Fostering Academic Integrity in Distance Education

Distance education courses, whether they are fully online or blended, pose new challenges in the area of Academic Integrity, for faculty and students alike. Combine student high technology implementation with new technology constantly being available, and this often equates to new ways to diminish integrity. With the Internet being readily available and providing a constant resource, students may find the challenge to resist using the work of others or finding an exam answer firmly out of their reach. Presenting students with guidelines or discussions concerning integrity early in each course will go a long way to secure decisions which will help develop ethical behavior and improve Academic Integrity.

This document contains information and strategies that will help foster Academic Integrity within online and blended courses. Information contained within this document is broken into several sections in order to easily locate information concerning particular topics. The first section lists unique scenarios that are considered as integrity issues and could be encountered while teaching online. Other sections include strategies to foster Academic Integrity, such as contingency plan suggestions, and helpful information you can easily cut and paste into your course materials as necessary. As you skim each of the sections, look for suggestions for past course issues and incorporate solutions for those situations into your current syllabus.

A contingency plan should appear on your course syllabus in order that students know their assigned responsibilities and expectations in an unplanned, online outage situation.

Consider the following Scenarios:

Though some Academic Integrity issues are clear and easily recognized, others may not be so visible. Along with the blatant act of passing one student’s work off as another student’s own papers and exams, the following scenarios are also considered violations of Academic Integrity issues.

- Posting an assignment or paper in public chat rooms, classrooms, or websites
- Cutting and inserting materials from the Internet, other sources, or other individuals, into assignments without proper citations
- Selling papers or assignments to other students
- Obtaining term papers from others or having others write assignments
- Using technology during a test, exam, or assessment that is not authorized by the instructor
- Writing and/or forging a class excuse note

Strategies to Foster Academic Integrity

Define Academic Integrity and why it is important in your class. Consider a letter to your students.
Dear Students,

Each semester students struggle with the concept of Academic Integrity, mainly because Academic Integrity means different things to different people. Within integrity discussions, the conversation generally turns to plagiarism or cheating, but these are just indicators of the quality of a person’s integrity, not integrity itself. Bill Taylor, in his Letter to Students, notes that integrity is a quality of character that we must nurture and that requires practice. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states that “Integrity is primarily a formal relation one has to oneself. . . .” In academics, integrity encompasses the character traits of respect, truth, fairness, and honesty: Respect for your own learning and that of others, being truthful and fair in your practices, and honest with your peers and yourself.

Academic Integrity also means taking pride in your learning, and while I can point you to the University policies on Academic Honesty (located in the East Carolina University Undergraduate Catalog) and guide you through the Academic Integrity requirements in my syllabus, it is you who must make a conscious decision to incorporate the core values of integrity into your course experience. Though plagiarizing or cheating on assignments or exams are certainly examples of integrity issues, these are generally the results of not having integrity and will do little to help you “get in the practice” or “nurture” Academic Integrity.

In order to nurture the growth of our individual values and professional integrity, we must incorporate them into our daily activities. As your instructor, I am prepared to help you nurture Academic Integrity by beginning each class prepared and on time. I will strive to use our class time well and encourage you to do the same. I will respect your thoughts and ideas, give you every opportunity to ask questions, and help prepare you for assignments and exams. I will treat you fairly, and give you honest, timely feedback which will help you master learning objectives defined for the course. In turn, you must participate in the course with an open mind, prepared to make the most of learning by doing your own work; have read assigned course materials; have thought about the upcoming assignment; and be ready to contribute ideas from your own experiences. All of these elements promote the growth of Academic Integrity because these behaviors support respect for learning, truthful and fair practices, and honesty. Then, when the discussion rolls around to cheating and plagiarism, you will not feel the pressure to succumb to this lack of integrity, because you have “practiced” and “nurtured” your Academic Integrity.

Sincerely,

Professor’s Name

http://www.ecu.edu/osrr/faculty_staff-process.cfm (Academic Integrity process)


Suggestions for use:

Feel free to personalize this letter and email it to your students. You may want to post the letter in your syllabus and the Course Information area of Blackboard. You can even set an Adaptive Release requirement in Blackboard so that your students must click to indicate that they reviewed the letter before opening the course for the semester.
Include Citation Specifics in your Course Syllabus

How do you cite sources?

There are many different citation styles; generally your instructor will tell you what citation style to use. Joyner Library provides links to citation style guides, examples of how to cite various types of materials, and online citation generators in the Style Manuals / Citation Guides section of the Virtual Reference Desk. One of the best citation generators is the KnightCite Citation Service. Choose a resource type, complete a brief online form with the citation information and the Citation Service will create the citation. You can then copy and paste the citation into your document. (citation guide, http://jw3mh2cm6n.search.serialssolutions.com/?SS_Page=refiner&SS_RefinerEditable=yes)

What is Plagiarism and how can you avoid it?

The ECU Student Handbook defines plagiarism as “copying the language, structure, ideas, and/or thoughts of another and passing same as one’s original work.” The “How Do I Avoid Plagiarism” web page on the Joyner Library web site offers tips on how to avoid plagiarism. These include placing quotation marks around direct quotes, paraphrasing your source information, and always citing your sources. Work through one of the plagiarism tutorials listed on the “How Do I Avoid Plagiarism” page to make sure you understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

Course Management Strategies

Safe Assign Blackboard Tool at ECU / Plagiarism Software

What is SafeAssign?
SafeAssign is integrated with the Assignment tool in Blackboard. SafeAssign is both an educational tool and a deterrent for plagiarism. SafeAssign can help students identify how to properly attribute sources. For more information, visit the Blackboard site.

Students at ECU are expected to comply with the university’s honor system and to cite the work of others appropriately. Faculty benefit from tools designed to check for possible occurrences of plagiarism. SafeAssign is a tool that can help in this process.

When do I use SafeAssign?
SafeAssign is most often used in writing intensive courses; however, it is a useful tool for any writing assignments.

*Respondus LockDown Browser

What is LockDown Browser?  LockDown Browser (LDB) is a secure custom browser that locks down the online testing environment within Blackboard.

When Do I Use LDB?  Instructors have the option to require that LDB be used for one or more quizzes /exams to be taken online.  LockDown Browser is a secure browser that students download, and they access their quizzes via
LDB on their local computers. Students, (during test taking), will lose the ability to take screenshots, access email, open a new window, access the Internet, etc.

To learn more about LDB from the instructor's point of view: Link
To learn more about LDB from the student’s point of view: Link

If you copy your course from one semester to another semester, please follow the instructions below to Synchronize your course with the SafeAssign database. Go to the Control Panel

1. Click Course Tools, then SafeAssign
2. Click SafeAssignments Items
3. Click Synchronize this course

Instructor’s Information about SafeAssign
Click Here

Student’s Information about SafeAssign
Click Here

Share a Distance Education Pledge with your Students.

FAILURE TO ADHERE TO, OR TO MEET THE STANDARDS OF EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY’S ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY, MAY RESULT IN A MAXIMUM PENALTY OF EXPULSION FROM EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY.

1. I will use only my own assigned/selected username and password when participating in online activities such as exams or assignments.
2. I will use only materials permitted by my instructor while taking online exams.
3. I will discuss only appropriate course materials and not exam content with other students.
4. I will do my own work and will not share individual assignments with others according to my instructor’s requirements.
5. I will footnote and cite materials according to my instructor’s citation preference. (Example APA, MLA)
6. I will do my own work when taking exams and completing assignments.
7. I will not provide answers to other students during an exam, such as using an online communication tool to send/receive answers.
8. I will not copy and or provide another student with test questions accessed during an exam.
9. I will not purchase any academic papers and submit them as my own work.
Suggestions for use:

You may want to post the Distance Education Student Pledge in your syllabus and the Course Information area in Blackboard. From time to time you also may want to use the pledge as a Blackboard Announcement. The pledge is also a great resource to refer your students back to if you suspect a student may be having an academic integrity issue.

Institute a Test Policy for Online Test Takers

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<tr>
<th>Course Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Number</td>
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Dear Student,

In order for all students to be assessed in the same manner with the same advantages, it is important that you use only materials allowed by your professor while completing this exam. You should not communicate with others in any manner (in person or by using instant messenger, email or any other type of communication devices and/or software) while taking this exam. This is in accordance with the Distance Education Student Pledge in Academic Integrity for Distance Education Students which states:

6. I will do my own work when taking exams and completing assignments.

7. I will not provide answers to other students during an exam, such as using an online communication tool to send/receive answers.

By opening and submitting this exam, you are agreeing to adhere to the pledge statements 6 and 7 as noted above. By opening and submitting this exam, you are also acknowledging that you understand and will abide by the Academic Integrity for Distance Education Students by not communicating with anyone or using prohibited materials while completing this exam. Those students who choose not to follow these guidelines will be dealt with through East Carolina University Policies governing Academic Integrity. FAILURE TO ADHERE TO, OR TO MEET THE STANDARDS OF EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY’S ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY, MAY RESULT IN A MAXIMUM PENALTY OF EXPULSION FROM EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY.

Suggestions for use:

You may want to include the test policy in your syllabus and Course Information area in Blackboard. You may also want to include the test policy as part of the test instructions. In Blackboard you can set the Review feature and require that your students click the Mark Review button to acknowledge that they have read and agree to adhere to your test policy.
Share Simple Tips With Students to Help Complete Assignments

- Do not procrastinate
- Use the Online Writing Center Site: http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/writing/uwc/OWL.cfm
- Use your library resources
- Last but not least, talk to your instructor