

Chapter VIII

Generic Learning Materials: Developing Academic Integrity in Your Students

Helen Durham

University of Leeds, UK

Samuel Leung

University of Southampton, UK

David DiBiase

The Pennsylvania State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Academic integrity (AI) is of relevance across all academic disciplines, both from the perspective of the educator and the student. From the former perspective there is the need to increase the awareness of AI amongst the student population whilst monitoring and enforcing the rules and regulation regarding plagiarism within their institution. On the other hand, students need a full appreciation of the importance of AI and a clear recognition of the penalties for flouting the regulations in order to steer a successful passage through higher education and on into their professional career. By repurposing learning materials originally developed by the Pennsylvania State University (USA), the Universities of Southampton and Leeds (UK) have developed academic integrity guidelines to support students in their studies and provide an assessment of their understanding of AI concepts. This chapter describes the development of these learning activities and examines the technical and content issues of repurposing materials for three different institutions. It also reflects on the success of embedding the guidelines and assessment in geography programmes at two UK universities, examines the effect of using the online plagiarism detection service, Turnitin, to police plagiarism cases and summaries the lessons learnt in helping geography students to enhance their study skills.

INTRODUCTION

What do we mean by academic integrity? Academic integrity refers to a standard of behavior expected from all members of the academic community in which all work produced should be one's own and if ideas and material are used from other sources, then these should be attributed appropriately. It is not just plagiarism (the representation of someone else's ideas, words or intellectual property as one's own) that is under discussion; hence the broader terminology "academic integrity" is used in this chapter. The term academic integrity is a more positive view of the concept emphasizing the need for correct citation, full referencing, relevant and well-punctuated quotations, and accurately represented paraphrasing. These, in addition to avoiding plagiarism, all constitute academic integrity. Hinman (2002) identifies academic integrity as consisting of five core values required for academic life to flourish: honesty, fairness, trust, respect, and responsibility. Anyone employed or studying in the academic sector is expected to show integrity in their work whether, for example, they are students submitting assignments or academics producing papers. Submitting work that is not wholly your own, or using ideas or quotes from other sources without citing and referencing correctly, is cheating.

Understanding and agreeing to the terms of academic integrity is an important step to help students avoid inadvertent plagiarism resulting from ignorance, lack of understanding, causal attitude, and cultural differences. All of these have become sensitive issues facing the academic community in the light of widening access and an internationalized education market. When cheating has been detected, is the transgression a result of poor scholarship or rather an intention to gain unfair advantage? Larkham and Manns (2002) discuss the difficulties of distinguishing between these two situations and highlight the complexity and practical problems of identifying plagiarism cases and penalizing appropriately.

McCabe (2000) suggests that there is a growing perception among students that many of their peers are plagiarizing to gain unfair advantages without being caught; while most students would prefer a truly honest and level studying environment, many are "unwilling to become moral heroes" and thus reluctantly follow suit. This view of gaining unfair advantage by plagiarizing is supported by studies carried out among staff and students at UK universities by Dordoy (2002) and Barrett and Cox (2005). Student perceptions of cheating and plagiarism are also reported in Ashworth et al. (1997), concluding with the message that it is important to stress to students the positive reasons for correctly attributing work and that students should consider themselves part of a scholarly community. From these studies it can be seen that it is essential for students to realize that academic integrity goes beyond a good grade and that the adherence to it is an important quality in their career and personal development.

This chapter sets out to emphasize the importance of academic integrity across the board of learning, teaching, and research, and describes the repurposing of existing learning resources to guide the academic community in their understanding and application of "good practice". This is achieved through focusing on a case study from the Joint Information System Committee (JISC) and National Science Foundation (NSF) funded DialogPLUS project, part of the Digital Libraries in the Classroom program of work. It draws on experiences of academic staff from one United States of America (USA) and two United Kingdom (UK) universities and explores the development and embedding phase of repurposed learning material from the initial identification of a generic learning resource through to the examination of usage in current study programmes.

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