A potential tool for analyzing
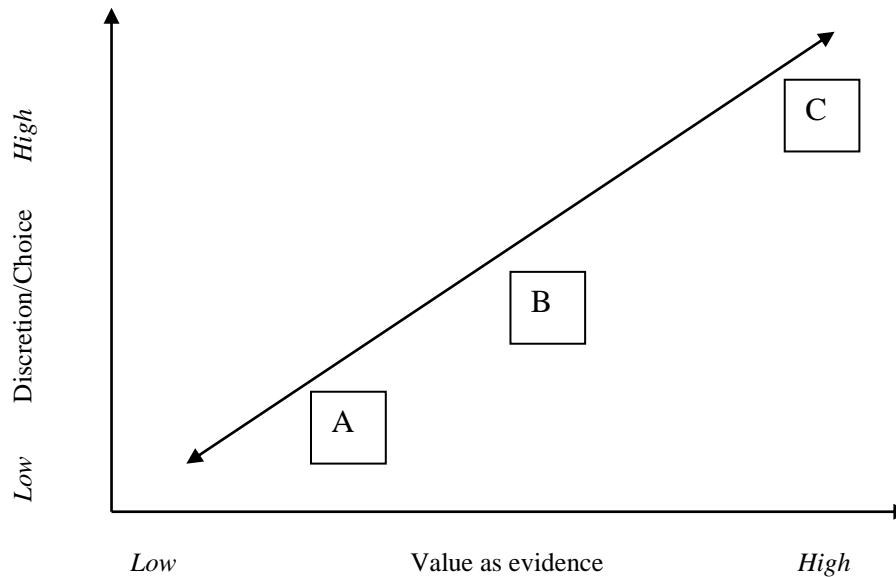# Graduate Honor System allegations

Diagram Key:

Vertical axis – The degree to which a student had options in formulating their answer. Example: If asked an arithmetic question with only one correct answer, the question provides little room for discretion, and the student has "Low" choice. If asked an essay question such as "How do investors select their primary media source of business news?" a student has many possible (good) choices as to how they will answer the question.

Horizontal axis – The degree to which an element of the documentary evidence is useful for reaching a good verdict. Example: "Low" evidence neither proves nor disproves an allegation. "High" evidence gives a Review Panel a reasonable chance to reach a verdict.

Diagonal Axis – The interaction between these two variables with sample points plotted. Example: If students have been accused of cheating, their papers should be the primary source of evidence. Comparing the papers for similarities and differences allows a Review Panel to assess the allegation.

"A": If an area in common between the two students' academic work is low in choice, then it should be low in evidentiary value. Example: In a code-writing assignment, there may be elements of code that MUST be present (very routine commands and prompts), in order for the program to work. Since the two students are assumed to be proficient in code-writing and would ensure that their programs worked, the mere presence of these same lines of code might not be enough to reach a "Guilty" verdict.

"B":   If an area in common affords a moderate degree of choice, then a similarity between the two assignments might justifiably influence the deliberations. Example: In a software program, there may be multiple successful ways to arrange the lines of code and to set up various algorithms and logic loops/subroutines. The code could run successfully either way, so a student has a variable degree of choice in deciding how the program will be structured and how it runs. If there are multiple alternatives for how the program is structured, and the students have the same structure, this similarity might be useful in addressing an allegation of cheating.

"C": If an area in common affords a very high degree of choice, then a similarity between the two assignments should be considered very closely. Example: In a given software program, code writers may from time to time insert comments. The comments do not affect the running of the program; they are inserted as notes of the programmer for a variety of reasons. Since these notes may be the personal communications of the code writer, there is usually a very wide range of options as to whether comments are there or not, how they are worded, and even the font or typographical errors within them.   Two assignments with identical comments containing identical typographical errors might be heavy evidence.

Using this diagram as a tool.

(Note: Panelists considering a cheating case are not restricted to any one algorithm for their deliberations and decisions. So long as they follow Graduate Honor System procedures, they have great liberty in how they individually and collectively reach their decision. Thus, panelists are not required to use this decision tool.)

1. This process might be most useful for panelists who do not have expertise in the topic of the accused students' papers. This is because an informed effort invested in pattern-matching can allow allegations of cheating to be appropriately considered. Panelists should carefully consider the areas of the assignments that are alike and not alike.

2. Panelists should consider information provided by the referrer and the referred students that helps them assess what elements of the assignment offered high or low choice. Panelists are encouraged to ask questions of the referrer and the accused student(s) that help determine the level of discretion/choice for the disputed sections of the students' work.

3. Panelists often consider alternative explanations as to why elements of the referred students' papers are similar. "Unauthorized collaboration" may be one explanation, and is often suggested by the referrer. "Coincidence" may be an explanation suggested by referred students. "Common (but independent) access to identical study materials or references" is an alternative often considered. Panelists will weigh the various alternatives, and reach their conclusion.

4. Panelists may choose to examine "neutral papers" from other students in the class, as this sometimes helps place similarities and differences within that class's context.