

Case 4: Academic Integrity

You're in your second semester at a prestigious Midwestern university with rigorous academic standards. You and three classmates have been assigned a group project that will count for 75% of your course grade. You think that's a little harsh and have made comments to your fellow teammates about how unfair you think the weight of the assignment is for a first-year course. You've already taken on an academically challenging course load, in spite of concerns stated by your academic advisor. You feel that this assignment unjustly increases an already heavy burden.

The situation is complicated by the fact that you have just been invited to join a popular and high profile campus organization — one that will fill your time with meetings and other public obligations. None of your teammates has been asked to join any campus organizations, so they can't possibly understand the pressures you are feeling. Then there's your roommate who keeps impossible hours, making it difficult to work or study in your room.

As the weeks pass, you are putting more and more time into the work of the campus organization and have been absent or underprepared for meetings with your teammates to discuss the project. Shortly before the deadline and in a panic, you volunteer to gather the parts of the project from your teammates, add your portion, edit appropriately, and turn in the entire thing on behalf of your team. There is one problem: you haven't yet written a single word of your portion.

Desperate and in a rush, you use portions of a paper you wrote last semester. This paper earned an A, so it seems like a good choice. You tweak the old paper, bury its parts within the text from your teammates' papers, and turn the project in.

Unfortunately, the professor discovers your tactic and calls the four of you before an academic integrity board. Your teammates have no clue about what's happening, and you pretend to be ignorant as well.

Study questions:

1. Were you right to feel that the weight of the assignment was unfair? If so, does this have any bearing on how you ought to handle the project?

2. What ethical obligations do you have toward your teammates? Are these obligations affected by the fact that they have fewer responsibilities outside of coursework than you do?
3. Once your actions have been revealed by the professor, are you obligated to inform your teammates of your actions prior to the academic integrity meeting?
4. If the paper you submitted is your own original work, although from a different class, is that cheating, or isn't it?

Author: [Clinical Associate Professor Emerita Pat Van Volkinburg](#), served a total of 32 years with the [University of Michigan School of Kinesiology](#). For more than 16 years, Professor Van Volkinburg also served in various administrative positions, with the last five years as the Assistant Dean and then Associate Dean for Academic Programs. One of her duties was to chair the Academic Integrity Committee. She served in that capacity for more than 25 years for both graduate and undergraduate cases. Additionally, Professor Van Volkinburg created two new academic majors in the School and several non-academic programs within Kinesiology and across the greater campus.

In addition to teaching and advising undergraduate students, Professor Van Volkinburg was active at the state and national level on committees that wrote and addressed state and national policy related to pedagogy. Professor Van Volkinburg was selected by Kinesiology students three times for her [teaching excellence and twice at the state level for her dedication to teaching and for service](#).