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Academic Integrity: Not the speed camera approach.

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ABSTRACT

Academic Integrity is essential to the viability of the academic community and also underpins values of honesty and responsibility that extend beyond academe and into the business world. Teaching both academic integrity and business ethics are tasks that carry broad responsibilities. While the rules and procedures of academic integrity are both explicit and widely distributed in universities, students often find compliance with those rules challenging, perhaps because the reasons are implicit. The Bachelor of Business degree at Victoria University has a diverse student cohort, a significant proportion of which comes from backgrounds that suggest they may not have a full appreciation of academic life and the rules that life requires them to follow in an Australian university. This paper reports on an approach to ensuring students have the best chance to understand their academic obligations and thus comply with the rules and procedures of academic integrity. Ideas of academic integrity are embedded with the presentation of a discipline specific topic within a first year compulsory management unit of study. Frequency and types of plagiarism under this approach will inform future Academic Integrity approaches within this unit of study.

Key words: Student-centred learning, Academic Integrity

Introduction

Despite the general appreciation amongst academic staff of the difficulties faced by students, instances of plagiarism and unauthorised collusion have frequently been dealt with in a near-draconian manner with little or no tolerance allowed. The gap between the appreciation that knowledge of academic integrity may be absent and the way in which that absence is addressed has been wide. Students are often informed of their obligations with regard to academic integrity in and amongst detailed information about assessment requirements. When the student fails to reference their work adequately (or even correctly) the metaphorical *speed camera* flashes and the student is penalised.

The Academy JISC Academic Integrity report (2011) used the Curtin University definition of academic integrity. This defines Academic Integrity as fundamental to the existence of the university and hence everyone's responsibility. It is

> "… essential to the foundation and ongoing viability of an academic community, including managers, researchers, teachers and students. It defines values held by those in the community and which serve to guide the community in its work. In particular, academic integrity involves a commitment to such fundamental values as honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility within all academic endeavours (Curtin University, 2011)."

The source goes on to add that academic honesty is personal and social. It

> "… underpins respect for, and the search for, knowledge and understanding. Academic staff are honest in their research and in their dealings with other staff and with students. Students are honest with themselves and with others, in their personal ambition, study and particularly in their involvement in the assessment process (Curtin University, 2011)."

This definition is important as a teaching principle as it requires an agreed understanding of what is "fair", how one demonstrates "respect" and who is "responsible" for specific teaching and learning activities. These foci are also what the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) team are investigating as they audit Australian universities. Building skills that enable students to demonstrate academic integrity is complex especially if a written communication requiring a synthesis of sources is required. Indeed academic integrity itself is one skill component of Academic Literacy which Whitelaw, Henderson, Jose, Li, Gao, Shi and Li (2010, p.6) define as "the ability to read, write, understand, analyse, interpret, create and communicate in a formal scholarly context. It involves being capable of critical / independent thought, being able to work alone and to knowing how to acknowledge the work of others". Clearly there are a number of skills in this definition, none of which can be taught instantly.

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Pedagogically, regular and sustained skill development is more likely to be a positive educational experience (Shute, 2008). The idea of learning as building a wall of blocks that can withstand a range of small pieces but nothing too large is not new and whether the learning is discipline content or the academic skills the principle is the same. There also needs to be reinforcement and practice to make the wall as strong as possible.

On the other hand, if procedural skills are being acquired simply so that an assignment can be resubmitted, the learning may be superficial and possibly undertaken begrudgingly (Tuckman & Kennedy, 2011). In such a case the learning may also be short term rather than long lasting. One way of making learning meaningful and engaging is to find the "teachable moments" (Havighurst, 1952). These are moments when students are ready to learn either due to the sequence of learning events, links to prior knowledge and /or experiences, and / or emotional state. Knowing one's students is one way of ensuring the value of "teachable moments" is maximised.

Herein lies our "speed camera" dilemma. As educators, if we believe we have allocated time to developing the Academic Integrity skills, do we then punish the abusers / non-compliers? Do we punish based on a "snap shot" without having seen the distance travelled i.e. the skills developed? Is it the same snap shot point taken for the same mistakes at the beginning and end of semester? Are the penalties the same?

Seeking to make fair, respectful, responsible and educative decisions, the research questions were:

1. What understanding of AI do the Management students have?
2. How is AI being taught in the Management unit of study?
3. If AI is more explicitly addressed educatively, will offences decrease?

Context of one unit at Victoria University (VU)

Victoria University's Bachelor of Business students are typically from low socio-economic status areas, often from a household where English is not the language normally spoken and are frequently the first member of their family to go beyond secondary education. The tertiary entrance score

(ATAR) for many students commencing with VU is relatively low when compared to universities such as the University of Melbourne, Monash University or the University of Sydney, and around 20% of the commencing cohort of the business degree will have followed a pathway from Technical and Further Education (TAFE) to Higher Education (Victoria University, 2012; 2011).

An approach to delivering discipline specific content (subject knowledge) cannot easily proceed from the position that these students will have developed academic skills to a tertiary level that will enable them to meet their assignment deadlines and submit work of an appropriate first year university level. On the contrary, the experience of the authors and others reported in the wider literature points to a need to ensure that academic skills are developed alongside the delivery of discipline specific content (Harris & Ashton, 2011).

The obligation of Management and Organisational Behaviour (M&OB) as a first year unit of study is to go beyond the role of policing the rules of academic integrity and to develop an understanding amongst students as to why those rules are important. The following sections of this paper presents how academic integrity has been understood by the students, how it is now presented to M&OB students who are transitioning to tertiary study from challenging backgrounds and the effect on instances of academic dishonesty.

Management and Organisation Behaviour

One of the core subjects in the Bachelor of Business normally undertaken in first year is Management and Organisation Behaviour (M&OB). M&OB is one of seven compulsory foundation units common to of all the Bachelor of Business specialisations offered by VU. M&OB is delivered at two locations in Melbourne (Footscray campus and City campus) by a team of (usually) 8- 9 fulltime and sessional academic staff. As well as being delivered onshore, M&OB is delivered at multiple offshore locations.

From a pedagogical perspective the range of social and educational contexts makes it difficult to meet the needs of a widely diverse student cohort, however and notwithstanding cultural differences, within the context of transnational education it is critical to maintain comparability of learning outcomes (DEST, 2005). An agreed understanding of academic integrity is essential in this context.

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1. What understanding of AI do the Management students have?

M&OB is delivered at campuses in Beijing, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru in Malaysia. A common scenario is that international students tell us that "respect" means using the exact words; we say fine as long as you use quotation marks and cite the source according to the appropriate system, AND tell us what the words mean. Here the difficulty of writing in English can arise and so students work together. The educator says collaboration is good but the students construct the paragraphs together and submit "overly similar" work. Yet, learning took place. Local students do likewise.

The circumstances faced by VU students who are commencing in their chosen business degree suggests to the authors that, despite the implicit assumption that these students are keen to improve their employment prospects, they also lack some of the skills, experiences and family resources to be resilient in the face of academic difficulties and to develop the academic skills needed to be successful with their studies. Nor can academic staff assume that these students will necessarily understand their responsibilities with regard to academic integrity or to be able to quickly acquire that understanding by simply following a set of rules (Miller, Shoptaugh & Wooldridge, 2011).

2. How is AI being taught in the Management unit of study?

The focus of academic integrity in M&OB is to build a discipline oriented story starting with "Ethics as a student", "Ethics as a Manager" and "Ethics in an Organisation" early in the semester and before a major written assignment is due for submission, and hence the skills of AI demonstrated. This differs from a number of Management textbooks that have Ethics as a chapter in the latter part of the book, which both plays down its importance and may not be reached during a busy semester.). The use of current business news items as illustrative examples of management theory is included in tutorials to encourage students to present anecdotes from their own experiences of part-time work. The use of illustrative stories acts to ground the otherwise abstract theories in the familiar and concrete (Harbin & Humphrey, 2010, p.99).

Business Ethics in M&OB

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As a first year introduction to management, M&OB can only address business ethics in a relatively superficial way, unlike later year units of study explicitly tasked with addressing business ethics in a systematic and comprehensive manner. However, the concepts of business ethics presented in M&OB form the basis upon which second and third year units of study present more comprehensive and sophisticated explorations of the topic. Within the limited time available to cover the topic of business ethics the M&OB teaching team undertook a re-evaluation of the approach taken.

Sims (2002) presents an adumbration of common approaches to teaching business ethics which range from the traditional to the more contemporary. The traditional approach to teaching business ethics has been typically based on a theoretical exposition of the philosophical underpinning of morals and ethical behaviour. These approaches range in complexity and depth and are variously associated with rule utilitarianism, teleology and deontology. These traditional approaches to teaching ethics presents ethics as series of theories and principles which can be criticised for being abstract and lacking contact with the day to day experiences of students.

Rule based and rule following approaches to teaching ethics are also outlined by Sims (2002). The rule based approach focuses on a consequentialist approach and presents ethics as a compliance system. The rule following/compliance approach has been criticised for drilling students in the rules without a great deal of explanation as to why those rules form the basis of ethical behaviour. Addressing the issue of teaching ethics within an accounting course, McDonald and Donleavy (1995) advocate for autonomous thinking, arguing that students should have the opportunity to apply ethical rules and principles in a practical context (see also Van Peursem and Julian 2008).

M&OB has developed around a constructivist pedagogy (Biggs 2003) as well as using experiential exercises to explore and apply the management concepts covered during the semester. This overarching framework brought the teaching team to develop connections between teaching business ethics and the application of ethical principle to issues of academic integrity.

By discussing issues of student plagiarism and collusion within the context of a wider discussion of business ethics has allowed the teaching team in M&OB to move the discussion of academic integrity

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beyond a rules based compliance approach and into a discussion connecting academic integrity to ideas of professional behaviour within the broader business community.

By explicitly linking academic integrity with professional ethical behaviour the teaching team is attempting to provide a connection between the immediate ethical dilemma facing each student (to cheat or not to cheat) and the ethical decision making values and processes that they will encounter after graduation. This is also supported by a clear articulation of the processes and rules of academic integrity.

Academic Integrity in M&OB

Academic integrity has been embedded in the assessment and delivery of M&OB. The position taken by the teaching team has been to approach academic integrity as a set of principles to be internalised by the students rather than as a set of rules to be complied with.

At the micro level, the "rules" and compliance with those rules inherent within a narrow conception of academic integrity being solely concerned with plagiarism and other forms of "cheating" might be of paramount concern to academic staff. However, at the macro level academic integrity should be of concern the students as well as they proceed through their studies towards their chosen career. The link between academic integrity in their current studies and professional integrity in their future career is made explicit within M&OB.

Students who have part-time employment and students who have another understanding based on life experiences are able to contribute their perspectives before the lecturer/tutor narrows the topic to the concept of academic integrity and then to ethical behaviour as a student of this university.

In tutorials the academic integrity story is continued with discussions about the role, types and use of evidence. Firstly students review secondary evidence for the summary of three simple refereed journal articles and develop an essay plan which incorporates the examined articles. This is a precursor activity to an essay assessment task which requires the synthesis of several secondary sources. Then

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later in the semester, students in groups have to construct a report which requires them to start making authentic connections between theory and practice, using primary data collected via an interview.

Aligned with the use of evidence, are the skills of synthesising, paraphrasing and quoting. These are explicitly noted in the marking criteria for each assessment task with marks allocated differently according to the focus of each assessment task. Academic skills such as accessing library resources (e.g. online databases of academic journals), researching, writing and analysis have been embedded in an integrated, constructivist manner to the assessment tasks and support materials within M&OB. These embedded academic skills are also supported by tutorial activities which explicitly address the skills needed to complete an assessment task as well as by a program of lunch time academic skills development seminars delivered by specialist Academic Language and Learning lecturers. These include Understanding the Assignment Topic, Writing Academically, Getting into Databases, Why Reference, Where and What to Reference.

Explicit details of academic integrity requirements are given to students in the details of the assessment task and the marking rubric attached to those details indicates the marks allocated to them. Students are also required to submit their assignments to an online source checker, TurnItIn, and achieve both an overall similarity index of 20% or less and no individual source greater than 5%. Consistent with a constructivist approach, students are allowed multiple submissions to TurnItIn so that they can revise their work in order to achieve the requisite similarity index scores. M&OB does not use TurnItIn as a speed camera to catch *wrong doers* it uses it as tool for students to improve their own work.

3. If AI is more explicitly addressed educatively, will offences decrease?

The research team is collating semester results and information from the teaching team regarding number of instances where students have been asked to resubmit due to an AI speed camera photo and an assessment of the average mark allocated to AI on the essay marking criteria will be compared across Semester 1, 2013, Semester 2, 2013 and Semester 1, 2014 to see if the average mark has increased.

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Conclusion

For any academic integrity program to be successful there needs to be constant growth and reinforcement of the identified academic integrity skills. On a day-to-day level this may appear more as a course / unit / subject level responsibility but the culture of the university, and the actions of teaching and allied staff, have a significant impact. As is the case with M&OB discussed in this paper, teaching staff and Academic Language and Learning staff from the University's Student Learning Unit have collaborated closely on curriculum development.

The majority of students taking the unit presented above have entered their degree course directly from secondary school. While many have part time work to support their studies, the anticipated outcome of their degree, professional employment, is not yet fully appreciated by all of them from an ethical / integrity perspective and more relevantly, from an academic learning perspective. Hence finding and using teachable moments is vital.

The evidence to determine whether these AI interventions have been successful or not will be gathered through subject level retention, resubmission of assessment task figures and marking criteria data during 2013.

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