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People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

Students Against Academic Misconduct (SAAM): A case study of how a mobile learning framework can be used to deliver a pedagogy reducing academic integrity issues

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This paper presents a comprehensive and coordinated partnership between students and faculty in response to academic integrity breaches at the School of Business and Law (SBL). We highlight the widespread nature of academic misconduct among university students, particularly emphasising the prevalence of cheating among business students. Additionally, the paper addresses the impact of institutional practices on academic integrity breaches. Considering the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) requirements, the SBL aims to reduce academic integrity breaches by implementing a coordinated students-as-partners approach. We propose that a mobile learning theory can be applied to reducing academic integrity breaches, focusing on contract cheating allegations. By sharing our experiences, we hope to inform and inspire a coordinated institutional approach to uphold academic integrity and combat misconduct effectively.

Keywords: Academic integrity breaches, Academic misconduct, Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF), Students as Partners

Introduction

Academic integrity is a fundamental pillar of higher education, ensuring fairness, honesty, and ethical conduct in pursuing knowledge. However, numerous studies have indicated a widespread breach of academic integrity among university students (Bretag et al., 2018). These breaches encompass a range of unethical behaviour, such as plagiarism, cheating, contract cheating, and fabrication of research data. This alarming trend poses a significant challenge for educational institutions worldwide.

Within this context, business students have exhibited higher levels of cheating than students in other majors (McCabe, 2005). This observation raises concerns about the ethical standards and values within business education. Understanding the motivations behind cheating is crucial in developing effective strategies to address academic integrity breaches. Newton (2018) highlights various motivations, including past cheating behaviour, gender, grades, poor learning environments, normalisation of cheating, studying in a second language, socioeconomic levels, and learning mode (distance learning vs. face-to-face). Furthermore, academic integrity breaches are influenced not only by individual factors but also by institutional practices. Walker and Townley (2012) emphasise the role of entry requirements, policy, procedural processes, and enrolment trends in shaping the prevalence of academic misconduct.

In light of these challenges, universities recognise the urgent need to address student cheating and violations of academic integrity comprehensively and directly through a 'students as partners' (SaP) modality (Healey et al., 2016). The SaP modality chosen in this project was a Students Against Academic Misconduct (SAAM) approach to academic integrity breaches. This approach aims to recruit students to assist faculty in developing academic integrity content, deciphering modes of delivery of content, generating new assessments that reduce the temptation of academic misconduct, producing updated content as academic misconduct trends change, and revealing new academic misconduct revelations (Vanderburg, et al, 2023). The most significant area for improvement in implementing these frameworks was the content delivery mode. While the content is vital, it is not dense enough for a unit, and delivering this content in a unit does not allow for updates to content after students have finished the unit, so we used a mobile learning theory framework (Narayan et al., 2021). We used an online, blended, and asynchronous learning approach to deliver the content. This research paper guides implementing a proactive and practical approach to maintaining academic integrity using a mobile learning framework, specifically focusing on contract cheating allegations.

Motivations for cheating: Environmental factors and institutional practices

The motivations for cheating can vary depending on various environmental factors and institutional practices

(Morris, 2018). Environmental factors include the learning environment, language barriers, socioeconomic status, and study modes. Studies have shown that poor learning environments, including limited support and engagement, can increase the likelihood of academic misconduct (Newton, 2018). Students studying in a second language may also face additional challenges, which could increase their motivation to cheat. Socioeconomic factors can influence the incentives for cheating, with financial pressures or disparities affecting students' decisions. Furthermore, the rise of distance learning and online education has introduced new dynamics, potentially impacting academic integrity. The lack of direct supervision and the ease of accessing online resources can create opportunities for cheating (Bretag et al., 2018).

Institutional practices also play a significant role in shaping the prevalence of academic integrity breaches (Morris, 2018). Entry requirements, policy and procedural processes, and enrolment trends within educational institutions can influence students' motivations to cheat. For instance, if institutions prioritize high enrolments without ensuring adequate support and academic rigor, students may perceive cheating as a way to navigate challenging courses. Similarly, if institutions lack clear policies and procedures to address academic misconduct, students may feel a reduced risk of facing consequences for their actions (Walker & Townley, 2012).

To effectively address academic integrity breaches, institutions must adopt a partnership approach such as SAAM (Mercer-Mapstonea, et al., 2017). By addressing academic misconduct prevention with the SaP framework, a practical framework can be developed that involves using the intellect of our students to understand why cheating occurs and inspire innovative approaches related to reducing academic integrity breaches. Institutions can mitigate the motivations for cheating and create a culture of integrity. To create a culture of integrity, institutions need to enhance learning environments by supporting students facing language barriers or socioeconomic challenges, developing robust policies and procedures to deter and detect academic misconduct, and promoting awareness and education on academic integrity.

Cheating trends among business students

While academic misconduct occurs across various disciplines, studies indicate that cheating trends are particularly pronounced among business students (Rigby, et al, 2015). Newton (2018) found that self-reported levels of cheating were higher among business students than students in other majors. The reasons behind this phenomenon may be multifaceted. Business students might face high-performance pressures, leading them to engage in unethical behaviour to achieve desired grades and meet competitive demands. Additionally, the nature of business education, which often emphasizes competition and outcome-driven approaches, may contribute to an environment that is more susceptible to cheating tendencies.

Mobile learning framework

We chose A mobile learning framework for this project because we wanted the delivery of the content to lack classroom confinement (Sharples, et al., 2002). This framework enabled us to allow students to access the content as they needed it in the location that best suited them. The students helped us understand that reaching students is predicated on delivering content in the modes students feel most comfortable interacting. So, we chose an online, blended, and asynchronous learning approach to deliver the content (Narayan et al., 2021). The core of this approach was to develop the content for this program, which students can interact with in multiple ways. We delivered material using Zooms, Moodle, and digital resources students could access on any mobile device. The Zooms were where we met with students, and most of the tutorial content was placed in Moodle.

Intervention

A student engagement approach was adopted to address the ongoing growth of academic integrity issues (Mercer-Mapstonea, et al., 2017). Students are valuable stakeholders with insights into the root causes of academic integrity breaches. By involving students as partners, their perspectives and experiences informed the development of strategies and interventions. This approach aimed to empower students, allowing them to take ownership of their academic journey and fostering a sense of responsibility towards academic integrity. Students created a study guide to meet the student cohort's specific needs. This guide aimed to enhance study habits and reduce academic integrity breaches. Supported by the International Student Experience Directorate, the guide received positive feedback, highlighting its impact on student learning. The plan actively involved students in raising awareness about academic integrity.

To ensure the integrity of assessments, we introduced a streamlined peer-review process and provided guidelines for assessment standards. These measures received positive feedback from academics and students, demonstrating their effectiveness in promoting academic integrity. We developed a learning and teaching web page and a Good Practices in Learning and Teaching guide to support staff in adopting best practices. These resources provided materials and strategies to improve student engagement and reduce potential instances of academic misconduct. The Lunch, Learn, Absorb, and Innovate sessions were provided via Zoom and focused on innovative education technology professional developments. In conjunction with student involvement, we recognised the importance of technology in promoting academic integrity. By standardising Moodle sites and embedding academic misconduct information blocks, we could raise awareness and promote a culture of academic integrity among students. Students and academics supported using the Learning Management System (LMS) in promoting academic integrity. A Students as Partners (SaP) theoretical framework was employed in this study. The SaP framework advocates for student-faculty/academic staff collaboration to address challenges within universities, including academic integrity breaches. The School of Business and Law (SBL) Academic Integrity Plan draws upon the principles of the SaP initiative to inform the development of a practical framework for addressing academic misconduct. This framework outlines specific steps and actions to reduce academic integrity breaches and promote a culture of integrity within the institution.

Methods

We analysed cases substantiated through the Academic and Research Integrity Database (ARID) to establish a clear academic misconduct threshold. This database provided a comprehensive overview of academic misconduct incidents and aligned with the definitions outlined in the Student Academic Integrity Policy and Procedure. The outcomes applied in response to substantiated academic integrity breaches include inappropriate academic conduct, academic integrity breaches (minor incidents), academic integrity breaches including plagiarism, collusion, and cheating other than contract cheating, and severe or multiple academic misconduct and contract cheating cases. We present the percentage of academic misconduct occurrences in our sample unit before and after implementing our initiative.

Results

The results revealed a reduction of academic misconduct cases as an overall percentage of cases for the university and the overall percentage of student cohort within the school that breached the SAIPP. We reviewed the cases substantiated through the academic misconduct database to establish an academic misconduct threshold further. The Academic Integrity Improvement Plan was successful because there was a 95.46% reduction in overall university breaches for the most prevalent unit of academic misconduct after the plan was implemented. Table 1 presents that the unit had 32.95% of the overall university in breachers before the plan was implemented in 2018 and then was reduced to 1.50% after the plan was implemented in 2019. The considerable decrease in breaches can be ascribed to the comprehensive and proactive SAAM approach.

Table 1: BUSN 20017 academic misconduct cases

Year	Enrolment	# of breaches	% of the total cohort	% of overall breaches
2018	1409	523	37%	33%
2019	1548	63	4%	3%
2020	676	20	3%	3%
2021	211	9	4%	1%

Discussion

Implementing a student engagement approach in addressing academic integrity issues has yielded significant benefits and outcomes. By recognizing students as valuable stakeholders with insights into the root causes of academic integrity breaches, this approach empowers them to take ownership of their academic journey. It fosters a sense of responsibility toward academic integrity. Using this approach helped reduce accounts of academic misconduct in a business unit.

The developed framework serves as a guide for integrating student-faculty/academic staff collaboration, student insights, and innovative approaches into the overall academic integrity plan of the institution. The plan fosters a culture of academic integrity through awareness campaigns, workshops, and educational initiatives by involving

students as partners. This approach ensures that students have a shared understanding of what academic integrity means within the institution and actively participate in designing and delivering integrity-related programs.

The benefits of the Academic Integrity Plan are multifaceted. Firstly, it has improved academic integrity through a comprehensive and student-centered approach. Collaboratively analyzing the data and gaining insights into the reasons behind cheating enables the development of targeted interventions and strategies.

By involving students in designing and delivering integrity-related programs, the plan ensures their active participation and engagement. This approach fosters a culture of trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility, making academic integrity a collective effort. Secondly, the plan enhances student engagement and a sense of ownership over their education. By providing opportunities for students to propose innovative solutions and interventions, the plan empowers them to actively contribute to maintaining academic integrity within the institution. This increased engagement creates a supportive environment that encourages experimentation and learning from failures, promoting continuous improvement in academic integrity practices.

Conclusion

The significance of this research lies in its practical implications for educational institutions seeking to combat academic misconduct. By sharing the experiences and outcomes of the SBL's efforts, this paper aims to inform and inspire a coordinated institutional approach through a SAAM approach to reduce academic integrity breaches. The proposed actions and measures outlined in this paper provide a roadmap for other schools and universities to develop and implement strategies tailored to their contexts.

By adopting a proactive SAAM approach, educational institutions can safeguard their educational programs' quality and integrity, protect their degrees' reputations, and ensure a fair and equitable learning environment for all students. This research paper contributes to the ongoing dialogue on academic integrity. Through the 'students as partners' methodology, it provides practical insights for fostering a culture of integrity within higher education institutions.

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