



*To:* All students enrolled in EOAS courses

*Re:* Academic Integrity

September 24, 2020

Dear Students,

As you know, we have all had to adapt to new teaching and learning practices in the face of a global health pandemic. I realize that this has created significant challenges, both for students and instructors, as we navigate uncharted terrain and explore new approaches to remain digitally connected. Over the past few months, EOAS faculty, staff and graduate students have put enormous effort into developing virtual resources to continue providing you with a world-class Earth science education. As a department, we remain firmly committed to this educational mission.

Unfortunately, there are a small number of students who have exploited the current situation in dishonest ways, attempting to advance through their course work without putting in the necessary effort. These students have engaged in a variety of unethical behaviors, including stealing quiz and exam answers, and paying professional ‘tutors’ to complete their work. These actions are a clear and flagrant breach of UBC’s [Academic Integrity Policy](#). In recent weeks, I have received a number of messages from students reporting instances of apparent academic misconduct, and providing evidence that is being used in various on-going investigations. I would encourage all of you to bring any concerns about academic integrity to me, by emailing [head@eoas.ubc.ca](mailto:head@eoas.ubc.ca). Any information you provide will be treated as confidential, and shared only with course instructors and relevant parties in the Dean of Science office.

We remain committed to identifying all cases of academic misconduct, and applying disciplinary actions, as appropriate. To this end, we are currently using all of the means at our disposal, including a variety of software tools, to identify cases of plagiarism, cheating and ‘contract test taking’. We are also reviewing our assessment tools to ensure that students must independently provide evidence of learning outcomes. Instances of cheating may result in the assignment of a failing grade for a course, at the discretion of the instructor, and other academic censure, as deemed appropriate by the Dean’s office.

In this time of on-line learning, problems of increased academic misconduct are certainly not restricted to UBC. Some of you may be aware that Burnaby police recently arrested a woman in an alleged [cheating scheme](#) at SFU. We have also received reports that some tutoring companies may be blackmailing students, with requests for additional payments under threat of disclosure to university officials. This is a dark and ugly world, with many potentially unintended negative consequences.

For the vast majority of you, who approach your studies with honesty and integrity, I say this: do not be discouraged by the actions of a small minority. Yes, cheating is unfair, and no, we will not be able to catch all instances of academic misconduct. But in the end, those dishonest students are only harming their own future, robbing themselves of a world-class education and the ability to gain deeper insights into the world around them. These students are recklessly throwing away an opportunity that is reserved for a small fraction of the world's population.

You chose to study at UBC, and to take EOAS courses in particular, to expand your understanding of our Earth system. Many of you are motivated by a deep desire to understand and mitigate climate change, others may soon lead the development of better ocean management practices or sustainable resource economies. Still others may simply be fascinated by the geological history of our planet and the processes that led to creation of our magnificent coastal mountains. No matter what your specialization and interest, you will be the leaders of tomorrow, as we seek to adapt our societies to live in greater balance with the physical world around us. With this in mind, I urge you to stay focused on your long-term goals as you work hard to make the most of the educational opportunities in front of you.

I wish you all the best in these unusual and challenging times, and hope that the year ahead is healthy and academically rewarding.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Philippe Tortell', followed by a stylized monogram or set of initials.

Philippe Tortell  
Professor and Head  
Department of Earth, Ocean & Atmospheric Sciences