Procedures to Prevent and Detect Academic Dishonesty Among Graduate Students

Custom Research Brief

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I. Research Methodology

**Project Challenge**  Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- How do contacts educate students and faculty on academic integrity policies?
- What are the components of training? To what extent is training standardized across disciplines?
- How does training differ for students and faculty? For international students?
- How do contacts address different cultural perceptions of academic integrity during these trainings?
- What resources are necessary to support training?
- When does training occur?
- Who detects academic dishonesty?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and supervisory committees in detecting violations of academic integrity?
- What tools help determine academic dishonesty (e.g., turnitin.com)?
- How do contacts address academic integrity in non-traditional academic work (e.g., “sandwich” theses)?
- How have efforts to educate graduate students on academic integrity impacted the number of scope of academic conduct violations?
- What advice do contacts have for improving prevention or detection of academic integrity violations?
- What challenges arise while trying to maintain effective academic integrity policies? What advice do contacts have for overcoming these obstacles?

**Project Sources**

- Education Advisory Board’s internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
- Institutional web sites
The Forum interviewed administrators who oversee academic integrity at select institutions in the United States and Canada.

### A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Region/Province</th>
<th>Carnegie/McLean Classification</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment (Total/Undergraduate)</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Research Universities (very high research activity)</td>
<td>58,450/50,000</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>22,000/19,400</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>Research Universities (high research activity)</td>
<td>13,200/10,600</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>20,000/18,800</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** National Center for Education Statistics
II. Executive Overview

Key Observations

Mandatory online tutorials and face-to-face workshops ensure students engage with academic integrity policies during their first semester. Online tutorials consist of modules that describe academic integrity policies and outline the adjudication process for academic misconduct. Face-to-face workshops include interactive case studies and promote discussion over instruction.

Most instances of academic dishonesty are the result of misunderstanding policies and/or cultural differences. Contacts estimate that nearly 80 percent of academic integrity violations among graduate students are unintentional.

No contacts formally educate faculty on academic integrity policies; contacts instead depend on deans to notify faculty members of changes to policies and procedures. Several contacts indicate they intend to improve faculty education by instituting similar tutorials to those required of students.

Most contacts rely on course instructors and/or academic advisors to detect instances of academic dishonesty rather than tools such as TurnItIn.com. Required in-class writing assignments at the start of each semester to limit academic dishonesty and provide a baseline of writing quality against which instructors detect violations.

Cumbersome reporting processes discourage faculty members from reporting instances of academic dishonesty. To avoid onerous adjudication processes, faculty often self-adjudicate less severe instances of academic dishonesty (e.g., citation mistakes, paraphrasing difficulty). As a result, contacts experience difficulty in determining the scope of academic dishonesty on campus.
III. Promoting Academic Integrity

**Classifying Academic Dishonesty**

*Most Academic Integrity Violations Represent Misunderstood Citation Guidelines or Plagiarism Policies*

Contacts estimate that approximately 80 percent of academic integrity violations among graduate students are unintentional. Many of these violations can be prevented by properly educating students of policies and adjudication processes.

**Common Categories of Academic Integrity Violations**

1. **Intentional**: Mounting stress levels, poor time management, and/or a lack of work ethic may contribute to students’ decisions to cheat. Positive faculty advising relationships and strong academic support systems (e.g., tutoring, time management workshops) may decrease the number of students inclined to cheat.

2. **Citation or Paraphrasing Difficulty**: Many instances of academic dishonesty occur unintentionally due to a lack of education or a misunderstanding of citation or paraphrasing policies.

3. **Cultural Differences**: Contacts estimate that international students compose approximately 65 percent of academic integrity violations. International interpretations of plagiarism often differ from North American definitions (e.g., “borrowing” full passages in China is considered a compliment). Although international students may be aware of North American policies, many have difficulty internalizing practices, especially when no standardized education exists.

**Student Education**

*Faculty and Staff Members Design Tutorials and Workshops*

Growing numbers of unintentional academic integrity violations and subsequent frustration among faculty members motivated administrators to improve training on academic integrity policies. At University A, a graduate council composed of faculty members, deans of the graduate school, and other relevant staff members (e.g., reference librarians, research specialists, integrity officers) designed academic integrity workshops. For the first year, workshops were voluntary, allowing senior leaders to evaluate the program before requiring it of all students. All of the original instructors are faculty members who served on the graduate council. Although faculty members volunteer to lead workshops on a voluntary basis, the council incentivizes participation through small stipends for professional development.
**Mandatory Online Tutorials and Face-to-Face Workshops Ensure Students Engage with Academic Integrity Policies**

University A, University B, and University C require graduate students to complete online tutorials or attend workshops that address graduate school academic integrity policies. Each department must educate students on any discipline-specific policies. University D does not require any academic integrity training; however, writing center administrators encourage professors and deans of graduate colleges to provide their own academic integrity tutorials at the beginning of the semester so students know how to cite correctly according to their discipline.

**Online Tutorials**

Tutorials include examples of proper and improper academic conduct, descriptions of how to avoid unintentional plagiarism, and exercises that require students to apply their knowledge to scenarios (e.g., citing quotations, paraphrasing paragraphs). Each module concludes with a quiz, on which students must score 80 percent to pass. At University C, students must pass a tutorial before registering for the following semesters’ courses. At University B, students who do not pass the tutorial in their first semester receive an incomplete and must retake the tutorial to receive credit for their courses.

**Online Tutorial at University B:**

(Module A) Misappropriation of Work

The first module overviews plagiarism (e.g., misrepresenting other’s ideas, expression of other’s ideas, or visual expression of other’s data as one’s own) and unauthorized cooperation or collaboration.

(Module B) Misrepresentation and Fraud

The second module includes impersonation, falsification, withholding, unauthorized aids and assistance, and improper access and obstruction.

(Module C) Obstruction and Interference

The third module explains improper access to and improper dissemination of information.

(Module D) Aiding and Abetting Academic Dishonesty

The fourth module provides students with strategies to avoid violations, based upon five questions: What are the causes of academic misconduct? How does one prevent misconduct? How does one properly paraphrase and/or integrate source material without plagiarizing? How does one recognize when information must be cited? Where does one find further assistance with citing, referencing, and other academic integrity questions?

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1University B, “Academic Integrity for Graduate Studies.”
Face-to-Face Workshops:

At University A, all doctoral students must take four face-to-face academic integrity workshops. Students must take at least two core workshops from among the following offerings: personal integrity in the classroom; plagiarism; data management (including fabrication, falsification, and confidentiality); authorship and peer review; mentor and trainee responsibilities; collaborative research; and conflicts of interest. Students must also complete two additional workshops from the set of core workshops or a series of additional workshops, which provide specialized training such as human subjects, animal welfare, and other areas of ethical concern unique to a discipline or research area. Students may replace one required workshop if their college offers a workshop of similar rigor. Contacts encourage individual colleges to offer discipline-specific training when citation, paraphrasing, or research policies differ from other disciplines (e.g., sandwich theses, patch-writing).

Address Cultural Differences through Tutorials or Supplemental Courses

University C is the only contact institution that addresses cultural differences in academic integrity tutorials. Interactive scenarios compare common international policies of academic integrity with the University’s policies. Contacts at University B considered requiring workshops of all visa students and offering workshops in different languages, however, both ideas were eventually rejected due to discriminatory concerns.

Faculty Education  No Institutions Formally Educate Faculty Members on Academic Integrity Policies

University C and University D rely on graduate program directors and deans to discuss academic integrity with faculty. At University C, graduate program directors and deans meet each year to discuss academic integrity violations and evaluate current policies. Deans relay any policy changes to faculty members through department meetings held at the beginning of each semester. Contacts intend to improve their academic integrity training for faculty by instituting a tutorial similar to that required of students.
IV. Detecting Academic Dishonesty

**Identifying Plagiarism**  
*Instructors or Academic Advisors Detect Violations of Academic Integrity*

All institutions used TurnItIn.com to detect plagiarism. However, in the last five years, all institutions have decreased or discontinued their use of the tool. Instead, instructors or academic advisors identify most instances of academic dishonesty by copying suspicious passages into online search engines.

**Strategies to Detect Academic Dishonesty**

**Self-Checking with TurnItIn.com at University B**

Students of the physical and engineering Science department at University B must submit their own work into TurnItIn.com and correct any instances of plagiarism before submitting a final draft. Contacts indicate that this identifies almost all accidental violations and helps students understand what constitutes plagiarism.

**Diagnostic, In-Class Writing Assignment at University D**

The Writing Centre at University D suggests that instructors offer an in-class writing assignment at the beginning of each semester. Through this diagnostic writing assignment, instructors can gauge students’ quality of writing. For each subsequent writing assignment, instructors have a sample against which they can compare each assignment.

**Frequent, Low-value Writing Assignments at University D**

The Writing Centre at University D works with up to ten instructors each year to design curricula that discourage academic dishonesty. Frequent, low-value writing assignments make plagiarism not worth the risk for students. Further, multiple writing assignments better highlight plagiarism as instructors become more familiar with students’ writing.

**Evaluating Outcomes of Preventative Measures**

*Burden Some Reporting Processes Deter Faculty Members from Reporting Instances of Academic Dishonesty*

Adjudication processes for academic dishonesty often require additional work for reporting faculty members (e.g., paperwork, disciplinary hearings, student meetings). To avoid this process, instructors often determine responses to less severe violations themselves. As a result, contacts experience difficulty in determining the prevalence of academic integrity and the success of preventative measures.