To Whom It May Concern:

Entering college at the university level is a big step that requires a new set of skills, an increased work ethic along with a new high level of integrity. It is a whole new environment that takes time to get used to. Sometimes certain individuals are never able to fully adapt and others find themselves struggling throughout. I am writing to you because I have fallen victim to the overwhelming and sometimes hard to handle atmosphere of a university, but have come out a strong student as well as a better individual.

Coming out of high school I was so excited to start my college career here at Western Washington University. I only heard great things about the school and ever since my first time visiting I fell in love with the campus, the people, the city and the community. I consider myself a hardworking, smart, talented and driven individual who was excited for the new challenges my college career was about to give me. Right away the first struggle I found myself facing was time management. In this new atmosphere, it was and still is hard to balance academics, social life, family and fun all at the same time and to be completely honest I still find myself struggling with it. This issue of time management, as well as some short term situational circumstances, has lead me to the hardest and most stressful situation I have had to face and the reason I am sharing it with you.

Academic Integrity, the term most students interpret as no cheating. Well there is a lot more to this two-word term that so many of us disregard or ignore but to start out I will explain my first run in with academic dishonesty. It was early in my sophomore year and I was taking a Geology 101 course to fulfill my lab science general university requirement. I have no interest in pursuing a career in geology or any type of hard science so looking back I was not taking the course as seriously as I should have been. The course was split up into lecture and lab. The lab section was taught by a graduate student. Now at that time, I was going through a serious health issue that had me in the hospital on a few separate occasions. Looking back now I used my health issue as an excuse to fall behind. I forgot to do a lab assignment and I heard that lab assignments from past quarters were being passed around. So, just thinking I need to get this done regardless I used a colleague’s lab to copy off. Ultimately, I ended up getting caught by the T.A. and she confronted me about it. I was honest and she respected that but still had to follow the policy that Western takes very seriously and turn me over to the Academic dishonesty. I then went and took the online program about academic dishonesty that they require you to do for your first offense. Never did I think I would have an issue with cheating or academic dishonesty, that is not who I am as a student or a person but it happened, I owned up to it and I moved past it.

Now, my junior year and third year at Western it was time to figure out my future and get my major decided. It was during spring quarter and I was pretty set on a communication studies major with a sports psychology. I was excited to have this all finally figured out and get started on some important classes. I was taking courses that all related to my intended Communications studies major as well as courses for my sports psychology minor. These classes were ones I genuinely enjoyed and I looked forward to attending. I was finally at a point where I knew what I wanted to get my undergraduate degree in and I was so excited. The time to apply for the communications major was just around the corner and I heard from peers that the portfolio required for applying included a lot of pieces and so I needed to get that all put together and once again my time management was not the best, waiting till the last minute to put the pieces together. So, while scrambling to get letters of recommendations, write my letter of intent, dig up writing samples and more I was also taking a very important load of classes. This was my first quarter where all my courses were relevant to my degree and minor, including two Kinesiology classes and my first communications writing proficiency course. Everything was going well; my application was coming together and midterms had just passed. As the quarter progressed I
submitted my application for consideration and was waiting to hear back. This quarter I was taking a Sociology of sport course taught by one of my favorite professors and one who I had built a strong relationship with and who wrote one of my letters of recommendation for my application. Her course was interesting and demanding all at the same time but I always put maximum effort in her assignments. Now my other class was a communication research methods class that asked a lot of you; more than any class has ever asked of me before. This class was one of the more difficult classes I have taken in my college career and up until this point I was doing alright. The quarter was almost over, I was handling my stress well, my grades were coming along and I was enjoying myself. The time had come and I finally heard back from the communications department and I was accepted into the major. Finally, a bit of relief could come off my shoulders but it was not for long. My communications professor was leaving two weeks early too go and do research in China I believe it was so her final was going to be given in advance. I had my worst grade in this class so I needed to do well on this final exam and her exams were some of the most comprehensive and complex exams I have ever taken. Hours and hours of studying were being put into this exam all at the same time of the last assignments for my minor courses before the actual finals week began. I was assigned a paper in my Kinesiology class that was due around the same time as my big exam. I found myself only studying for the test and waiting till the last day to write my paper. With minimal effort and no revision or editing I submitted the paper and did not think about it again. I took the test for my communications class, not doing as well as I would have hoped but finishing that class was a good feeling. Shortly after that feeling went away. I received an email from my Kinesiology professor saying that I had not cited my sources correctly and my paper had forms of plagiarism in it. My paraphrasing was too close to the original and the citation was in the wrong format. It was the end of the quarter so she was unable to meet with me in person to discuss it but she submitted me to the university for what was now my second offense of academic dishonesty.

I knew what was next and what I was about to face but it was still the most anxiety I have ever experienced waiting for it all to take place. In most cases, you would be in contact with the board of academic dishonesty right away and set a time to meet with the board in a hearing to decide the repercussions. Mine happened in spring quarter so it was extended over a five-month process in which I worried all the time about my future here at the university. The day came and I met with a board about my incident and was able to have a real conversation about it all. I told them exactly what I have told you in this letter. I told them my story, how I ended up in front of them and that I nor any other student at Western has ever intended to be in my situation. My situation was serious, I was up for suspension and dismissal from the university but I was honest, truthful and fair. I did not hide what I had done, I faced it with acceptance and understanding. I never meant to hurt the integrity of myself, my classmates, my professors and most importantly my school. Now what is Integrity and why was that the most upsetting thing about this whole situation?

Integrity, in a basic definition is, a quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. The idea of integrity is basic and most people believe they understand it. But there is a difference between understanding what integrity is and exhibiting integrity in one’s life. Western uses this term of integrity because of its universality. Integrity can be thought of honor, decency, morality, fairness, honesty, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and more. I believe that is one of the reasons why integrity is more complex than many think. The circumstance I just told you about affected not just my own integrity but the integrity of many others. The relationships I have built in my life hold strong importance and I hurt those relationships in this situation. I caused disruption in my relationship with my friends, classmates, professors, academic colleagues and more. I personally believe I live my life with high morals and which I value my integrity. This is a personal choice; which living a life of integrity usually is. But at this specific time of my life I was experiencing something called moral myopia or a term of near sightedness where nothing else matters besides what you are trying to achieve. You see this myopia a lot in business ethics when someone is trying to gain an edge to get a
promotion or make more money; their morals sometimes go out the window. This does not mean that this person does not have any morals or is an unethical low integrity individual. It just means that the raise or the promotion seemed to matter more to them at the time and whatever it took to get that they were going to do. So, for me I was so focused on studying for my communications class as well as getting into my major that everything else was on the back burner. It felt like the only important thing to me was getting into my major and passing my communications 398 course. This idea that nothing else was as important or was going to help me reach my goal, my goal being acceptance into the major and finishing strong in my communications class, lead me to my own moral myopia. In my situation, my morals were not completely gone, they just were not around at the times I needed them. I am not using this concept of myopia as an excuse, nor should anyone who experiences it. No one should ever have an excuse for what I did but what I am telling you is, it happens. At some point in your life and most likely in your college career you will find yourself in this state of myopia. Something will be more important than something else or the seemingly most important thing will come up and something or someone will be left behind or forgotten about. Unfortunately for me, my professors, my classmates, my friends, my family, the university and all those involved were affected by my lack of integrity in one situation. The trust I had built with my professors was disrupted, my family had to worry about things they should not have too worry about, my classmates opportunity for education or grading was messed with and my university was now questioning my integrity as a whole. It was never my intent to hurt those around me or myself but it happened and I have learned more from it than I could have ever imagined. Hopefully you have learned from me that although something you never meant to do or even imagined could happen occurs it not only affects you but everyone around you. And honestly that is the worst part, I disappointed a professor who stood up for me and wrote me a letter of recommendation by not taking her assignments seriously enough, I took value away from a university that inspires growth and strong education and community. It is a letdown I never want to feel again and hope you will never come close to feeling. I want you to understand the seriousness of academic integrity and know that it is not a victimless offense. It affects you as well as those around you, plagiarism takes away credit that is due elsewhere and puts faculty and staff in positions of fraud if evaluating those articles of plagiarism. This all allows for question to be invited towards the student and the university. Our university takes academic integrity very seriously and when it is questioned it jeopardizes the university’s academic reputation. As you can see although integrity seems like a personal attribute it has effect on many.

Integrity is deeply rooted in the educational system as well as ourselves. Western values its students’ and their integrity. The university has given me the opportunity to share my own experience in hope that you as future students understand its importance and its effects. College is a place for outstanding individuals to come and learn, grown, and succeed. Do not let a lack of integrity take that away from you. Honor integrity as it is vital for your growth as an individual and success at the university level.