



Guide to Ethical Conduct

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Preamble

Librarians play an important role in society. One of the hallmarks of a profession is that it is guided and instructed by a set of ethical principles and conduct. The American Library Association's Code of ethics reminds us that

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.¹

Graduate students training to become professional librarians have an obligation to become conversant with the ethics of the profession. Students also have an obligation to be observant of ethical practices of being a student. This Guide is a first step to introduce VSU MLIS students to the generally accepted ethical practices as students and as librarians.

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The Importance of Academic Honesty in a University Community²

Academic Integrity is a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to the five fundamental values:
Honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

From these values flow the principles of behavior that enable academic communities to translate ideals into action.

As members of the VSU community, we are committed to cultivating an environment of mutual respect, honesty, fairness, and responsibility, because we know those values and actions cause others to respect us and the work we do. The value of the degrees VSU confers is raised because of our academic integrity.

VSU community members understand that academic integrity comes from honesty in learning and research. Genuine and sometimes hard-won knowledge and respect comes from presenting one's own work and acknowledging the work of others.

Personal and academic honesty fosters trust. Mutual trust among all members of the VSU community is essential for a positive learning environment. Through mutual trust, we can conduct research and learn with confidence.

All members of the VSU community must be treated with fairness. This means that all policies and practices must apply equally to all members.

By respecting our academic environment and peers, we learn to thrive in VSU's diversity. We recognize the participatory nature of the learning process and therefore the requirement for mutual respect in academic relationships, including respect and tolerance for a wide range of opinions and ideas.

Finally, we all have a responsibility to uphold the values of academic integrity. This is the key to building a better VSU community.

Code of Ethics of the American Library Association³

The American Library Association, the organization that guides the profession that you aspire to enter, recognizes “the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians.” The principles of the ALA Code of Ethics are reproduced below. The sections that are also relevant to academic conduct are highlighted.

- I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- III. We protect each library user’s right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- IV. We respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.**
- V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
- VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.**
- VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
- VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills**, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

What Is Academic Honesty?

Academic Integrity or Academic Honesty means performing all academic work without plagiarism, cheating, lying, tampering, stealing, receiving unauthorized or illegitimate assistance from any other person, or using any source of information that is not common knowledge.⁴

Violations of Academic Honesty

No specific set of rules or definitions can embrace every act of academic misconduct. A student who employs any form of academic deceit has violated the intellectual enterprise of the university.⁶

The following acts are designated as violations of academic honesty in many universities:

Plagiarism - representation of someone else's words, ideas, or work as one's own without attribution. Proper quoting and citing are missing.⁷

Inappropriate collaboration – consulting, conferring, or copying from a secondary party or parties before submitting a graded product such as a paper, project, or responses on an examination that are assumed to be solely a student's own work.⁸

Inappropriate use of sources – over-reliance upon a source or reliance upon a synopsis or abstract of a source to supply the content for a graded assignment. Direct quoting or citing of the sources does not legitimize this type of use.

Interference with work of other students - covers but is not limited to acts that deny others access to scholarly resources or deliberately impede the progress of another student or scholar. Examples include disrupting class work, giving misleading information, knowingly deceiving other members of a project team or group, and making library material unavailable to others.⁹

What Is Academic Dishonesty?

Academic Dishonesty means knowingly performing, attempting to perform, or assisting any other person in performing any academic work that does not meet this standard of academic honesty. Our goal is to use proactive measures to uphold the integrity of the University, and to increase the overall value of our diploma.⁵

Fabrication of data - falsification, distortion, or invention of any information or citation in academic work. Examples include, but are not limited to, inventing a source, deliberately misquoting, or falsifying numbers or other data.¹⁰

Misrepresentation of circumstances – attempting to secure an unfair advantage over other students by requesting exceptions or exemptions from the designated requirements of a course. Examples include lying about a need for an extension for an exam or paper¹¹ or declaring that material either placed on reserve or obtainable through normal academic channels is not available.

Multiple submission - submitting, without prior permission, any work submitted to fulfill another academic requirement.¹²

Facilitating academic dishonesty - knowingly helping or attempting to help another student violate any provision of the academic honesty code instituted by the university.¹³ Examples include disseminating copies of examinations; writing a paper for a student or supplying a paper previously written to a current student to fulfill course requirements.

Collaboration is permitted when the professor sanctions it. Examples are that the professor designates a graded requirement for the course as a group project, encourages students to help each other, suggests that a student consult with or engage a tutor to help with specific skills such as grammar or spelling, or makes tasks such as brainstorming or reviewing each other's work a part of the assignment.

Make Good Communication a Learning Goal

Work on developing good communication skills with professors as you move through your program of study. The relationships you form with the faculty can have an impact beyond the classroom. Professors who personally know you are more likely to write letters of recommendation, give career advice, and pass on contacts.¹⁴

Work on developing good communication skills with your classmates as you move through your program of study. These are your peers upon whom you will depend during your semesters in the program to work with you on group projects, lend moral support, nominate you for student awards, and form collegial bonds that may carry over into your professional career.

Tips for Communicating Effectively with Your Professors

Before you communicate with your professor:

- » Assess the situation.¹⁵
- » Decide the best venue (private e-mail, discussion post, or telephone call).
- » Plan what you are going to say before you act.¹⁶

If you decide to send the professor a private e-mail:

- » Start your communication with a salutation
(e.g., Dear Professor Smith or Hello, Dr. Jones)
- » Adjust your tone to the situation. Remember that the professor is a highly trained professional and his or her job is to teach and assess you.¹⁷
- » Give the context of your situation (e.g., I am working on the exam that is due Friday or I really can't come up with an idea for the paper that is due soon.)
- » Express yourself clearly and avoid slang or language that may be construed as offensive. If you are angry, wait at least 24 hours before sending a message.¹⁸

Rules of Etiquette in a Distance Learning Environment

In the VSU distance learning setting, most of your communications will take place using online tools provided by the university's courseware. VSU currently uses BlazeVIEW, a program that gives each course a password-protected website. The tools students typically use to communicate with professors and classmates in BlazeVIEW are e-mail and discussion boards.

What you say on a discussion board is comparable to announcing your message publicly in a face-to-face class. Before you post a message, ask yourself: Would I stand up in an in-person class and say this to my classmates?

What you say in a private e-mail is comparable to what you would say in a one-on-one conversation. Before you hit the "send" button, ask yourself: Would I want my words quoted in tomorrow's newspaper headline?

Also, replying by mistake to the entire e-mail "list" happens to almost everyone at least once. When this occurs, what you say will be read by many subscribers.

In any type of communication between student and professor:

- » Ask for help rather than demand assistance.
- » While it is true that your professor is a professional who should maintain an even demeanor, remember that everyone slips. Remember that you are talking to a human being who also has bad days and good days. It may be the best approach to walk away (politely) and try again later.¹⁹
- » Give your professor enough lead time to respond.
- » Ask the professor how he or she prefers to communicate and give your timeline.
- » If for some reason, you cannot reach a professor and you have an issue that needs to be resolved, call the MLIS office number at 229-333-5966. The program director is your first point of contact.

End Notes

1. 2. ALA Code of Ethics (Chicago: American Library Association, adopted June 28, 1997, by the ALA Council, amended January 22, 2008), available online at <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspolis/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm>.
2. 3. The Importance of Academic Honesty in a University Community (Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University, 2009), available online at <http://www.valdosta.edu/academic/AcademicHonestyatVSU.shtml>
Adapted from Center for Academic Integrity, Duke University, 1999.
3. 4. ALA Code of Ethics, amended 2008.
- 4.-5. 4.-5. Footnotes added to The Importance of Academic Honesty in a University Community statement on the Valdosta State University web site.
- 6.-10. 6.-10. Adapted from Academic Integrity Code, Section 02.A: Violations Adjudicated under the Academic Integrity Code (Washington, D.C.: American University, effective spring 1991, last revised fall 2007), available online at <http://www1.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.htm>
- 11.-13. 11.-13. Adapted from the Code of Academic Integrity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Office of the Provost, 1996), available online at <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html>
- 14.-19. 14.-19. Catherine Rayburn Trobaugh, How to Communicate with Your Professor, eHow (Bellevue, WA: eHow Inc., nd), available online at http://www.ehow.com/how_4473974_communicate-professor.html

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