
Defining Academic Integrity: International Perspectives – Introduction

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Abstract

In the first section of the *Handbook of Academic Integrity* it is appropriate and necessary to begin by defining the term ‘academic integrity’. This is such a multifarious topic that authors around the globe report differing historical developments which have led to a variety of interpretations of academic integrity as a concept, and a broad range of approaches to promulgating it in their own environments.

There can be no debate that academic integrity is fundamental to teaching, learning, research, and the advance of knowledge. In fact, it is critical to every aspect of the educational process. If there was ever any doubt, it is the hope of all the contributors to this book that those doubts will be quashed once and for all.

In the first section of the *Handbook of Academic Integrity*, it is appropriate and necessary to begin by defining the term “academic integrity.” Any undergraduate student will know that a quick Wikipedia search or a flick through a modern dictionary will provide a sensible and useful working definition for just about any major concept. Who could imagine that in attempting to define and understand the meaning of academic integrity, it would be necessary to seek the input of 17 authors representing 39 different countries? Academic integrity is such a multifarious topic that authors around the globe report differing historical developments which have led to a variety of interpretations of it as a concept and a broad range of approaches to promulgating it in their own environments.

The *Handbook* opens with a chapter by Teresa (Teddi) Fishman (► [Chap. 2, “Academic Integrity as an Educational Concept, Concern, and Movement in US Institutions of Higher Learning”](#)) and provides a broad overview of the genesis of academic integrity as an educational concept in the USA. Fishman compares the history of higher education in the USA to other countries, demonstrating that a range of unique factors have contributed to the widespread focus in the USA today

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on the high incidence of student cheating. As Fishman explains, higher education in the USA is “a relatively young system of higher education modeled on much older medieval universities, predicated on the integration of higher learning and specifically Judeo-Christian ethics and morality, in a cultural setting in which access to higher education to members of varying social classes was valued more highly than uniformly thorough preparation, characterized by academic environments that put instructors in the dual roles of educator and disciplinarian, with virtually no mandated uniformity amongst or sometimes even within institutions.”

Tracey Bretag shares the recent history of what is known as the “educational integrity” movement in Australia. Struggling under the weight of an underfunded and increasingly internationalized higher education sector, the educational integrity movement benefitted from a decade of research on student cheating in the USA, as well as teaching and learning practices developed in the UK. The resultant approach has been characterized by an understanding that academic integrity is a multifaceted and multi-stakeholder issue, premised on actions underpinned by values, and something which goes well beyond sensationalized scandals of student cheating, plagiarism, and essay mills.

Jon Scott and Jane Thomas discuss academic integrity as an “increasing preoccupation” in the internationalized, diverse, and complex UK higher education sector. This preoccupation initially led to an almost universal acceptance across the sector of the text-matching software *Turnitin* to assist in the detection and punishment of “unfair practice.” This punitive approach has since evolved to include more proactive and preventive teaching and learning practices focused on the promotion of academic integrity. Scott and Thomas use their chapter to demonstrate how to embed academic integrity in authentic assessment and “design out” opportunities for potential compromise.

As the project leader of the *Impact of Policies for Plagiarism in Higher Education Across Europe* project (IPPHEAE 2010–2013), Irene Glendinning is in an inimitable position to provide a summary of the key academic integrity issues facing the 27 member states of the European Union (EU). Glendinning presents evidence about how academic integrity is perceived and managed at the tertiary level across the diverse countries of the EU, with a focus on undergraduate and master’s level students. The project found that some EU countries, particularly the UK, Sweden, Austria, the Republic of Ireland, and Slovakia, had made important progress at both institutional and national levels to address issues of academic integrity. However, the project found that much more is needed to be done in nearly every country to strengthen integrity policies that encourage scholarly practices while consistently and appropriately responding to breaches when they occur.

Distinctive perspectives from five Asian countries are provided, including Indonesia (Ide Bagus Siaputra), Malaysia (Joyce Cheah Kim Sim), India (Sachidananda Mohanty), China (Chen Shuangye and Bruce Macfarlane), and Japan (Gregory Wheeler). While not intending to be exhaustive, and in no way purporting to represent “Asia” in a unitary sense, the chapter aims to give some insight into the diversity of experience in this large region. It is evident from all five contributions

that while academic integrity is a relatively new field of enquiry in these various countries, the topic has gained increasing attention in recent years. Scholars and practitioners now have the opportunity to extend and adapt the lessons from the existing research to their own specific contexts.

Middle Eastern perspectives of academic integrity are covered by contributions on the Gulf Region from Gina Cinali and on Egypt by Mohamed Agib Abou-Zeid. While providing a frank discussion of the sociocultural context and its impact on academic integrity, Cinali simultaneously calls for “sensitivity and appreciation for cultural diversity of those educators and administrators who venture into classrooms and boardrooms influenced by cultural values and mores different from the presumed, accepted ‘Eurocentric/Western’ norms.” In detailing the historical antecedents of higher education in Egypt, Abou-Zeid makes the case that academic integrity breaches occur more often there than in Western nations and concludes that the root causes of the violations are the “inadequate quality of education and the lack of coordination between the various stakeholders.”

Stella-Maris Orim provides an informative outline of the way that academic integrity is perceived and managed in the Nigerian educational system. She demonstrates that to date, research and interest have focused on students’ examination malpractice, rather than the range of other academic integrity breaches by both staff and students. Orim argues that numerous factors create challenges for achieving academic integrity in Nigeria, including the education system, pedagogy, sociocultural environment, economic environment, infrastructure, technology, institutional policies, and management systems.

In the last chapter in this section, Mauricio García Villegas, Nathalia Franco Pérez, and Alejandro Cortés Arbeláez (► [Chap. 14, “Perspectives on Academic Integrity in Colombia and Latin America”](#)) explain why academic integrity is becoming an important issue in Colombia’s national context and in Latin America’s regional context. The authors refer to recent studies on the topic and describe some of the government and nongovernmental initiatives that have been implemented to promote academic integrity. In company with other contributors to this section, Villegas et al. share some of the sociocultural and political factors which have contributed to the region’s academic integrity concerns, notably referring to social acceptance of rule-breaking, social stratification, a weak civic culture, the influence of drug trafficking on the country’s social and institutional life, and an education system in crisis.

At first glance, “academic integrity” appears to be a relatively easy topic to address. However, it is a very complex, interdisciplinary field of research requiring input from educational stakeholders from around the globe. This section has situated the *Handbook of Academic Integrity* in the international arena. While providing a broad brush view of the topic from the perspective of a range of scholars from numerous countries, the section has aimed to provide an insight into the issues of common interest as well as the factors unique to particular cultures and contexts. Contributors to other sections of the *Handbook* will further demonstrate the complexity and worldwide relevance of academic integrity in its many and varied forms.