

Editors' Introduction

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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY is not a new topic in higher education. Honor codes and academic dishonesty are familiar concepts for guiding scholarly conduct. But why the emphasis on “integrity” instead of dishonesty, plagiarism, or just plain cheating?

“Integrity” often refers to one’s character. At the surface, it may seem easy to differentiate between people and actions with integrity and those without. And the public trust placed in academe would indicate that integrity in higher education should be at a high level. We expect our scholars, teachers, researchers, and leaders to be exemplary not only in knowledge but also in character and behavior—a premise that accords with the public outcry we encounter when integrity violations at the academy are made known.

Though the issues around integrity in higher education are not news, this topic has received a marked increase in attention as accountability in higher education has become more important. This increase can be understood in several ways. One could note that as our society focuses more and more on standardization and certification, educational institutions at all levels are under increasing pressure to communicate their methods and goals to governmental and corporate bodies. While this is one way to read the situation, another is to take note that institutions are having to become more transparent about the policies and practices that consolidate power. We would argue that this give-and-take between higher education and the public regarding the standards espoused at colleges and universities is overall a healthy development. The need for the “Ivory Tower” to respond to the call for thinking itself in its social context and to take less for granted is at the core of the philosophy behind the liberal institution and, arguably, higher education as a modern cultural value.

One method of reflecting these values implicit in higher education is to institutionalize them through policy. For example, the Syracuse University Academic Integrity policy lays its foundation on “a commitment to the values of honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and respect.” We would agree that these are worthy values, and that their converses are not so. This agreement leads us, as educators, to feeling offended when someone lacks commitment to any one of these values. That reaction is probably at the core of why many think of academic integrity violations as repudiations of these values and why many think of academic integrity itself as an issue of enforcement. It is a matter of protecting what we hold dear.

This book explores academic integrity using a different approach. Instead of seeking out ways to identify, catch, and punish those who cheat or plagiarize, this book explores what universities, instructors, and students can do to create an environment that promotes honesty, trust, and respect.

This book is a product of the Future Professoriate Program (FPP) of the Syracuse University Graduate School. FPP has been responsible for identifying topics at Syracuse University, and in higher education more generally, ripe for rich examination and productive work toward making changes in approaches and practices. It has provided funding and direction to staff and students to not only collaborate in the creation of these works but also gain experience by editing and producing such volumes—experience that many of us will build upon as we pursue careers in higher education. We were invited to be editors by FPP because our graduate work and professional interests involve academic integrity, teaching, faculty life, interdisciplinarity, and the role of higher education in society.

This book is organized into four sections. The first asks us to reconsider our assumptions and basic definitions so as to think critically about both what we mean when we use the term academic integrity and what the implications of that thinking are for ourselves, our institutional practices, and the students we teach. The second draws attention to the particular position of the graduate student in the academy as a student—one hovering or oscillating between the poles of what is often described as a teacher/student binary—and the unique pressures for defining and practicing “integrity” that this position entails. The third section, titled “The People Behind the Policies,” offers elements ranging from personal reflections to programmatic descriptions, contributed by a range of writers including an undergraduate student, a TA, a faculty member, and two administrators from different campus offices, each sharing experience and advice from a localized perspective. Finally, the fourth section offers practical strategies for instructors and TAs to apply so as to promote a climate of integrity in their classrooms.

The primary goal of educators is not eliminating dishonesty, it is educating. And with this goal in focus, we can accept that the factors and pressures that lead to scholars *at any level* misrepresenting their work are not going away. As educators, while we may visualize a utopian environment of consistent, honest scholastic performance, we do better to recognize that such a pure place is not possible and to make choices in our pedagogies that move away from policing towards practicing the behaviors we say we value. We hope that this book inspires you to form your own pedagogical style in promoting academic integrity in your classrooms. But we also hope that, as you encounter familiar issues and suggestions, you will feel affirmed as an educator. It is good to remember that in many ways, promoting academic integrity is not something new we have to conform to: it is what happens naturally whenever we are active learners and thoughtful educators.