

## University Policy: Revocation of Degrees, Certificates, and Credit Policy

**Policy Category:** Academic Policies

**Responsible Executive:** Provost

**Office Responsible for Review of this Policy:** Office of the Provost

**Related University Policies:** Academic Integrity Code, Scholarly Misconduct Policy, Honor Code for the Washington College of Law

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### I. SCOPE

A degree from American University is a credential of academic accomplishment earned honorably and ethically. Other university policies addressing academic and research integrity attempt to ensure these academic standards; however, conduct may be discovered after a student has graduated from or left the university. If a former student has acquired academic credentials through deceit, fraud, or misrepresentation, American University reserves the right to revoke those degrees, certificates, and/or decertify credit from the institution. Examples of such actions may include, but are not limited to, violations of the Academic Integrity Code, the Scholarly Misconduct Policy, or the Honor Code for the Washington College of Law. Decisions to take such actions will be made only after careful consideration of all available evidence.

### III. DEFINITIONS

**Former Student:** A student who has taken coursework at American University but is no longer enrolled. The former student may or may not have received a degree or certificate from American University.

**Panel:** A group of three or more faculty members from the Academic Unit of the former student. All Panel members must be able to certify that they have no conflict of interest associated with the former student's case.

**Dean:** The Dean from the Academic Unit where the former student was enrolled when the incident took place.

## **IV. POLICY**

### **1. Investigation**

If an Academic Unit discovers that a former student may have improperly entered a degree or certificate program (e.g., intentional misrepresentation about a previous academic record) or improperly earned a degree or certification (e.g., plagiarizing part of a dissertation) from American University, an investigation may be opened. The Dean of the Academic Unit where the former student was enrolled shall appoint an investigating Panel consisting of at least three faculty members customarily from the Academic Unit with no conflict of interest associated with the case.

#### **a. Preliminary Assessment**

Prior to contacting the former student, the Panel members shall conduct an internal preliminary assessment of the information available to them. The goal of the preliminary assessment is to determine if there is sufficient merit to the allegation to pursue a full review. The Panel may obtain any materials deemed relevant; all university offices shall cooperate with the Panel. If the Panel finds there is insufficient evidence to pursue the allegation, the preliminary assessment is closed. The information from the preliminary assessment will be maintained by the Academic Unit in a confidential manner to the extent permitted by law. The preliminary assessment may be reopened if further evidence becomes available to consider a full review. No sanctions may be imposed if the allegation does not go to a full review. The investigating Panel shall have no more than 30 days to complete the preliminary assessment, unless there is a justified exception granted by the Dean.

#### **b. Notification**

If the Panel determines that evidence supports the allegation, the Panel shall then notify the student of the full review. Notification shall be sent within 10 days after completion of the preliminary assessment. Notification must include copies of all relevant materials and evidence.

#### **c. Response**

The former student shall have 60 days from the date of notification to respond to the allegation. The response may include any relevant materials that the former student wishes to submit. The former student may request an extension from the Panel for specific, justifiable reasons.

#### **d. Optional Hearing**

If the former student desires an optional hearing, the written request for one must accompany the submission of all relevant material in the response. Failure by the former student to make a timely written request for a hearing shall constitute a waiver of the former student's right to a hearing before the Panel. The hearing will take place after the Panel has had an opportunity to review the relevant materials, which may be up to 30 days. The hearing must take place no more than 21 days after the conclusion of the review of materials. The former student may request an extension from the Panel for specific, justifiable reasons. If the former student is unable to be physically present but desires to attend electronically, the former student is responsible for the coordination and success of the software solution.

The Panel hearing will be closed to the public. The student charged will have the opportunity to answer the charges. Witnesses may be called by the parties or by the Panel. The Panel may limit the number of witnesses for such reasons as redundancy or irrelevancy. Witnesses will be excluded from the hearing until testimony is to be presented. All participants must provide truthful testimony. All parties present may question the witnesses. No supporters or persons acting as legal counsel for the former student or witnesses are permitted during the proceedings; only the former student, the Panel, and any witnesses are permitted in attendance. If the student fails to attend the hearing, the time and place of which have been agreed upon by all parties in advance, the Panel may choose to hear the case in the former student's absence.

#### **e. Review and Report**

After the response period ends and an optional hearing, if properly requested, has occurred, the Panel shall review all materials and evidence available. The Panel shall provide a written report of their findings and recommendations to the Dean of Academic Unit. The purpose of the report is to summarize the evidence to the Dean. The report may or may not include a recommendation of specific sanctions, but the Dean, and not the Panel, has the authority to impose sanctions. The review must be concluded 30 days after the former student has responded. If the review cannot be concluded in the 30-day time period, the Panel may request a time extension from the Dean. Information obtained during review will be maintained by the Academic Unit in a confidential manner to the extent permitted by law.

## **2. Adjudication**

After reviewing the Panel's report, the Dean shall make a determination regarding the allegation. The Dean may choose to dismiss the case or issue a sanction, based on the weight of the evidence that the former student engaged in misconduct. Sanctions may include, but are not limited to, revocation of the degree or certificate and/or decertification of credit. Upon determination of the appropriate sanction, the Dean will notify the former student in writing of the decision. The standard of proof for a sanction will be clear and convincing evidence – a measure of proof that produces a firm belief in the allegations presented. It is more than the standard of “preponderance of the evidence” and less than the standard of “beyond a reasonable doubt.” The Dean will also provide a copy of the investigation to the Provost, the General Counsel, and the Registrar if a sanction is imposed.

## **3. Appeal**

The former student will have 15 days upon receiving notification of a sanction from the Dean to appeal the decision. An appeal will only be considered for the following reasons:

- The procedures in this document were not properly followed;
- Newly discovered evidence relevant to the case was not examined in the review;  
or
- The severity of the sanction was not proportionate to the conduct.

All appeals must be given to the Office of the Provost in writing. The Dean may respond to the appeal in writing. A copy of the Dean's response will be made available to the former student. The Provost's decision is final.

## **4. Sanction**

If no appeal is made or if the appeal is denied, the Dean or designee will work with the appropriate stakeholders on campus, such as the University Registrar, to carry out the sanctions. If a degree revocation or any other sanction is imposed, the former student's official transcript will be corrected to reflect the sanction.

**V. EFFECTIVE DATE AND REVISIONS:**

This Policy is effective as of December 1, 2016