

**3-18-04**

**To: University Committee on Academic Policy**

**From: UCAP Subcommittee on the Importance of Teaching**

**Subject: University policy regarding faculty distribution of old exams**

**Background:** Acting on a request from the Academic Assembly for a review of existing university policy, the Importance of Teaching Subcommittee met to discuss the problems caused by the lack of a clear policy in regard to faculty distribution of old exams.

The Academic Assembly's request read, in part:

“Over the last year the Academic Assembly has increasingly grown concerned with the lack of a University policy that adequately addresses the way professors distribute and collect their old exams. Over the last year a number of representatives of the Academic Assembly have witnessed that some students have access to prior exams that a professor has written while others do not have access to that same exam. This practice is worrisome when a professor, semester after semester, uses the same exam with little if any changes. In the view of the Academic Assembly this gives some students in the class an unearned advantage that comes at the expense of others.”

Both student and faculty representatives on the subcommittee agreed that the practice of some faculty members carelessly distributing old exams is all too common. Faculty who use the same exams year after year (or at times who use the same exam every other year) without making the exam universally available to all students in the course compromise the integrity of the exam as a measure of learning. This practice leads to some significant problems in the classroom. These problems include, but are not limited to:

- an unfair atmosphere in which students who make use of old exams prosper while others who choose to study without the use of such aids do not (this problem is exacerbated in courses that use grading curves).
- grade inflation
- a general breakdown in academic rigor affecting both students and faculty

**Suggested Policy Change:** Our subcommittee also agreed with the Academic Assembly's concern that the existing policy as it is stated in the General Student Regulations section of Spartan Life is inadequate to deal with the problem. Section 1.02 of the document, “Protection of Scholarship and Grades,” states that, “no student shall procure, provide, accept or use any materials containing question or answers to any examination or assignment without proper authorization.”

While this covers the student side of the issue, current policy does nothing to guide faculty in regard to their responsibilities in maintaining the integrity of their course

exams. Under the existing policy, students have little or no recourse when they feel that their instructor has compromised the integrity of course exams. As a means of correcting this unfair situation, our subcommittee proposes the following changes to the MSU code of Teaching Responsibility:

**Proposed change to point #3 of the MSU Code of Teaching Responsibility:**

(New language bold)

**The instructor is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the examinations and other assignments as evaluation tools.** Examinations and other assignments submitted for grading during the semester should be returned with sufficient promptness to enhance the learning experience. Unclaimed final examination answers will be retained by the instructor for at least one semester so that they may be reviewed by students who desire to do so. Examination questions are an integral part of course materials, and the decision whether to allow their retention by students is the responsibility of the instructor. **If instructors choose to allow students to retain examination materials, these materials should be accompanied by guidelines for how they may be used.** Term papers and other comparable projects are the property of students who prepare them.....