

GATEWAY TO PREPARING K-12 STUDENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION – REFLECTIONS ON ORGANIZING AN ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CAMP

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Prior knowledge is expected when students move from school to higher education, and is critical in ensuring student learning, achievement and success (Hailikari, Nevgi and Lindblom-Ylänne, 2007). Lack of prior knowledge can hamper and negatively influence students' ability to learn or apply higher order thinking (Nathanson, Paulhus and Williams, 2004). Issue arises when there is a misalignment between school curricula and courses taught in higher education which often leads to students struggling and confused (Long, 2013).

We focus on “content knowledge” of prior knowledge, particularly “background knowledge” and “subject matter knowledge” (Margana, 2012) for which universities are often seen to offer introductory, developmental or remedial courses that are subject, degree, and/or specialization specific. Introductory courses are offered prior to joining a program, while developmental or remedial ones are offered when students falter or demonstrate lack of understanding during their degree. These courses provide students with opportunities to re-learn concepts that have not been understood (Yolal, Kiziltepe and Seggie; 2019). We found that introductory, developmental, and remedial courses did not necessarily prepare students in higher education on academic writing and integrity policy awareness, but too often focused on subject content and skills like MATH, Economics, and so on (Reed, 2017; Fenton and Gralla, 2020; Cavaliere et al. 2020).

There have been studies that suggest that first year students find themselves committing academic misconduct such as plagiarism (Denisova-Schmidt, 2016). First year students have many reasons to plagiarize as stated in the study by Hawe, Lightfoot and Dixon (2019). Besides reasons such as lack of self-efficacy, self-monitoring and self-regulation, students'

inability to comprehend subject material in order to apply the knowledge they attain have all been posited as reasons for first year students' plagiarising or cheating (Khan and Balasubramanian, 2012; Tayan, 2017; Hawe, Lightfoot and Dixon, 2019; Khan, 2014; CMU Eberly Centre, 2021a).

A search into open-access programs by some universities have yielded very few, if any introductory courses on academic integrity, and some on remedial courses for academic writing (Callahan and Chumney, 2009; Kuiken and Vedder, 2020). Venugopal and Khan (2020) posited how some students who find it difficult to cope with expectations of academic writing and knowledge of academic integrity policies and such in higher education. Similar observations were recorded by Braxley (2005) and Gurel Cennetkusu (2012). In fact, a George Washington University study (2007) reported that school students were often not required to write with synthesis or criticism; similarly, The Chronicle of Higher Education published a study (2006) that said students did not necessarily practice academic writing in school (as qtd in CMU Eberly Centre; 2021b).

Recognising this gap, our research objective was to design and implement a transitional module to school students. Based on Butcher, Davies and Highton (2006; 2020) guidelines on how to develop a module for learning and observations, we designed a nine-hour module for school students to help prepare them for the next level (either secondary to high school; or high school to higher education).

First author conceptualized the learning module to raise their awareness on integrity values, misconduct, and behaviour; and second author developed the module on providing skills in academic writing.

The module was organized for two iterations, once in 2019 with colleagues from the host campus, University of Wollongong in Dubai (which acted as a pilot and trial) and second time in 2021 as a virtual camp with authors and student board members as part of the Centre for Academic Integrity in the UAE initiative to support the community. This proposed presentation focuses on the second iteration from 2021 and its impact (UOWD, 2021).

Feedback of students on Likert scale revealed 37 students responded out of 52. These students ranged from grades 6–12 and had parental consent to attend the module and provide feedback. 94.6% students felt confident about their knowledge regarding academic integrity after the camp. 67% of the participants enjoyed listening to real life experiences and circumstances faced by the facilitators. Students also “enjoyed learning about academic integrity, paraphrasing and citation”, “enjoyed the way everyone collaborated in saying the answers and how the teachers explained us easily with their own experiences”, “enjoyed the breakout room sessions. in which a group of students gathered together and did various activities and debates”, “enjoyed how we were able to learn about Academic Integrity when having fun”.

Students shared specific things they learned from the sessions that they didn’t know before, such as “referencing”, “paraphrasing”, “values of academic integrity”, “what to do and what not to do”.

Overall, about 62.2% rated this camp a five out of five with 32.4% rating four and remaining 5.4% rating a three.

Furthermore, the writing contest acted as a summative assessment of skills in academic writing, and continuous assessments throughout the three days in the form of individual and group work helped gauge students’ level of learning. For instance, an online quiz on “practicing integrity” tested students’ knowledge and understanding. 47 out of 52 students took the test. 6.38% students did not complete the test, 58% got all the answers correct. The question with the least number of correct responses was “I asked to borrow my friend’s homework as my parents had a party and I could not complete my work”. In discussions they said “asked to borrow” did not necessarily mean cheating or copying. This provided a further learning opportunity.

The feedback from attendees, summative and continuous assessments highlighted both student perception of their competencies and how much they did learn in terms of skills on academic integrity and writing. The structure, badging ceremony and ambassador’s roles in raising awareness and inviting more students to join such a module in the future led to greater levels of engagement. We aim to follow up with the attending students annually to track their experience with academic integrity and writing to observe and record if the module had the desired effect of enhancing their “prior knowledge” as they progressed to higher studies.

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