

FROM PLAGIARISM TO ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: CHANGING POLICY IN A CHANGED LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

National University of Ireland (NUI), Galway has approximately 20,000 students and 1000 academic staff. As with many institutions, the focus of the work done in the area of academic integrity to date has mainly been on plagiarism. The university has support available for students both at a module level from individual lecturers and at an institutional level from the Academic Writing Centre with tutors available to help students develop their writing skills and avoid plagiarism. In addition, online lessons were developed as part of the AllAboard project (<https://www.allaboardhe.ie/>) to help students improve their referencing and citing skills. There is no doubt that many students struggle with intentional and unintentional plagiarism (Selemani, Chawinga & Dube, 2018) and these supports are much needed. In recent years, however, the threats to academic integrity have expanded significantly beyond classic plagiarism and universities like ours are now left in a position of having to pivot to deal with a much broader range of academic misconduct.

In order to begin addressing this broader academic misconduct, we have taken a multi-layered approach including supporting academic staff in revising their assessments, creating workshops around academic integrity for staff and students, developing and launching a lesson on contract cheating for students, and holding an academic integrity event for academic leadership in the University to highlight the current issues. However, we know that this is not enough. As reported internationally, even "authentic assessment" is regularly outsourced both for a fee to contract cheating sites and without a fee to family and friends (Ellis et al, 2020).

As a result, in addition to the educational efforts discussed above, a significant focus of our academic integrity work at our institution is to update the current plagiarism policy to a more comprehensive academic integrity policy. Our current plagiarism policy came into effect in the academic year 2012/13 and was designed to deal with classic cases of plagiarism and works well in those instances. However, the policy is not designed to deal with contract cheating, file sharing, data falsification and a myriad of other types of academic misconduct that have increased in prevalence across higher education over the last decade and in particular since Spring 2020 as is reflected in the literature and the media. (Lancaster & Cotarlan (2021), Sforza (2021)).

A robust academic integrity policy is essential to combat academic misconduct. Although some students will respond to educational efforts and moral pleas this alone is not enough, there needs to be consequences for engaging in academic misconduct and we must expend effort into discovering this academic misconduct (Ellis (2021)). Not only is it important to have an academic integrity policy which enables this, but the policy must be enforceable and academic staff and students need to be convinced that it should be used consistently for all cases of academic misconduct.

In preparing for writing this new academic integrity policy, we have reviewed international approaches to academic integrity policies, identified issues that the university should consider in drafting the new policy, consulted national recommendations from the National

Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) in Ireland, and determined the best way to incorporate these aspects given the institutional context.

In this presentation, we will outline the process we used to review our current policy, highlight

problems that we encountered, share the new features that we incorporated into our policy based on our research and describe the institutional change that is required to facilitate this new policy.

References

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