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## Building a Culture of Academic Integrity [Waldron]

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## **Building a Culture of Academic Integrity [Waldron]**

Part of the journal section “Forum: Building a Culture of Academic Integrity”

Jennifer J. Waldron “Building a Culture of Academic Integrity”

1. I want to start by contextualizing my teaching in terms of academic integrity. First, I teach primarily upper-level, major courses and graduate classes. Second, academic integrity is a core value that I believe is essential to the university environment. Along with that, is my belief that it is critical that students develop academic integrity as a value as they move into their professional careers. Because of this, I work to educate students on academic dishonesty. I am also upfront with them and state that I have and will investigate potential violations and take the necessary action.

2. Knowing this, I still struggle with how I integrate academic integrity into the courses I teach and how I mentor students. My initial struggle stems from a perspective that students (and faculty) should just know the importance of academic integrity. Moreover, I like to think the best of people and typically approach my classes with the naïve, initial thought that my students wouldn’t engage in academic dishonesty because they are good people. This initial thought exists, in spite of relatively stable research reports showing that 75% of students have cheated or plagiarized (Lang, 2013).

3. A second struggle exists because of the level of courses I teach. I think students should have already learned that plagiarism and cheating is unethical and have learned strategies to prevent these things from happening. In fact, when I ask students, most of them share that previous classes have covered plagiarism and cheating to some extent. However, when I follow up and ask what they learned, specifically, or strategies they use to prevent plagiarism, most of them avoid eye contact with me. This suggests that students are introduced to academic integrity but that the introduction is either cursory or that students are permitted to forget. My interpretation is that they know not to plagiarize and cheat; however, they may not have learned strategies to prevent it, or they may not think there is a culture of academic integrity on campus. For example, although dated, a 1999 study of 1000 faculty showed that 1/3 who were aware of academic dishonesty did nothing to either investigate or take action against the student (Center for Academic Integrity).

4. And of course, another struggle is the time to devote to this issue in class. We all have so much we want to accomplish during the semester – course content, writing skills, critical thinking skills, to name a few. How much time can I give to academic integrity?

5. My struggles continue with how to inform, deliver, and educate students. Other panel members will highlight innovative techniques they use to create a culture of academic integrity. So, let me simply say that I often find assignments such as worksheets, reading material, and even discussions to be unengaging for students. I continue to search out best practices to engage students with the material and help them gain ownership.

6. Finally, I struggle with what to do if I suspect a violation. We have a substantial student academic ethics policy on campus that highlights responsibilities of various parties, including students and faculty, types of violations, and sanctions. This document informs me what sanctions I can take with various levels of violations and the reporting I need to do. In all honesty, I do not know if other faculty on campus are reporting incidences to the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost. And, for level I and level II violations, do I want to report the student or help educate the student to try to prevent future incidences? The answer is, I don't know. Building a culture of academic integrity would help faculty and students with this process.

#### References

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