

# CREATION OF AN ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CLUB AT GULF MEDICAL UNIVERSITY – SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE

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## KEY WORDS

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academic integrity, academically dishonest behaviours, ethics, academic integrity club, health professions students

## BACKGROUND

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Gulf Medical University (GMU) is a leading university in United Arab Emirates (UAE) offering programs in health professions. As future healthcare workers, academic integrity plays an important role in the lives of the students. Studies have shown that students who engage in academic misconduct behaviors are likely to showcase future unethical behavior in patient care<sup>1</sup> or in other aspects of life<sup>2</sup>. Though the value of academic integrity is deep rooted in most students, a few, intentionally or unintentionally, engage in academic dishonesty behaviors despite the honor pledges or other academic misconduct policies in many universities. An earlier study<sup>3</sup> had investigated health professions

students' perceptions about academic integrity in UAE. The results of that study revealed that though a majority of students knew what academic integrity meant, academic misconducts like copying someone else's work, and "helping" others by doing their work were not taken seriously or considered dishonest. Factors such as peer pressure, pressure to perform well, and lack of time to complete assignments were some reasons that students reported for engaging in academic dishonesty. Students in that study had also themselves suggested that availability of resources on avoiding plagiarism, reducing academic workload, and peer support could be ways to address the problem.

## THE IDEA OF AN ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CLUB

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As students, our interest in academic integrity first developed when we participated online in a poster competition organized by the International Center for Academic Integrity. When the Center for Academic Integrity in the UAE (CAIU) was launched in October 2020 with the aim of raising awareness about academic integrity in universities, colleges, and schools, we were given the opportunity to join as student board members. As members of the student board, our role is to promote the values of academic

integrity among the student community by hosting events that make learning about academic integrity enjoyable such as podcasts, talks by experts and senior faculty, practitioner series, etc.

As members of the student board of CAIU and keeping the findings of the earlier study in mind, the idea of a club to promote Academic Integrity on campus started to take shape. The goal of the Academic Integrity club is to help students identify dishonest behaviours and raise awareness about academic in-

tegrity. The motto of the club is “Academic Integrity for the students by the students”. This approach was adopted with the idea that students are more likely to react positively and participate in peer-led activities aimed to increase awareness, and to foster a culture of Integrity on campus. Building a culture of academic integrity takes time and effort, and includes four main steps starting from recognition of the issue, commitment to deal with it, generating the response and finally implementation of measures resulting in institutionalization of the culture.<sup>4</sup> Various types

of activities have been attempted in universities to promote ethical behavior such as truthfulness regarding cheating behavior,<sup>5</sup> a co-curricular honor and integrity program<sup>6</sup> and an academic integrity e-tutorial as part of the curriculum.<sup>7</sup> Since students are important stakeholders in this process, we planned to get student views on academic integrity in general, responses to the idea of an academic integrity club, and how such a club could assist them, by means of a survey.

## THE SURVEY

A short 6-question survey using google forms was prepared and pilot tested. All undergraduate health professions students at the university were invited to participate by email. Participation was voluntary and the survey was kept open for one month. Reminders were sent by email and announcements were also made in class. Students were asked to rate, using 3 or 4-point scales, their knowledge regarding academic integrity (poor-fair-good-very good),

importance of academic integrity (not important - somewhat important-very important), desire to learn more about academic integrity (yes-not sure-no), whether they found it difficult to discuss academic integrity issues with faculty (yes-sometimes-no), their interest to join the club (yes-maybe-no) and finally how they would like to learn more about academic integrity with an option for free responses.

## FINDINGS

121 students responded. Age of the students ranged from 18-23 years and 70% of the respondents were females. Students were from different colleges including medicine (38.84%), dentistry (12.39%), nursing (5.78%) pharmacy (2.47%), health sciences (37.19%) and healthcare management (3.30%). Most students were from year 1 (61%) followed by year 3 (14.9%), year 2 (13.2%) and year 4 (10%). Our findings indicate that 2 out of 3 students (66%) feel they have a very good/good idea about academic integrity with the rest indicating fair to poor knowledge. Most (98%) students felt academic integrity to be important for healthcare professionals and 76% wanted to know more about academic integrity. We also wanted to know if the students felt comfortable discussing academic integrity issues with the faculty. Only 6.7% said yes and the rest were divided between students who said “No (48%)” and those

who said “sometimes (46%)” indicating that there is a need for a forum where students can express themselves freely on matters related to academic integrity. A good number of students (43%) showed interest in joining the club while many indicated “maybe (48%)” to joining the club. Regarding the types of activities for the club, responses selected included workshops by senior students/experts (67%) followed by skits/podcasts/videos (53%) as well as case studies and debates (44% and 46%). Some other suggestions from the students received as free responses were: “This club is very important and wonderful it is possible, for example, to make a meeting in which you can explain more about this club so that the information can be clearer” and Apart from ‘Talks’ do focus on organizing interactive events for students, that involve students in different activities or tasks.

## CONCLUSIONS

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Keeping the above findings in mind we have launched the academic integrity club in GMU. We plan to organize a variety of events for students, actively engaging them and promoting knowledge and practices related to academic integrity. The idea being to change the culture of the university from a punitive

one to a preventive one with respect to academic misconduct. We will also be encouraging them to participate in various competitions conducted by international organizations making the whole learning process enjoyable and entertaining.

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