

Defining Academic Integrity Exercise

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Introduction:

In this exercise, students read university policy documents, resources pages, and popular articles about “copying” or plagiarism, confirm their understanding of their reading through peer-to-peer learning and writing a definition of academic integrity. Each group publishes their definition (e.g., on Canvas), and the class votes on which one(s) best define(s) academic integrity in a way that reflects the practices and values of the wider academic community. We then combine the parts the class found most relevant into a class definition that is posted on Canvas and referred to in each subsequent formal assignment. As we prepare for the final assignment, we revisit the definition to see if we need to add or revise any part of it.

This exercise allows for explicit engagement with and discussion of academic integrity as a topic, allowing students to ask questions – of each other, first, then as a class – that allow them to clarify their understanding. It sets up a framework for the course that we are able to refer back to as students begin their own applications of ethical research. Through their reading, they also learn the consequences of academic misconduct at our university, and familiarize themselves with some resources they can use for help in ensuring their work meets the expectations of academic integrity.

In my academic writing course, I do this exercise right away. It helps introduce students to the expectations and practices of the academic research community; in my classes, it has also generated productive discussion about the differences between high school and university writing and research. We typically get to have our first (no-stakes) academic integrity “teachable moment” together because, in writing the definition, no one cites or acknowledges their sources!

Time Required:

Parts of 2 classes (about 1 class total), plus portions of 2-3 subsequent classes for the revision/review later in the term.

Exercise – Instructions for Students:

For **class on Tuesday, Sept 11**, please read the following texts. As you are reading, take notes so that you can answer these questions:

1. How do these readings, together, **define academic integrity**?
2. What are **specific research activities or practices** that academic integrity includes?

You can bring a laptop or phone to consult the readings during our discussion of them.

- From the UBC Calendar page on [Student Conduct and Discipline](#): the entries on “[Academic Honesty](#),” “[Academic Misconduct](#),” and “[Disciplinary Measures](#).”
- From the Chapman Learning Commons “[Academic Integrity](#)” page, the “Avoiding Plagiarism” section, especially the “FAQ”.
- UBC Policy #85 on [Scholarly Integrity](#)
- Brian Hughes’s February 2016 blog on *Huffington Post*, “[Tough Topics: Are Essay Writing Companies Ethical?](#)”
- [an article on a relevant popular case of copying, e.g., Melania Trump copying Michelle Obama’s speech, songwriters accused of stealing vs sampling (Childish Gambino, etc.), journalists’ plagiarisms, etc.]

On Tuesday, we’ll take up these readings in the following ways:

You’ll work in groups and compare notes on these readings, thinking about these questions:

- What existing knowledge did they confirm for you?
- What was surprising?
- What questions do you have?

Then, still in your groups, you will write a definition of “academic integrity” that you will post on Canvas. Your definition should think about how to address the following questions:

- what is “academic integrity”?
- why does academic integrity matter *here*, at UBC? Did it matter for you before you came to UBC?
- why do you think people commit academic misconduct?
- here at UBC, how do we as an academic community address lapses in academic integrity?

For **Thursday, September 13**:

- **Read the other groups’ definitions.**
- **Choose one** that to you **best defines academic integrity** in a way that reflects the practices and values of the wider academic community.
- **Add a comment** on the one you’ve chosen explaining why it gets your vote.