

I

THEORY IN PRACTICE

WHAT IS ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, AND WHAT ARE ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS?

AT FIRST GLANCE, the question above may seem over-familiar, if not facile, and its answers obvious: academic integrity is doing your own work, not cheating, “playing fair.” If everybody practiced it, school would run the way it “should.” When not everybody does, we have problems, and there are punishments to mete out and cheaters to catch. But such a simplistic appraisal overlooks the real complexity of both the notion of academic integrity and its implications for us all, which can be easily seen if we stop to interrogate the assumptions the simple answers take for granted. Ask, for example, what makes “academic” integrity a separate concept from “integrity” itself—why don’t we just have policies asking students to do everything with integrity? Is that outside our jurisdiction? What is our jurisdiction? Ask what “integrity” means in the first place, and why, if its opposites in most academic integrity policies are words such as “cheating,” “plagiarism,” and “academic *dishonesty*,” we don’t just call it “academic honesty”?

Ask why doing one’s “own” work is culturally superior to working collaboratively—and ask whether or not this is universally true. Ask why it *matters* whether or not students cheat, if they also learn, and if as teachers our job is just to teach them. Ask what the purpose is of seeking an undergraduate or graduate education—and if you think of such possible answers as career opportunities, field advancement, or job experience, ask whether these are more likely to come to students who can most convincingly demonstrate that they have learned from their coursework or to students who have the best credentials—and the highest GPA. And while you’re at it, ask about grading curves, “culling” classes,¹ and interdepartmental funding wars over enrollment statistics. Ask who benefits from teaching and learning “with integrity”—not only from the perspective of a humanistic belief in the value of education, but also through a consideration of

the economies of grades, degree requirements, scholarship stipulations, enrollment statistics, part-time vs. full-time instructors' salaries, overly full schedules, and competitive job markets.

The pieces in this section take on these difficult questions, placing the academy and its expectations of its teachers and students under tough theoretical scrutiny. David Horacek examines the nature of knowledge-making to see how the concept of “academic integrity” has evolved as a matter of necessity. Amy Roache-Fedchenko investigates academic integrity as a climate to promote rather than a set of practices or lapses. Ben Lovett asks what it is about educators' approaches that makes cheating seem to some students like a *type* of “fair play”; Jim Pangborn examines the ways the tasks we ask of writers set them up to plagiarize as an act of panic. Mike Murphy provides a critical examination of the commodification of education in today's economies, and Matthew Bertram challenges our basic cultural understandings of textual ownership and “originality.” Then, going further, each writer brings his or her thought-provoking reflection into the realm of the concrete, sharing learned experience to suggest what can be done in real classrooms to address this complexity in ways that recognize students' rationality and autonomy and invite their participation in making and partaking of a shared academic culture of integrity.

Notes

1. This is a term heard in circulation at a large state school offering a wide array of degrees in science and engineering fields whose programs of study began with a series of large, lecture-based introductory courses, sometimes seating as many as 400 students per lecture, the grades for which courses were determined solely by multiple-choice tests graded on curves and designed to be difficult. Large numbers of students never made it past these introductory courses, and thus the “herds” were “culled” down to more reasonable numbers of only the strongest students—or at least those best at passing multiple-choice tests in crowded rooms. Other institutions have other ways of referring to this not uncommon practice, but likely none as metaphorically vivid.