CHAPTER 10 : ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is an essential foundation for 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. Academic integrity is based on the fundamental principles of Respect, Honesty, Fairness, Trust and Responsibility (International Centre for Academic Integrity, 1999). An essential part of orienting students to higher education is to communicate how these principles apply and are to be upheld in an academic community, providing students with ongoing opportunities to develop and demonstrate academic integrity, and for staff to model academic integrity in all aspects of teaching, learning, and research.

Curtin’s Academic Integrity Policy demonstrates our commitment to an educational approach to academic integrity, recognising that academic integrity involves a set of competencies situated within a cultural context that must be explicitly communicated to and developed within our students.

Promoting Academic Integrity

1. Through education
All students who are new to Curtin will be provided with information and education related to academic integrity, including teaching related to academic writing and referencing conventions – such as paraphrasing and referencing – and appropriate standards of behaviour for group-based assessments. This education occurs in compulsory communication skills units in pre-Bachelor and undergraduate courses. However, demonstrating competence in academic integrity is a developmental process, thus it is essential that information and feedback about academic integrity be provided to students in all units throughout coursework degrees. Higher Degree by Research students are required to complete education in academic integrity as a condition of their candidacy. All students should be regularly informed of resources available to assist them with academic writing and referencing, such as through the Library and The Learning Centre.

All work that is submitted for assessment by an individual student or group of students will be accompanied by a student declaration that involves the acknowledgement that the work meets all requirements for academic integrity at Curtin. All assessments conducted under invigilated conditions (tests, eTests, examinations) will be accompanied by a statement of the conditions of conduct that a student agrees to abide by as a requirement for completing the assessment and acknowledgment that a violation of any of these conditions constitutes academic misconduct. These declarations help to draw students’ attention to the importance of academic integrity and promote a positive culture of academic integrity at Curtin.

2. Through assessment design
There are many strategies available to promote academic integrity through assessment design. Many of these strategies are also recommended to promote the authenticity and learning value of assessments. Some strategies include:
• Vary assessment topics/questions in different study periods.
• Design assignments around topics of interest or personal relevance to students, or which are relevant to local or unique issues or perspectives. Allow for personal choice in the selection of assessment topic or task.
• Design assessments that require students to integrate theory, previous literature, and personal experience (e.g., an experiment, field trip, or other activity) rather than describing or reporting facts.
• Design assessments that allow for a range of responses rather than having one “right” answer.
• Conduct an assessment in class (with possible prior preparation).
• Ask students to work on a task in groups but to submit individual assignments.
• Ask students to make brief presentations to the class based on their written assignments.
• Include a “meta-essay” or “meta-assignment” component in which students are assessed on their explanation of what they learnt through completing the assessment or what challenges they experienced and how they overcame these.

3. Through communication about assessment
• Ensure that the instructions for assessments are clear, particularly about the distinction between collaboration and collusion.
• For group-based assessments, be explicit about how students will report on their work, including how they will manage issues related to individuals not making appropriate contributions.
• Discuss with students the risks associated with making their work available to other students either intentionally or unintentionally.

4. Through collecting evidence of students’ work contributing to assessment
• Require students to include an annotated bibliography of all of the sources they consulted in completing an assessment.
• Require students to submit a copy of each source and details of where they found it prior to the assignment due date or with the assessment.

5. Through strategic planning and scheduling of assessments
• Use summative assessments sparingly to avoid over-assessing. Be mindful of assessment workload for students (and staff).
• Coordinate deadlines within and between units in a course to reduce time pressures associated with assessment that may lead to plagiarism and collusion.

6. Through appropriate detection and action to manage breaches

Literature indicates that one factor that contributes to plagiarism and other breaches of academic integrity by students is the perception that breaches are not detected, acted upon, and/or punished. Appropriate management of breaches of academic integrity is essential for the reputation of a course and the University, and to protect the value of academic awards.

As part of Curtin’s commitment to promoting and upholding academic integrity, it is mandated through policy that all text-based assessments are submitted to Turnitin™. Turnitin™ is an electronic text matching system that compares text in a student assignment against a database of electronic sources
including text on the Internet, published works, commercial databases, and assignments previously submitted to Turnitin by students in universities all over the world. Turnitin™ is not a plagiarism detection system. It is one tool that can be used by staff to assist with the detection of plagiarism in text-based assessments and must be used in conjunction with other strategies and academic judgement. For example, some limitations of Turnitin™ are:

- It will not detect matches with non-electronic sources such as textbooks (unless these have been converted to electronic text in some form).
- It does not detect where a citation for a source is missing or inaccurate.
- There is no percentage of text match that defines or excludes whether plagiarism has occurred.

Turnitin™ also has many positive benefits as a teaching and learning tool for students. Staff can allow students to submit a draft of their assignment in order to generate an originality report. This report will highlight text that matches another source and this may provide feedback on improvements in writing and/or referencing that are required. The student may then choose to seek assistance to improve their assignment before submitting it for marking.

For further information about Turnitin, see http://academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/overview/Turnitin_whatis.cfm

The management of suspected breaches of academic integrity is prescribed by the Academic Misconduct Rules, the Academic Integrity Policy, and the Plagiarism Procedures. These processes are described in detail in the Academic Integrity at Curtin: Staff Guidelines for Dealing with Student Plagiarism resource at http://academicintegrity.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/StaffPlagiarismGuide.pdf.

Further information