provided from the Director to the ASC. A copy of the Director's decision will be added to the student's file. Possible sanctions imposed by the Program Director include, but are not limited to: 1) requiring the student retake a course, 2) requiring that the student take remedial courses to improve their work habits and/or their understanding of ethical behavior, 3) placing the student on probation, as defined for the specific case, 4) discontinuing a student's stipend, insurance, tuition and/or other financial resources provided by the Program (see below for the time line of such a discontinuation), and/or 5) recommending probation, suspension or expulsion from the Program.

- 4) *Financial Support*: The Programs routinely provide support for the first year of graduate study, later relinquishing that task to the laboratory and department to which the student commits for thesis research. Financial support for a student accused of academic misconduct will be maintained throughout the entirety of the Interdepartmental Program's process including any ASC review process. If, once the process is complete, the Director decides upon termination of the student from the program, funding will be terminated after 15 (fifteen) days. The Interdepartmental Programs will not maintain financial support for the student if the student decides to appeal the Director's decision to the appropriate Academic Appeal Committee (see below).
- 5) *Student Appeal*: The student may appeal the Program Director's final decision to the appropriate college Academic Appeals Committee (the College of Science for the Biological Chemistry Program or the School of Medicine for the Molecular Biology Program).

## **University Sanctions**

If the Program Director decides upon probation, suspension or expulsion from the Program, then he/she will provide documentation of the decision and send it to the Academic Appeals Committee of the appropriate college (the College of Science for the Biological Chemistry Program or the School of Medicine for the Molecular Biology Program) in accordance with Sections V-B.6 or V-B.7 of the Student Code.