

STUDENTS' VIEWS ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: EXPLORING THEIR DECLARATIONS ACROSS THREE YEARS OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY WEEKS

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Abstract

This contribution will share insights into students' thoughts and attitudes to academic integrity, garnered through analysis of three sets of academic integrity declarations created by students from 2019-2021. These declarations were captured during annual "Promoting Academic Integrity Weeks" at Dublin City University (DCU). The week-long campaign, organised annually by DCU's Teaching Enhancement Unit (TEU), Library and Students' Union seeks to raise awareness of academic integrity, assessment design and contract cheating among staff and students (DCU Teaching Enhancement Unit, 2021). Among other synchronous and asynchronous events, students are invited to make a declaration about academic integrity.

Academic integrity has been defined by the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) as a commitment 'to six fundamental values; honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage' (Fishman, 2014). Academic integrity often focuses on student assessment (mis)conduct (Eaton and Turner, 2020) but they are not one and the same (McKay, 2021). Academic integrity is about fostering ethical behaviour and it is about good teaching and learning (Morris, 2016; Stephens, 2016).

The TEU has focused on the area of academic integrity as an area of work for several years.

Initially, as part of an Erasmus+ project, the focus was on assessment design to uphold academic integrity. This project produced a literature review into the area (Egan, 2018) and a suite of principles for staff around embedding academic integrity in assessment design. This work then advanced to the development of an 'Academic Integrity Hub' for staff, to enable them to explore issues of academic integrity and to support them in actioning the principles of assessment design. Many of these resources are also available externally under a Creative Commons licence at <https://teuintegrityproject.wordpress.com/> (2018).

Taking this work further, the TEU partnered with the Library and Students' Union to coordinate the first academic integrity week in an institution in Ireland in 2019, influenced by the ICAI's Day of Action. In 2020 and 2021, a national academic integrity week took place, under the umbrella of which DCU participated. As part of the 2019 week, students were invited to contribute an anonymous personal declaration around academic integrity to a "pledge wall", which was facilitated by TEU staff. These "pledge walls" were situated at three locations on campus during week, to which students affixed post-it notes with their thoughts and attitudes. Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and the extended remote teaching context, in 2020 and

2021 these “pledge walls” morphed into an online “declaration bank” on DCU’s Moodle-based virtual learning environment (VLE), into which all students were invited to submit an anonymous entry and to browse others’.

For the first time in Ireland, national guidelines for academic integrity have been drafted by a network comprising higher education representatives—the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN). These guidelines state that academic integrity is “everyone’s business”, that they hold “enrolled learners at the centre” and that learners have a “leading role in terms of their own behaviour in upholding academic integrity” (NAIN, 2021, p.7).

With that in mind, it is timely to examine students’ own thoughts and attitudes towards academic integrity. The three sets of student declarations provide interesting insights. Between 2019 and 2021, over 800 student declarations were made during the academic integrity weeks. At present, the authors are analysing the declarations using the thematic analysis approach from Braun & Clarke (2021). The analogue format of the 2019 pledges have been converted to digital text to allow electronic coding. The pledges entered into the VLE declaration bank have been exported as text,

with no additional metadata. All three sets, comprising simply the pledges themselves, have been combined in a spreadsheet to facilitate coding. Emergent themes include:

- Fairness—plagiarising and cheating is not fair on others;
- Right and wrong—plagiarising and cheating is just simply wrong;
- Value of degree—plagiarising and cheating affects the value of the degree for all students;
- Learning—plagiarising and cheating leads to no learning.

This contribution at ECAIP will share the background to and details of the academic integrity week initiatives and student declaration activities that took place between 2019 and 2021, as well as the major themes from the student declaration once fully analysed. The authors welcome conversations and discussions with conference attendees around these themes, particularly if similar themes are emerging in other institutions. Moreover, discussions around how to capitalise on student sentiment and better support them to uphold academic integrity are most welcome, considering the central role they play themselves.

References

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