



Friday, March 8th, 2024

Subject: Cheating and the Trophy Challenge

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Da Vinci Tree Academy's investigations are thorough and follow industry best practices. They involve individualized open-ended questions, review of security camera footage, written documentation of evidence, and the recording of student/staff interviews. Our strict system of investigation has multiple benefits for our community. Among them are:

- Bullying and intimidation are rooted out quickly and thoroughly.
- Students who accuse others unjustly are not given punishment for their false accusations. This includes accusations against students, staff, and parents.
- Students involved with illicit items (such as vapes) are caught and corrected.
- Staff members involved in harmful behavior towards students are corrected or relieved of their positions in a manner that is fair and impartial.
- Staff members falsely accused of wrongdoing do not have to fear for their jobs.

Da Vinci Tree's process was designed in consultation with the Udall Shumway Law Firm. Our process has been requested by the Tucson Police Department and several schools in the area to serve as a model. Investigations are led by a member of administration or an administrative assistant. They tend to take an average minimum of five hours but can regularly take much longer than that.

Round One of the Trophy Challenge for all of our students is the equivalent weight of a final exam in high school. It makes up 30% of a student's overall grade in three subjects. On Thursday, February 29th, school administration was alerted to abnormalities in the meta data associated with our students' academic Trophy Challenge. After a brief review of the documentation, it became clear that at least a dozen students had been involved in cheating and an investigation was opened.

We care about giving students opportunities for grace. On our morning announcements on Monday, March 2nd, I made an open invitation to any student involved in cheating. If a student involved in cheating turned themselves in and honestly shared with us who they



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were involved with, we would spare them from any disciplinary consequences and they would get off with a warning. These disciplinary consequences would not include academic amnesty (if you didn't do an assignment, you still shouldn't get credit for the assignment even if you admit it), but there would be no associated punishments. To our surprise, more than 40 students were implicated.

Under normal circumstances, this situation would mean at least 200 hours of administrative investigative time. This past week we have had three of our six investigators (administrators or administrative assistants) out for health reasons. We also had other pressing concerns, investigations, and Academic Probation to attend to.

As a result, we have done the best job we can under the circumstances to adjudicate each student fairly. Through deeper questioning and analysis of the available information, we were able to exonerate at least eight students who were accused. What to do with the remaining 30+ students has been an important issue. We have therefore, broadly categorized students involved into four separate groups.

1. **Students who have confessed to cheating.** As promised, students in this category are being let off with a warning. Any trophies that they did not do themselves are being deducted from their trophy count. For students that abetted in the cheating by doing trophies for others, if the total number of trophies was less than six, we are subtracting them from their own total as recompense for their activities. For students who cheated for other students who did more than six, we are capping the penalty at six given the outsized impact this grade has on our students' report card (and due to the promise of no disciplinary actions). Removal of six trophies for a student would drop their Trophy Challenge grade to a B-. Students in this group will no longer be eligible for gift cards for Round One trophies if they have not been awarded yet. Removal of gift cards not yet awarded is not a punishment, but a removal of a benefit.
2. **Students who we know cheated, but were unwilling to confess.** Students in this category have concrete evidence against them but they were unwilling to come forward and admit guilt. These students will have their ill-gotten trophies taken from their scores and will be given a full-day detention. Students in this category are also no longer eligible for Round One gift cards.



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3. **Students who we know cheated, but who lied to us and pretended to be innocent.** Students in this category have concrete evidence against them. These students not only cheated, but then lied about their involvement to a member of staff. These students will have their ill-gotten trophies taken from their scores and will be given a suspension (which goes on their permanent academic record). Students in this category are also no longer eligible for Round One gift cards.
4. **Students who we suspect of cheating, but do not have conclusive evidence.** Students in this group have circumstantial evidence against them, but nothing concrete. These students will be issued a general warning about cheating but nothing further. Students in this category will be awarded their gift cards since there is no proven wrong doing.

We are hopeful that these actions will preserve Da Vinci Tree Academy's academic integrity while also balancing our inability to investigate all 40+ cases with our usual rigor. If there are any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me. Given the events of the past two weeks, my schedule is still extremely tight so email is probably the best way to get ahold of me (mroll@davincitree.academy).

Kind Regards,

Matt Roll, M.Ed.

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