# SCORECARD FOR ACADEMIC INTEGRITY DEVELOPMENT: BENCHMARKS AND EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES

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**Abstract:** This paper develops and elaborates on the content of a recent workshop that was presented at the ICAI Athens conference in September 2016.

The Scorecard in Academic Integrity Development (SAID) has evolved from two earlier tools that were designed with a similar purpose: the Academic Integrity Rating System (AIRS) developed by the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) and the Academic Integrity Maturity Model AIMM, that was developed as part of the project Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe (IPPHEAE). The purpose of all three tools is to provide a supportive evaluation of institutional strategies for academic integrity and suggest where there are strengths and where improvements could be made. The feedback from SAID is designed to encourage institutions to review policies and systems that appear to be less robust.

SAID uses of a set of on-line surveys to create an institutional profile of a university or college based on responses from the perspectives of students, teachers and managers. The questions are designed to explore a range of academic integrity strategies, policies and practices. The scoring is currently semi-automatic and the feedback is generated manually.

The paper will elaborate on the details of benchmarks on which the survey questions and evaluation methods are based. It will also explore key influences in the development of the tools and how they have been refined over time. The paper provides an insight into what an evaluation under SAID will mean for an institution in terms of resource commitments and benefits.

At this stage the team are piloting the tools with interested institutions and the only available language version is English. However the plan is to validate the tools by running surveys in several countries to gain feedback on whether the questions and concepts are meaningful for different educational cultures and systems and whether the feedback is valuable, meaningful and accurate. The next stage will be to translate all the survey questions into other languages to extend the possible use (Spanish, French, German initially) and automate the evaluation process as much as possible using suitable technology.

**Key words:** Academic Integrity; higher education policies; academic misconduct; plagiarism; good academic practice

## 1   Introduction

### 1.1   Background

Higher Education can be increasingly perceived as a global industry, not just in terms of the international nature of collaborative research, but also concerning mobility of students, academic teachers and free access to ideas and knowledge. Internationalisation makes it imperative that the education community develops a globally shared vision about academic standards, understanding of best practices and reliability of academic qualifications.

Recent research into higher education in different parts of the world (e.g., Davis, 2011; Glendinning, 2016; Hayes & Introna, 2005, SEEPPAI results 2017) reveals a range of conflicting views about what constitutes good academic practice. In some countries, such as Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Nigeria, China, corruption and cheating can be perceived as a normal aspect of daily life in both civil society and education (Transparency International 2013, Glendinning 2016, Daniel 2016, SEEPPAI results 2017). In such cultures people who do not resort to unfair practices can be at a disadvantage when considering day to day matters, business transactions and academic qualifications.

Where academic integrity is compromised within an academic community, either through condoning or ignoring different forms of academic misconduct, or having no effective counter-measures for discouraging misconduct, then academic qualifications can no longer safely reflect the achievements of graduates. Where this happens the reputation of the institution is undermined and its capacity to engage in globalisation becomes severely limited.

In common with many like-minded researchers throughout the world, the author and co-developers are exploring ways to disrupt current unfair and unethical practices affecting education by encouraging the adoption of values aligning with principles of academic integrity. The first priority is to find a shared language about what is included under the term academic integrity and agree definitions of what constitute acceptable academic practice. The initial focus is limited to higher education institutions, but the intention is to broaden the scope to other levels of education once the tools have been validated.

The development team aims to address disparities in approaches taken towards academic integrity in different institutions and regions. Our particular focus is first to identify and pilot a set of benchmarks and associated tools that can be used to measure current institutional status regarding their approaches to academic integrity. The tools have been designed to indicate where strengths and weaknesses lie in current policies, procedures and educational programmes, in order to encourage the institution to set priorities in developing their institutional culture.

## 1.2   Strategies for Academic Integrity

Although many higher education institutions across the world have well established policies for managing academic integrity, including how allegations of academic misconduct should be handled, what penalties should be applied (e.g. Bretag & Mahmud 2014, Morris 2011) and how students receive instruction and guidance on sound academic practice, many other institutions do not have such policies and systems. Research suggests that even when institutions claim to have strategies and policies in place, sometimes there is no monitoring or enforcement, which means that students do not receive adequate guidance and cheating can go unchallenged (IPPHEAE results 2013, SEEPPAI results 2017, Orim 2015, Bakradze et al 2016, Hajrulla 2015, Manasiey & Mujkic 2016, Zhivkovikj 2016). Clearly where there is no effective control of academic standards underpinning academic qualifications, there are very serious implications for graduates (for example in medicine, healthcare, engineering,

architecture) who become responsible for aspects of workplace safety (Copy-Shake-Paste blog).

A statement that has appeared occasionally in surveys about student cheating is the claim that "our students do not plagiarise or cheat" (for example see IPPHEAE report for Estonia 2013 and SEEPPAI results 2017). It is easy for senior managers in higher education institutions to be convinced that their strategies, policies and procedures for managing violations to academic integrity are adequate for deterring academic misconduct if there is no evidence to the contrary. However different managers, teachers and students in the same institution will have their own views about this that may differ substantially. One way to find out about the institutional culture of academic integrity is to conduct an institution-wide survey to capture and compare the views of managers, academic teachers and students.

## 2   Evaluating Academic Integrity Strategies

When designing an institutional survey to explore customs and practices, the first consideration is what factors to include and how measure and distinguish the shades of grey between excellent and poor practice. The team is currently working on the fine detail to implement their ideas, based on previous research throughout the world.

The Scorecard in Academic Integrity Development (SAID) is a set of on-line tools developed by the team that can be used by educational institutions to evaluate their academic integrity strategy, policies and procedures and receive feedback on areas of strength and opportunities for further development.

SAID was inspired by two previous tools created independently by two of the team, each with a similar purpose: Tricia Bertram Gallant developed the Academic Integrity Rating System (AIRS) on behalf of the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI); the author developed the Academic Integrity Maturity Model (AIMM) as part of the project Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe (IPPHEAE). SAID has adapted features from both AIRS and AIMM, together with evidence from research undertaken previously in the UK (Glendinning 2016; Morris, 2011), Australia (Bretag & Mahmood, 2014), and USA (AIRS; Bertram Gallant & Drinan, 2008; McCabe & Pavella, 2012).

At the heart of SAID is a set of ten characteristics that the team believes are indicative of well-designed, effective and mature strategies for encouraging a culture of academic integrity and for managing violations to the institutional values:

- Top level governance and strategic commitment to support academic integrity
- Clear and consistently applied policies and procedures for academic integrity
- Fair and proportional sanctions applied across the institution or campus
- Engagement and buy-in of whole academic community towards strategies for deterring academic misconduct
- Institutional culture and values for encouraging scholarship and deep learning
- Student leadership in actively supporting the institutional strategy for academic integrity

- Transparency, openness, maintaining institutional data, effective communications at all levels
- On-going evaluation, monitoring, reviews to enhance strategy, policies and systems
- Engagement with research and development within and external to the institution into academic integrity
- Institutional understanding about what is acceptable academic practice, in line with international norms

The on-line tools take the form of an institutional survey that can operate in two different ways, either a short-cut assessment or a full survey.

The short-cut approach requires a designated representative to answer the survey on behalf of an institution. This will produce a score for each characteristic and brief overview on the institutional strategy that can be compared to other anonymous institutional results. The result may be used to identify which areas of policy need strengthening or justify whether a more detailed full institutional survey would be beneficial.

The full survey requires responses from students, academic teachers and senior managers. It can be conducted across part or all of an institution, either using a sample of the academic community or whole population approach. Survey questions have been customised for the three different levels of respondents. The score and feedback for each of the ten characteristics factors in the level of consistency in the responses collected from the three levels of participants.

The feedback for both short-cut and full survey provides information about strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for how to improve and where to prioritise effort. The scoring and feedback is currently done off-line, but the plan is to automate the process, when trials have proved the value and efficacy of the tools and scoring process.

## 3    Benchmarks for Academic Integrity

Independent of the on-line tools, the ten SAID characteristics potentially provide a set of global benchmarks that can guide institutions when designing and strengthening their strategy. In promoting and piloting the tools the plan is to try to reach a consensus with feedback from participants internationally on what is seen as important and what has the most impact in different educational settings and cultures. The first stage is to appreciate the nature of each of the characteristics in some detail. The ten characteristics and underlying principles and values described below were synthesised by the team members, drawing on a range of pivotal resources (AIRS, Bretag & Mahmud 2014, Glendinning 2013, 2014, McCabe & Pavela 2012, Morris 2011).

1. **Top level (typically institution or campus-wide) governance and strategic commitment to support academic integrity.**
   The team asserts that for a strategy to be effective there needs to be commitment and investment at the top level of the organisation. Therefore questions in this part of the survey largely target senior management level to explore theses aspects. However related questions for students and teachers check how well the strategies are communicated and understood. Evidence of any institutional preventative

strategies for deterring cheating and how diligently and consistently they are implemented are also of interest. Exploring who is involved in the process of formulating strategies and in what capacity, help to determine the inclusivity of the approach taken. The team believes that a transparent and inclusive approach is a sign of mature governance.

2. **Clear and consistently applied (institution-wide) policies and procedures for academic integrity**
The second characteristic concerns policies and procedures for dealing with integrity violations. The key factor on violations is to determine what measures are taken to try to ensure that all students accused of cheating are treated fairly and consistently, including provision of training for decision makers and rules on rights of appeal. Understanding whether records on violations are maintained and how the statistics are used in strategy and change management is indicative of whether the institution is self-reflective and improvement focused.

3. **Fair and proportional sanctions applied across the institution**
To be fair to all students, sanctions or penalties for integrity breaches need to be applied consistently according to rules or formulae decided for the whole institution. Any sanctions should be in proportion to the seriousness of the offence, but taking into account the student's background, knowledge and circumstances. The institutional community should be aware of what purposes the sanctions will serve (for example: educationally corrective, adjustment to address unfair advantage, personally punitive, serving as a deterrent) and be mindful of any unwarranted side-effects from decisions that could adversely affect the student's future career.

4. **Engagement and buy-in of whole academic community towards strategies for deterring academic misconduct**
There are several interdependent elements to this point that we will unpack for clarity. Firstly the whole academic community, students, teachers, managers, administrators all have serious interest in helping to discourage student misconduct; if misconduct is not actively discouraged, then workload increases in order to manage the growing number of disciplinary cases; moreover, academic standards and qualifications become insecure, to the detriment of the whole institution. A blunt approach to deterrence would be to apply very draconian procedures and sanctions, which can encourage academics to ignore or by-pass the rules and procedures, inevitably leading to inappropriate outcomes (Glendinning 2013 IPPHEAE report on Sweden). In summary a balanced and mature approach to deterrence involves an academic community that grasps the broad consequences of student cheating and works together to support measures to strengthen assessment, to educate and guide against all forms of academic misconduct.

5. **Institutional culture and values for encouraging scholarship and deep learning**
The logical reasoning behind this characteristic is that by encouraging learning as an essential part of acquiring essential knowledge and skills and promoting institutional values that demand scholarly thinking and dialogue throughout education,

the purpose of cheating becomes irrelevant. To approach this nirvana, institutional integrity and ethical values must permeate the whole academic community and all its practices. Conduct of senior management should be exemplary and academic staff viewed as role models on academic conduct. Such a culture of academic integrity should encompass all areas of public and private life of every member of the academic community. Areas of note for ethical practice and integrity applying across the institution include a transparent and robust approach to quality assurance, individual honesty about experience and academic qualifications, integrity in research and publications, not admitting students who lack suitable qualifications and fairness and equality in employee recruitment.

6. **Student leadership in actively supporting the institutional strategy for academic integrity**
   The author considers that involving student leaders as partners in the process of formulating strategy and implementing an institutional culture, is a sound indicator of a mature institutional approach. The roles assigned to students and the respect given to their contributions, provide evidence about how serious the institution is about listening to and acting on students' views and ideas. Student leaders have a vested interest in building and supporting strategies that encourage academic integrity, ethical values and discourage any form of cheating and corrupt practices. Mature institutions capitalise on supporting and building a strong and effective relationship with student leaders.

7. **Transparency, openness, maintaining institutional data, effective communications at all levels.**
   Transparency and open access to relevant institutional information are essential elements in developing an institutional culture of academic Integrity. The extent of transparency can be tested by asking different stakeholders what they know about policies and strategies that are a key part of the institutional regulatory framework. While allowing for security of sensitive and confidential information that it is not reasonable to make accessible, it is in the interest of institutions to make available to students and academic teaching staff information about institutional strategies, policies and sanctions for academic misconduct. If sanctions are applied consistently and proportionately, such information can help to deter students from cheating. Lack of openness in such information can be seen as a way of disadvantaging students. Good and clear communications and ease of availability of important information for the whole academic community are seen by the team as characteristics of a mature strategy.

8. **On-going evaluation, monitoring, reviews to enhance strategy, policies and systems**
   This characteristic acknowledges the wisdom of UK researcher and consultant Jude Carroll (2011) who said that if policies for academic misconduct have not been reviewed for three years or more, then they are most certainly out of date. Unless policies are regularly monitored and reviewed, an institution has no idea how effective they are. Unfortunately types of student misconduct evolve very rapidly in response to the capacity of higher education institutions to identify and

address such conduct. A few years ago the main threat to UK institutions was student plagiarism, which was countered to a large extent by systematic use of sophisticated text matching tools. At the time of writing this paper far greater threats are perceived as: firstly examination cheating by making use of hidden communications technology; secondly ghost writing, particularly taking advantage of the global contract cheating industry (QAA 2016, Lancaster & Clarke 2016). These evolving threats demand that institutions remain vigilant. A mature institutional strategy will have evidence that regular monitoring and review are central to the systematic review cycle.

9. **Engagement with research and development within and external to the institution into academic integrity**
The pursuit of academic integrity requires vigilance on a range of issues both internally and externally, and pro-activity in generating ideas for responding to new and evolving threats to the security of academic systems and processes. Encouraging involvement in research and development by members of the academic community provides the means for institutions to keep abreast of growing evidence on possible ways to respond to and manage academic misconduct. Investment in resources for research and development also allows for testing new ideas and sharing of effective practice, potentially to the benefit of a wide audience.

10. **Institutional understanding about what is acceptable academic practice, in line with international norms**
The team believes that most if not all researchers in this field across the world strive to find common ground in the form of internationally acceptable academic conventions about academic practices and expectations for educational standards at different levels. The questions in this category seek reassurance that the institutional community is aware of any local and international standards, conventions and recommendations for good practice and open to any new developments that can improve academic integrity.

It may be possible to consolidate categories 9 and 10 because there is considerable synergy between involvement in research and development and awareness of internationally acceptable norms. However the current reason for keeping both categories separate is that category 10 serves to highlight that great differences exist in what are seen as acceptable practice within and across institutions, countries and regions (for example as shown in the IPPHEAE and SEEPPAI country by country results). Although there are international standard conventions on ethical practices for research and publication (Retraction Watch blog, COPE) these are not always followed. Educational standards frameworks such as the Bologna Process are a long way from achieving consistency in Europe at present.

Specifically relating to SAID, there is no formal agreement internationally on what constitutes acceptable practice generally for different levels of education in the area of academic integrity. The extent of internationalisation in education increasingly makes agreements on such international standards a necessity. To address this problem the SAID toolset is supported by a glossary that has been designed to clarify ambiguities in usage of terms in different parts of the world.

## 4 Institutional evaluation using the SAID toolset

The institutions that agree take part in pilots will be asked to evaluate the toolset, commenting on relevance and wording of different questions and the feedback received on strengths and weaknesses, from their institutional and national perspectives. The pilot runs will help to refine and improve the tools before automating the scoring and feedback process. The next stage will be to provide translations of the tools, questionnaires and feedback in different languages, initially focusing on Spanish, French and German.

The results will be confidential to each institution that participates, but anonymous institutional profiles will be made available for comparison purposes to institutions that make use of the tools. Institutions will be encouraged to conduct surveys periodically using SAID, to evaluate their development and progress.

The International Centre for Academic Integrity website is likely to be the portal for accessing the operational version of the tools. There will be no charge for institutions that take part in pilot runs, but it may be necessary for a modest charge to be levied for institutional evaluations in the longer term, to cover maintenance costs associated with on-going operation of SAID.

## 5 Conclusions

The main purpose of disseminating information about SAID at this point in the development is to capture feedback from a wide range of possible users of this service. The author and colleagues would like to ascertain whether this toolset would be of use to the target audience of institutions in different parts of the world. Recent feedback from several conference presentations has provided encouragement that there will be a good demand for the tools.

An overview of the categories suggests that the benchmarking criteria appear to be appropriate. However more detailed feedback would be more welcome on any aspect of SAID described in this paper. It would be of particular value to hear of any views about alternative benchmarking criteria relating to academic integrity strategies and suggestions for improvements. It would be of particular interest to hear from institutions who would like to take part in the piloting of the toolset.

It is anticipated that SAID will be seen as a useful addition to the portfolio of guidance and advice already available to help institutions develop their strategies for improving the standards and quality of education across the globe.

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