# UA ACADEMIC INTEGRITY BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

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UNIVERSITIES
AUSTRALIA

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY TO UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

Universities are built on inspiring free thought and encouraging intellectual debate and exchange of ideas – academic freedom. With this freedom comes an equally compelling responsibility to uphold academic integrity – honest endeavour, ownership of work and acknowledgement of prior thoughts, ideas, data and research.

The Australian university sector has a reputation for quality that is world-class. This increases the value of Australian qualifications held by graduates and makes Australia a desirable destination for students from around the world. Any breach of academic integrity weakens the reputation of the sector.

Universities Australia's (UA) vision is to "support a sustainable national university system characterised by inherent quality, accessibility, innovation and high performance that affirms Australia as a world-leading nation." Assisting our member universities to foster academic integrity and minimise breaches is thus core business for the organisation.

The Principles outlined in this document have been endorsed by Universities Australia's members for the purpose of informing institutional policy and practice on strengthening the academic integrity of students.

Universities, as autonomous organisations, are responsible for how they use these Principles. Each university is encouraged to adopt the recommended practices outlined below in ways that best suit their own structure and practice.

These Principles represent the collected intent of Australian universities to address the issues of academic integrity at the systemic level. They are intended to provide a baseline position upon which the universities can build their own policies and practices. Through providing a common framework, they will enable greater collaboration between UA members.

# THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

In relation to academic integrity, the university peak body is responsible for:

- supporting the dissemination of best practices through the university sector;

- working towards a comparability of reporting practices; and

- dvocating public policies that serve the purposes of, and increase, academic integrity across Australia.

# DEFINITION

For the purpose of these Principles and elsewhere, UA endorses the following definition of academic integrity.

*Academic integrity means acting with the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility in learning, teaching and research.*

Universities consider that it is vital for students and all staff act in an honest way and take responsibility for their actions and every part of their work. Staff should be role models to students. Academic integrity is important for an individual's and a university's reputation. [1]

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[1] Bretag et al (2013)

# SCOPE

The primary focus of these Principles is the needs of and requirements for coursework students in Australian universities. The Principles also cover, to some extent, postgraduate research students, though the latter are also subject to the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research.

Students in Australian universities come from a diverse range of backgrounds with varying levels of academic preparedness. These Principles seek to provide a baseline from which the academic integrity of all students can be encouraged, supported and enhanced.

The Principles draw upon the findings and recommendations from a number of Office for Learning and Teaching projects on academic integrity and complement existing legal requirements through outlining commonly identified good practices for students, staff and university management.

# EXISTING REQUIREMENTS

Universities are required by a range of legislation and supporting regulations to ensure that academic integrity is upheld as central to educational standards, that its importance and meaning is communicated to students and staff, and that breaches and academic misconduct are pursued in systematic and fair ways. These requirements include:

- The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011.
- The Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015.
- The Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 and the related National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007.
- The Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research 2007.

These Principles sit beneath the requirements of these and other pieces of legislation.

The Principles sit alongside other formal advice, including TEQSA Guidance Notes and Best Practice Guides.

# PRINCIPLES FOR ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic misconduct is unacceptable.

These Principles serve to guide the implementation of a university's own academic integrity policy development and practice. Each institution will use them differently.

## PRINCIPLE 1: THE PRIMACY OF INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

Universities are the first line of defence against plagiarism and other breaches of academic integrity. They are best placed to provide their own students with the tools and support needed to avoid academic misconduct. Above all, they are self-accrediting institutions with sole responsibility for the quality of their academic course offerings.

## PRINCIPLE 2: EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE

All members of the university's community, from the Vice-Chancellor to a first year undergraduate, is responsible for ensuring the maintenance of academic integrity. Everyone has a role to play to ensure that students undertake learning tasks with integrity.

## PRINCIPLE 3: A WHOLE OF UNIVERSITY APPROACH

Academic misconduct takes many forms and is engaged in for many reasons, deliberate or unintentional.

As such, a university's response cannot be one-dimensional. Attention given to identification and penalty is important, but alone this will not ensure students adhere to expected standards of integrity.

A holistic, whole of institution approach from a university has been shown to be an effective model for minimising academic misconduct and academic breaches. Such a whole of institution approach combines elements of the following practices:

- a strong educative focus on academic integrity policy dissemination and practice for staff and students;

- a robust, consistent and fair process for dealing with breaches;

- a standard and centralised model of reporting across the university's schools and faculties; and

- using the data gained from reporting, anonymised as appropriate, to improve teaching and learning practices.

## PRINCIPLE 4: CONSISTENT AND EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Universities need to clearly define what they consider to be academic integrity, and ensure that they maintain a suite of academic integrity policies and practices that:

- focus on educative and preventive measures and activities;
- have clear terms and definitions that distinguish between types of policy breach;
- establish the level of penalties applicable to different types of breach; and
- have processes for investigating and assessing possible breaches that are clear, easy to follow and fair.

To eliminate academic misconduct, universities should ensure that their policies and processes are used consistently and effectively across all schools and faculties. Central administrations are responsible for the collection and use of data on the details of identified breaches and using that data for ongoing internal quality assurance and improvement.

## PRINCIPLE 5: ENGAGE WITH AND EMPOWER STUDENTS

Universities should ensure that students have a reasonable opportunity to learn about institutional policies and processes (through such channels as university handbooks, course induction and introductory materials and teaching).

An emphasis should be on active, participatory learning rather than relying on passive discovery. This should involve teaching and other frontline staff explicitly demonstrating academic integrity and appropriate academic behaviour to students, and actively involving students in these matters.

Students are responsible for the integrity of their learning, and decisions to breach codes of academic conduct (e.g. through outsourcing assessment tasks) are ultimately their own. However, universities should work to ensure that students are as knowledgeable as possible of the nature of academic integrity decisions and the possible consequences.

## PRINCIPLE 6: EMPOWER AND ENGAGE WITH STAFF

Through their work, frontline teaching and professional staff have a critical role to play in deterring and identifying student academic breaches. Universities are encouraged to consider ways in which academic integrity champions might be recognised and supported.

Universities should proactively communicate to teaching and assessment staff institutional policies relating to academic integrity and develop a framework that describes the processes that need to be followed when cases are identified.

Tools and resources, including best practices in course delivery, course design and assessment (to deter breaches) and technological aids (to detect breaches) should be made available to teaching staff, who should be tasked with using them. This would typically involve the provision of professional development opportunities on the issue. [2]

## PRINCIPLE 7: WORK TOGETHER

Academic integrity is an issue that affects all universities and can impact upon the reputation of the entire sector.

Universities may wish to share best practice and collaborate on benchmarking or other inter-institutional processes, especially regarding areas of joint concern (for instance, where it relates to third party commercial cheating enterprises targeting their students). Combining knowledge, experience or resources will strengthen the academic integrity of the overall sector.

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[2] Many examples of good practices can be found in the TEQSA *Good Practice Note: Addressing contract cheating to safeguard academic integrity.*

# REFERENCE SOURCES

This document was drawn from many sources. The most prominent among them follow.

Bretag et al (2013): *Exemplary Academic Integrity Project: Embedding and extending exemplary academic integrity policy and support frameworks across the higher education sector* (OLT, 2013) http://unisa.edu.au/EAIP

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Commonwealth of Australia *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2015L01639

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Nayak et al (2015) *Academic Integrity in Australia – Understanding and Changing Culture and Practice* (OLT 2015) http://web.science.mq.edu.au/academic-integrity/index.html

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Good Practice Note: Addressing contract cheating to safeguard academic integrity* http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/GoodPracticeNote-ContractCheating.pdf

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