Designing assessment for academic integrity
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Academic Integrity can be defined as being ‘a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action’ (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2017). The Higher Education landscape has radically changed in the UK with student numbers becoming larger and more diverse, and an increase in the use of information and communication technologies, including social networking for educational purposes (Ramsden; 2008). There is an increasing recognition that universities need to take a holistic, integrated approach to address these complex challenges within teaching, learning and assessment (MacDonald and Carroll; 2006) so that students can be supported to develop skills for good academic practice and thus avoid academic misconduct.

There are valuable recommended strategies and guidelines about how educators can minimise opportunities or possibilities for student plagiarism, collusion and related issues, through course improvement and the development of assessment tasks (Bloxham and Boyd; 2007; Carroll, 2007). For example, when designing assessment, good practice suggests:

- Change assessment methods regularly in each module, rather than just ‘roll over’ the same assessment type every year. Consider developing alternatives such as a report, a multimedia presentation, a project, a learning journal, rather than just an essay. Potentially combine different methods of assessment, for example, a submitted task with a related in-class component within a module.
- Create individualised assessment tasks that ask for student opinions, analysis or their own personal experience, rather than descriptive essays. In this way students are required to apply knowledge rather than just find and report it.
- If choosing an essay as an assessment, avoid repeating similar questions year on year and try and be novel. In order to check how vulnerable such an assessment is to plagiarism, once designed ‘Google’ the questions and see what information is identified and thus whether the question would benefit from refining.
- When setting problem-based or case study assignments avoid using large national or international organisations/data sets. This makes plagiarism from students at other universities and organisations’ websites more likely. Use examples from small local organisations instead and consider providing students in the same
• Assess the process of developing an assignment, along with assessing the final submitted piece of work. This might involve having stages or milestones in an assessment such as the submission of essay plans, a document detailing students’ reading or a draft as formative work. In this way, feedback can potentially allow plagiarism incidences to be prevented before they occur.

• Request that students keep a record of the time and activities they needed in order to complete an assessment and possibly allocate marks for this. Thus the process of doing the assessment is assessed as well as just the submission.

• Require students to provide reference lists and bibliographies, as well as search terms/histories and possibly allocate marks for this.

• Use oral assessment tasks or evaluate student work generated in-class, for example, in-class or recorded presentations (by an individual or a group); observed seminar debates, interviews or vivas.

Whilse assessment design alone cannot eradicate misconduct such as plagiarism, it is a key part of the multi-dimensional approach needed to embed Academic Integrity within a programme of study. Such innovative assessment strategies can lead to less reason or opportunity for students to cheat and encourage them to develop authentic work. Importantly, such approaches to assessment should enable students to develop the range of transferable skills that will serve them well in their personal, career and learning development beyond university.

References


International Center for Academic Integrity (2017) https://academicintegrity.org/fundamental-values/


Helpful additional resources


