

Report by the Psychology Department Executive Committee on its Investigation of Potential Academic Misconduct Involving Professor John Hagen

The purpose of this document is to report on the nature and findings of an investigation conducted by the Psychology Department Executive Committee (EC) in December 2007 and January 2008 concerning allegations of potential academic misconduct involving Professor John Hagen. A member of our faculty initially brought these matters to our attention in late November 2007. In what follows we first briefly describe the purpose and nature of our investigation, the information on which the report is based, and then summarize our findings. To anticipate the findings: we believe that Professor Hagen has not engaged in academic misconduct, and we have uncovered nothing to warrant further investigation.

Purpose and nature of the investigation

In our view the basic question raised by these allegations is whether or not Professor Hagen has been inappropriately granting academic credit to large numbers of students (especially student-athletes), possibly via courses (especially independent studies courses) lacking in suitable content. The purpose of our investigation was to resolve this issue, and we did so by pursuing the five specific questions listed below, which are those we believe to be the most serious and central. It is therefore not our intent to provide a detailed point-by-point response to the original November communication from our concerned faculty member, though we believe that our investigation does in fact address most of those concerns. It is also not our intent to provide a detailed corroboration or comment on the subsequent LS&A report from Dean Megginson. Rather, we intend here to provide our own independent assessment, and in doing so we have drawn on information and judgment that in part complements that of the LS&A report. Finally, while we have done our best here to discharge our responsibility to get to the bottom of this in a timely fashion, we also intended throughout to do so in a manner that did not compromise student privacy, and that respected Professor Hagen's academic freedom as a faculty member.

Our department chair, Professor Terri Lee, chose not to participate in the investigation or our deliberations, and we respect this well-considered decision.

Summary of the sources of information on which the report is based

We base our findings below on the following:

- A meeting of the EC with Professor Hagen in which he described his teaching and work with students, and responded to committee questions.
- A follow-up meeting of two members of the EC with Professor Hagen, focusing on a review of a sample of assigned papers written by students in a Fall 2007 course, and the acquisition of a further sample of student work (see below for a description) that was shared with the rest of the EC.
- A meeting of the EC with the member of our faculty who originally raised the concerns with us.
- A meeting of a member of the EC with staff from the Department's Student Academic Affairs office, concerning compliance of Professor Hagen's courses with our department regulations concerning the approval and documentation of courses.
- A sample of work from 53 students in courses Psy 200, Psy 218, Psy 327, and Psy 401 from the Fall 2007 term provided to us by Professor Hagen.
- The mean grades and course enrollments, specified separately for non-athletes and student-athletes, for all of Professor Hagen's independent studies courses from 2004 through 2007

(Psy 200, Psy 326, Psy 327, Psy 421, and Psy 423), and the mean cumulative GPAs for the students enrolled in those courses, again separated by non-athletes and student-athletes.

- The mean grades and course enrollments, specified separately for non-athletes and student-athletes for all of the corresponding independent studies courses taught by the rest of the Psychology Department faculty in 2006 and 2007 (Psy 200, Psy 327, Psy 421, and Psy 423), and the mean cumulative GPAs for the students enrolled in those courses, again separated by non-athletes and student-athletes.

Our findings

In our investigation we raised and answered the following five questions:

1. **Were there any procedural irregularities or violations in how Professor Hagen's courses were being handled in our department?**

The potential concern here was that inappropriate course content or inappropriate independent studies may have in some way bypassed our standard procedures for approvals, registrations, and filing of student work and syllabi with our Department Student Academic Affairs Office. We therefore reviewed these procedures and investigated their compliance.

Our finding is that there have not been procedural irregularities or violations.

2. **Were there any patterns in the grades assigned in Professor Hagen's courses to indicate that he was treating student-athletes differently from non-athletes?**

The potential concern here is that student-athletes might have been given preferential treatment in grading. We reviewed the grading patterns in Professor Hagen's courses over the past four years (see the detailed list above) and compared the athletes and non-athlete grades in these courses. There is a difference, but this difference is entirely consistent with the overall cumulative GPA difference between the two groups. There is no evidence that any preference is given to the student-athletes.

Our finding is that there is not a pattern in the grades assigned to indicate that Professor Hagen treats student-athletes differently from non-athletes.

3. **Were there any patterns in the grades assigned in Professor Hagen's independent studies courses to indicate that they are graded differently from other independent studies courses in the department?**

The potential concern here is that, perhaps even if student-athletes are not treated differently, the grade distribution in Professor Hagen's courses might be different enough from other comparable courses that the pattern would be consistent with the inappropriate assignment of higher grades, which might be intended to primarily benefit student-athletes. (Note that this issue is distinct from the issue of what students did for the grade, taken up in #4 and #5 below). We therefore looked at the grading patterns for all independent studies courses in the Psychology Department not taught by Professor Hagen over the past two years (see above for the detailed list). This provided a sufficient number of data points to meaningfully separate athletes and non-athletes, and we could therefore compare the overall department athlete/non-athlete pattern in independent studies courses to Professor Hagen's grading pattern, again using the students' own cumulative GPA's as a baseline. The overall department pattern is remarkably consistent with that of Professor Hagen's; both patterns suggest an assignment of grades that is blind to athlete status.

Our finding is that there is not a pattern to indicate that the way Professor Hagen assigns grades to athletes and non-athletes in his independent studies courses is any different from the way the rest of the department assigns independent studies grades to athlete and non-athletes.

4. Is the content of Professor Hagen's courses appropriate for psychology course credit?

The potential concern here is that some of the courses (especially the independent studies courses that enroll larger numbers of student-athletes) involve content that is insufficient, either in quantity or quality, for academic psychology course credit. This is obviously a matter of subjective judgment. We based our evaluation on a review of (a) the course syllabi from the formal courses taught by Professor Hagen that attract large numbers of student-athletes (Psy 218 and Psy 401) and (b) a sample of coursework (papers and presentations from 53 students) from the formal courses and independent studies courses (Psy 200 and 327) taught in Fall 2007, all of which attract large numbers of student-athletes.

Some of these courses are unusual in that they require personal application of the scientific material presented (primarily theory and data concerning learning) through a self-reflective analysis. Though they do not fit the standard model of an academic course, they are not greater departures from this model than many of the other independent studies courses we offer in the Department, which include experiential learning courses such as laboratory work, the Detroit Initiative courses, and Project Outreach. In any event, departing from the standard model itself is not the issue—the issue is whether the content of the courses is appropriate. Based on the materials we have reviewed, we believe it is.

Our view is that the content of these courses is appropriate for psychology academic course credit.

5. Did students (including student-athletes) actually produce the work required to earn the academic credit in these courses?

The potential concern here is that, even if the course content is appropriate, and even if the pattern of grade assignments is not unusual, the main substance of the allegations would nevertheless hold if students were earning their academic credit without actually doing the work. We therefore obtained and reviewed coursework produced by 53 students enrolled in Professor Hagen's courses. Because we viewed a sample and not the full set (unlike the grades above), we cannot unequivocally state that all students are doing all the work. Investigating each individual student's performance and their resulting grade over the last several years at this stage would have been both impractical and possibly a questionable compromise of student privacy. But based on our view of this sample of 53 students, which included student-athletes, we find no evidence to suggest that the work is not being done, or that the requirements for student-athletes are different from that of non-student-athletes. The work furthermore appears to be reasonable given the nature of the courses (see #4 above).

We have found no evidence to suggest that students, including student-athletes, did not produce the work required to earn academic credit in these courses.

This concludes our report and we consider it the end of this investigation. In closing, we wish to express our appreciation for the patience of all those involved in this matter.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee of the Psychology Department

Albert Cain, Professor of Psychology

Jacquelynne Eccles, Professor of Psychology

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Stephen Maren, Professor of Psychology

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