Inclusive Practices for Addressing Academic Integrity

A core part of Brown’s mission is to prepare “students to discharge the offices of life with usefulness and reputation,” in their endeavors of “discovering, communicating, and preserving knowledge.” With a foundation of these values, how can discussions about academic integrity allow for classrooms that are inclusive of multiple perspectives and backgrounds, while holding all students to the highest academic standards? Here, we offer evidence-based suggestions for cultivating a culture of academic integrity for all students, with a particular emphasis on including international students and multilingual learners.

Inviting Inclusive Discussions Around Academic Integrity

Citation as Engaging and Belonging

A foundational step in creating a culture of academic integrity is for instructors to first ask themselves and one another, “What does it mean for students to do their own work in my discipline? Why does it matter?” (Lang, 2013, pg. 203). This conversation can then be brought into the classroom and openly discussed with students. Such dialogue around what academic honesty is and more importantly, what it looks like in the context of the classroom, can help instructors to outline clear reasons for policies and to determine where continued conversation and learning is needed.

Additionally, initiating conversations around which style guides are preferred in different disciplines can help students to understand not only how to use a certain citation style, but why. Madigan, Johnson, and Linton (1995) outline the ways in which the rhetorical conventions of APA style, including hedging and disagreement, are intentionally used to reflect the norms of the field and the shared language of experts within it. Similarly, citation can be framed as a “courtship ritual” in which writers are able to gain (or lose) status in the community of their discipline (Rose, 1996). Students may be more likely to engage in a conversation that frames citation as a means in which they, as scholars, can enter into and interact with their chosen field, rather than a set of rules that must be followed.

Student Experiences and Expectations

Brown’s diverse community of learners bring different experiences and expectations to the classroom based on their linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. It is true that culture may influence writing style and approaches to citation, but these differences are often not as great as they are made out to be. A Brown graduate student from China explains that, in his experience, the practices and expectations for citing in China are similar to those the United States: “We had a compulsory course on ‘literature search and citation’ as part of our curriculum.” Asking students about their previous experiences can provide a useful starting point and allow professors to build on students’ existing knowledge. Moreover, scholarship consistently demonstrates that contextual factors -- such as the culture of academic integrity and classroom practices --
are as or more important than student backgrounds in influencing academic integrity (Lang, 2014; McCabe, Butterfield, & Treviño, 2012).

**Inclusive Approaches to Assignment Design and Assessment**

**Emphasis on Learning and Improvement**

Learning environments are often categorized as having a "mastery orientation" -- emphasizing practice to gain competence -- and a "performance orientation," focusing on grades and peer comparison (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010). Generally, classrooms with a mastery orientation have been found to mitigate conditions that encourage cheating. For example, a psychology study compared students' responses to a faculty member who allows for resubmission of assignments and encourages verbal contributions, even when incorrect (mastery orientation), compared to another instructor who makes public grade breakdowns so that students can compare their grades to others (performance orientation) (Murdock, Miller, & Goetzinger, 2007). Both undergraduates and graduate students indicated that cheating was more likely to occur in the classroom with a performance approach -- even when that faculty member also was seen as a good teacher. Small and frequent opportunities for students to get feedback, as well as cultivation of a collaborative climate, are two key approaches for promoting a culture of academic integrity (see textbox for an example from Computer Science).

For another example, Katherine Kinnaird, who teaches Applied Math 0110 ("What's the big deal with Data Science?"), uses the "Contract for a B" system (Hafer, 2014), with the goal of helping her students develop writing, oral communication, and data science skills. The contract lays out the expectations for students' team project, and if students complete these tasks, they will receive a minimum grade of 80% for the assignment. Additionally, Dr. Kinnard adds a "chip system" that gives students some flexibility over these requirements. Students begin with one chip and then can earn more by attending an approved event focused on their development as a data scientist.

**Explicit Instruction**

Going beyond syllabus statements, in-class discussions and activities around academic integrity can help students understand more deeply about why, when, and how we cite. Students’ academic integrity behaviors are heavily influenced by their perceptions of peers' behaviors (Broeckelman-Post, 2008; McCabe, Butterfield, & Treviño, 2012). Therefore, in addition to a syllabus statement referencing Brown's academic code, instructors may wish to invite former students or DUGs leaders to talk about the importance of...
academic integrity.

Further, students’ decisions about academic integrity are variable, affected by type of assessment (Passow, Mayhew, Finelli, Harding, & Carpenter, 2006). For example, a student who would not cheat on an exam might think differently about copying homework. Therefore, it is important for instructors to define standards for different types of work required in a course. In the case of writing, a frequent question at Brown’s Writing Center is how to determine if something is considered common knowledge or requires a citation. To practice making this judgement in class, students could evaluate concepts in the field and discuss in groups whether or not to cite, and if so, who to cite. After making and sharing their decisions, the instructor could facilitate a discussion of the appropriate ways of dealing with the concept in writing.

Another common issue during writing consultations is paraphrasing. While this can be a cumbersome topic to tackle in class, the ideas can be reinforced by having students judge between two paraphrases: which is done properly and which is plagiarized? In his Academic Essay course at Brown, English lecturer Robert Ward has students look at real world examples of texts (see textbox).

Robert Ward also incorporates student reflection on scholarly citation practices into his course. "I ask students to write reviews of their experiences using the Owl@Purdue and the particular reference systems. Those reviews record frustrations, but they also record discoveries. I tell students that both those experiences go with the territory of referencing sources. It's my ambition as a teacher on this course that the discoveries will begin to outweigh the frustrations."

Clear Definitions of Individual vs. Group Work

Having explicit definitions of what is considered individual work can help students, especially when the expectations can vary from classroom to classroom. Academic integrity scholars state, "It is relatively common to see peer instruction valued in class only to have students meet with dire consequences when they use it in assignments. The only way to counter this confusion is by providing clear definitions that state how individual work is to be signalled, what criteria for assessment will be used and how students should identify shared work" (Caroll & Appleton, 2001, pg. 15).

Providing clear examples can also help to signal the expectations for each assignment. For example, a recent survey of international students at 23 U.S. institutions found that nearly a third of students wished that their faculty would provide examples of completed assignments as a guideline for students to follow (Redden, 2017).
Time
Learning takes time. For writing, this is true for all students, but especially for multilingual writers, who must think and organize their ideas in multiple codes. At Brown, multilingual students at the undergraduate and graduate level have reported that they needed a lot of time to write in English. "If a regular person needed one hour to write a paper, I would need two days," reported one undergraduate student, who described using her two native languages during the brainstorming and planning process. Similar concerns are seen in disciplines involving problem-solving. A large study in a MIT physics course found that reported time pressure was the key reason that students copied homework, i.e., waiting too long to start the assignment (Palazzo, Lee, Warnakulasooriya, & Pritchard, 2010). When the instructors changed the course format to deliberately space out students' practice of the material -- shorter and more frequent out-of-class homework and in-class clicker questions and problem-solving sessions -- copying decreased by a factor of four. Therefore, strategies to help students with the pace of a course can simultaneously be useful to heighten academic integrity.

Nationally, academic integrity is a concern, and students' college behaviors are predictive of their approaches in their future careers (Lang, 2013; McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2012; Passow, Mayhew, Finelli, Harding, & Carpenter, 2006). Small steps by instructors to promote a culture of integrity in the classroom are helpful to mitigate code violations. More significantly, these strategies are foundational to inclusive teaching, by creating an explicit invitation to all students to understand, critique, and generate knowledge in our fields and disciplines.

Link to:

- Previous Inclusive Teaching newsletter: Inclusive Teaching Strategies to Help Students Navigate Fast-Past Courses

References


