

# Promoting Academic Integrity: A Tale of Two Case Studies

*Supriya Kunnath Kaitheri, Middlesex University Dubai, United Arab Emirates;  
Sreejith Balasubramanian, Middlesex University Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

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## Research aims and objectives

Academic dishonesty is a major concern for academicians and institutions. The topic got wider attention in academic literature for decades and a number of studies focus on the new challenges in this domain including the role of technology. Creating an environment that foster academic integrity is important in promoting a healthy learning environment. In addition to the many short-term solutions to eliminate academic dishonesty, it is important to devise solutions that promote long term changes that instill academic integrity practices in students. This paper addresses the issues of academic dishonesty in summative coursework submissions and presents two case studies. The first case study explores the use of technology in curbing social loafing in group assessments. Social loafing is the tendency of individuals to spend less effort when working collectively than when working individually (Karau and Williams, 1993; Smith, 2017). Focus of the second case study is to improve the integrity practices in individual coursework submissions. The second case study aims to identify the ways to integrate formative assessments in the module and develop strategies to improve the effectiveness of these assessments.

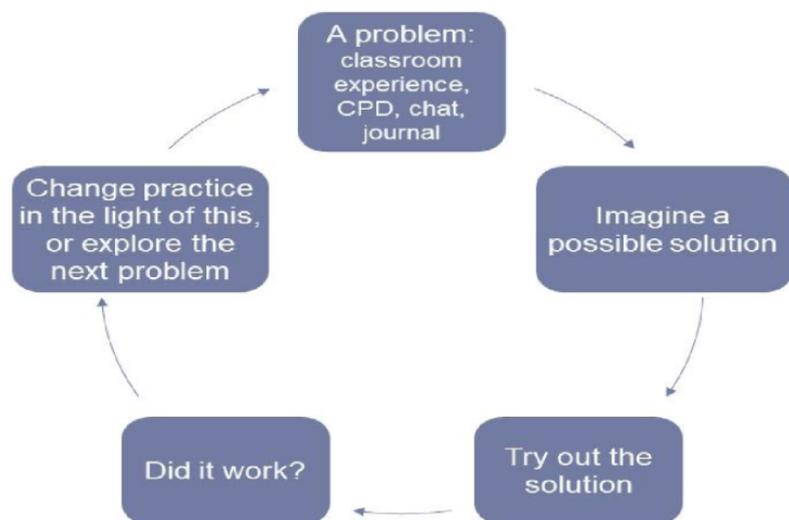
## CASE STUDY 1 – Methodology and Data Collection

Student team projects in higher education are prevalent today because of the educational value associated with students working in teams (Synnott, 2016). Research has shown the many benefits students acquire by engaging in team projects in higher education. Managing team assignments had been a problem for academicians especially when little in-class time is devoted for developing team skills among the students. One of the challenges in managing group coursework is to eliminate free riding/social loafing. While several authors have suggested solutions for social loafing, this is still a significant concern for academics in higher education (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008). One of the main concerns for academicians is ensuring fairness in marking in group assessments. This study tries to explore the ways to curb social loafing in summative group tasks with the help of online tools and e-learning platforms.

The study follows action research methodology as it focuses on studying a real university or classroom situation to understand and improve the quality of learning, explore the problem, it causes, and possible solutions. The action research process followed in this study is given below in Figure 1. It starts with identifying the problem, explores the solutions, experiment, evaluates the outcomes, and refine the practices. Literature is reviewed to identify the causes

and solutions. Discussions in the action learning sets and peer interviews helped in further in refining the solutions.

Figure 1: Action Research Methodology (McNiff, 2013)



### Experimented Interventions

The solutions identified from the literature were discussed and debated in various action learning sets. The inputs received from action learning sets were very helpful in converting the ideas to actual solutions. The study proposes three main methods for minimizing/eliminating social loafing. Studies have reported that social loafing can be eliminated by making the individual outputs identifiable and evaluating the output through comparison with the outputs of their co-workers (Harkins and Jackson, 1985, O'Leary et al., 2017). Three methods identified based on this include,

1. Communicating realistic expectation of group work is necessary to overcome group fear and to improve the standard (Burke, 2011). The solution is to create a peer evaluation of sample coursework and doing it with the groupmates to develop team building skills. Online and offline platforms were used to create student-led peer feedback sessions for a task similar to the coursework submission.
2. Using Moodle or Unihub, the learning management system to create online reflective blogs to update the reflection on their contribution every alternate week. One of the main solutions proposed was identifying the individual contribution in the coursework. The existing coursework marking scheme was modified to include an individual component with 5% marks on individual reflection. The reflection task was converted into four reflection blogs to update the progress of the individual contribution towards the group work using the Moodle blog feature.
3. Splitting the assignment into a set of sequential tasks each with a deadline, and assessing the individual contribution using online tools such as Google Docs and Unihub which capture student activity logs. This was an important step to monitor group activities when they are outside the classroom. This study explored the possibilities of using Google

Drive as a project management tool for monitoring the coursework status. The project management principles were used for the same. Coursework was split into different tasks with deadlines. Individual student activities were identified with the access logs. A separate Google Drive folder was created for each group, and only the group members of a particular group were given the edit access for the same.

## **Analysis and Results**

Independent sample t-test is performed to compare the results of the treatment group with the control group. Coursework marks in percentages from both the groups are collected to identify the effectiveness of the proposed solutions. Results indicated a significant difference in the marks of the treatment group (67%) compared to the control group (61%).

## **CASE STUDY 2 – Methodology**

This study focuses on the use of formative assessments in improving academic integrity in individual coursework submission. This study also follows action research methodology explained in Figure 1. Formative assessments have become an integral part of teaching and learning in higher education (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). The objective of the formative assessment is to aid student learning by generating feedback information that is of benefit to the students and teachers (Juwah et al., 2004). For students, it enables them to restructure their understanding/skills and build more powerful ideas and capabilities, whereas, for teachers, it allows them to understand where students are experiencing difficulties and realign their teaching in response to learners' needs (Juwah et al., 2004). However, there are growing concerns in the literature with regards to the use and effectiveness of formative assessments (Hunt and Pellegrino, 2002; Ginsburg, 2009; Bennett, 2011). Some of the concerns in formative assessments include a lack of student participation, students not seeing the need for it, its time consuming, and lack of helpful feedback.

The objectives of this study are two-fold: 1) identify and incorporate appropriate formative assessments to the module, 2) develop strategies to improve the effectiveness of the assessments.

### **Identifying and incorporating suitable formative assessments**

Evidence from the literature suggests that the type and nature of the formative assessments, and how its embedded in the module can determine the effectiveness of the assessment (Bennett and Gitomer, 2009). It is important to establishing a link between formative and summative assessments. Specifically, different formative assessments should be integrated to enhance learning and performance in summative assessments. Overall, the following formative assessments are introduced in the module.

- a. Online learning blog- Students are required to maintain online learning blog for the duration of the term. In the blog, students are expected to reflect on their experience and

learning in the module. Each student must complete a minimum of at least 4 reflective blogs in the term.

- b. Online week- students are expected to interact with other students in the class on several discussion topics. They are required to make three posts and needed to respond to the posts of three others. The reading materials are provided upfront.
- c. Presentations - Each student is required to present their coursework. The presentation should follow the same structure of coursework. Each student is allocated 10 minutes for presentation, and 5 minutes for feedback immediately following the presentation.
- d. In-class group activities- Throughout the term, students are given several in-class group activities such as Jigsaw reading.

### **Improving the effectiveness of the aforementioned formative assessments**

Several strategies were identified from the literature, action learning sets and discussion with colleagues which includes pedagogic, motivational, coercive, and technology-enabled strategies. The interventions devised for improving the effectiveness of formative assessments are as follows:

- a. Made the formative assessments mandatory, and a pre-requisite for submission of summative assessments.
- b. Repeated, concerted efforts were undertaken to increase student awareness on the benefits of participating in formative assessments and to demonstrate them the coherence/ connection between the different formative assessments and how is useful for their summative assessments (e.g., at the beginning of every class, few minutes were dedicated for discussion on formative assessments; close follow up and reminder emails were sent to students to complete their formative assessments; previous statistics showing the correlation between student participation in formative assessments and student performance was shared with students)
- c. Students were given the opportunity to negotiate the deadline for the formative assessments.
- d. Provided timely, constructive feedback for students on their formative assessments

### **Conclusions**

The two case studies shows different approaches to combat academic dishonesty in both individual and group coursework submissions. The paper also highlights the importance of action research as a method to improve academic integrity. The approach adopted in this study and the findings are expected to be useful for academics facing similar challenges. It provides a starting point for further exploration in improving academic integrity in coursework submissions.

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