



Higher education context

Researchers examining trends in higher education agree that the dramatic changes of the late 20th century and early 21st century are unparalleled^[1]. In particular, the challenges associated with increasing demand that post-secondary education be provided to larger and increasingly diverse segments of society have arguably resulted in over-burdened and under-funded systems that have been unable to cope with demand. This has resulted in higher education becoming a competitive enterprise at every level of operation^[2]. At the same time, the increasingly diverse student body (including, for example, those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature age students, students with disabilities, and students for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL) has created pressures for higher education providers to implement a range of support mechanisms, often with minimal funding and/or resources. This highly competitive and under-resourced educational environment is situated in an increasingly competitive worldwide economy, as well as a social context which encourages students to regard higher education as a means to a vocational end. Research suggests that people who cheat in school are likely to cheat at work^[3] and media coverage of various ethics scandals may have contributed to the perception that misconduct is common. It is therefore not surprising that some students may feel pressure to commit breaches of academic integrity in a bid to meet the requirements and/or expectations, or because they believe it is acceptable.

Academic integrity encompasses a number of values and ideals that should be upheld by all educational stakeholders. According to the International Center for Academic Integrity, these values include honesty, trust, respect, fairness and responsibility^[4]. Academic integrity involves ensuring that research, teaching and learning are conducted honestly and fairly by faculty, staff and students alike. This includes acknowledging the intellectual contributions of others, being open and accountable for one's actions, and exhibiting fairness and transparency in all aspects of scholarly endeavour. Academic integrity impacts on students and staff in these core activities, and is fundamental to the reputation and standing of an educational provider and its members^[5].

Academic integrity breaches may include plagiarism, cheating in exams or assignments, collusion (unauthorised collaboration), theft of other students' work, paying a third party for assignments, downloading whole or part of assignments from the Internet, falsification of data, misrepresentation of records, fraudulent publishing practices or any other action that undermines the integrity of scholarship and research^[6]. Examples of extreme academic integrity breaches may include relying

on bribery or nepotism for admissions to higher education providers, examination fraud, paying bribes for good grades, and even the purchase of academic titles [7].

While it may be very difficult to identify every instance of academic misconduct, higher education authorities have a role to play in reducing factors that are known to create environments conducive to misbehaviour. In the UK, the call to examine consistency in academic integrity came from the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education and resulted in the development of the project, 'Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research (AMBeR)' which looked at the range and spread of penalties available for student plagiarism among UK higher education institutions.

In Australia, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), following the work of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), has made clear its expectation that providers will have "systematic, mature internal processes for quality assurance and the maintenance of academic standards and academic integrity" [8]. It could be argued that by failing to adequately confront/prevent lapses in academic integrity, some higher education institutions are neglecting a broader duty to society to ensure that students are learning rather than cheating and that they have in fact earned their degrees. When academic integrity breaches go unchecked, this has the potential to undermine the credibility of degrees and the reputations of specific providers. Furthermore, society as a whole suffers because it is difficult for employers to determine who is and is not qualified and this potentially puts at risk the people who rely on well-trained professionals such as doctors, nurses, lawyers, pilots, engineers and teachers, to mention a few [9].

Please use the following citation when referring to this resource:

Exemplary Academic Integrity Project (EAIP): Embedding and extending exemplary academic integrity policy and support frameworks across the higher education sector (2013), *Higher Education Context*, Office for Learning and Teaching Strategic Commissioned Project 2012-2013, [http: www.unisa.edu.au/EAIP](http://www.unisa.edu.au/EAIP) .

[1] Philip G. Atlbach, Liz Reosberg & Laura E. Rumbley Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution. A report prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, published with support from SIDA/SAREC.

[2] Ibid

[3] Randi L. Sims, 'The relationship between academic dishonesty and unethical business practices'. *Journal of Education for Business*, vol 68, issue 4 (1993), pp. 207-211.

[4] International Center for Academic Integrity, Fundamental Values Project , http://www.academicintegrity.org/fundamental_values_project/index.php [accessed 7 May 2012]

[5] This explication of academic integrity has been developed from unpublished interviews conducted with academic staff, as part of the 2010-2012 Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded project, Academic integrity standards: Aligning policy and practice in Australian universities (Tracey Bretag, Ruth Walker, Margaret Green, Margaret Wallace, Julianne East, Colin James, Ursula McGowan, Lee Partridge and Saadia Mahmud).

[6] Tracey Bretag, Ruth Walker, Margaret Green, Margaret Wallace, Julianne East, Colin James, Ursula McGowan & Lee Partridge (2010), Academic integrity standards: Aligning policy and practice in Australian universities, successful Priority Projects proposal to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, <http://www.apfei.edu.au/altc-priority-project.html> [accessed 7 May 2011]

[7] Tracey Bretag (2012, forthcoming). Short-cut students: Fostering academic integrity in students, Section 3.8 in Transparency International, Global Corruption Report: Education.

[8] *Developing a framework for teaching and learning standards in Australian higher education and the role of TEQSA*, White paper, June 2011.

http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/teqsa/Documents/Teaching_Learning_Discussion_Paper.pdf [accessed 17 May 2012]

[9] Tracey Bretag (2012, forthcoming). Short-cut students.