Effective course level management of academic irregularities

TILT Course Leader Conference 2018

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Outline for this session

- My background in this area

- How common are academic irregularities?

- Student motivations for academic irregularities

- Possible solutions

- Developing a mission statement

- Successes so far

- Action plan for courses

My background

- 6 years on UG and PG course teams

- Identified potential for inconsistencies between courses based on the approach of individual course leaders:
  – Decision making process for recognising academic irregularities
  – Level of focus on academic irregularity training on courses
  – Level of support offered to students

- Potentially problematic:
  – Impact on appeals
  – Potential for unsuitable cases brought to panels
  – Potential for academic irregularities to not be picked up

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How common are academic irregularities?

- Difficult to pin down!
  - Type of academic irregularity examined
  - Reliance on staff detection rates and self-report data from students

- Overall stats range from 3% of students cheating to around 80%

- Perception of increasing rates in recent years (Newton, 2015)
  - Students see exam cheating as clearly wrong
  - Copying and pasting material very common (and sometimes endorsed)
  - Very common to see collaborative learning
  - Possible link to 'commodification of education'

- NTU rates - 2015-2016 there were 402 cases (67.9% upheld)

Student motivations for academic irregularities

- Based on 250-300 School Academic Irregularity Panels (SAIPs), three main motivations:
  - Deliberate attempts to cheat
  - Lack of training / skills / awareness
  - Personal circumstances (NEC-related)

- Specific predictors:
  - **Neutralisation**
  - Achievement focus
  - Procrastination / poor time management
  - Temptation and opportunity

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Mission statement

- 'Moral panic' over academic integrity

- Academic cheating often described in moralistic tones:
  - The unoriginal sin
  - Idea theft
  - Intellectual shoplifting

- This perspective is characterised by the question 'how do we stop students from cheating?'

- **A more effective question is to ask 'how do we ensure students are learning appropriately?'**

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Mission statement

- Two possible strategies – rule compliance and academic integrity

- Rule compliance strategies:
  - Strong focus on discipline
  - High costs for problematic behaviour
  - Very limited focus on development or pedagogy
  - Bureaucratic approach
  - Very mixed evidence on effectiveness and staff more hesitant to enact

- Academic integrity strategies:
  - Errors are seen as part of pedagogic development
  - Student-focused approach
  - Associated with Honor Codes
  - Strong discipline for repeated issues

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Successes so far!

- Creation of academic irregularities coordinator role with Department of Psychology

- Oversight of academic irregularities resulted in:
  - Monitoring of cases (students, modules and course effected)
  - Directing students to appropriate sources of support
  - 'Translation' of policies and procedures for students
  - Creation of support resources
  - Monitoring AI training across different courses
  - Proactive planning for emerging changes (e.g., ghost writing) rather than simply reacting to challenges

Successes so far!

- Standardised implementation of Quality Handbook (17C)
  - Standardised interpretation of Poor Academic Practice Notifications and other Academic irregularities (Misconduct and Offence)
  - Clear and reliable approach
  - Successful performance in SAIPs

- Efficient use of resources
  - Percentage of cases upheld increased from 60-70% to 90%+
  - Very limited recidivism preventing future academic irregularities
  - Increased forward planning

- Strong focus on student development
  - Student-focused support guides
  - Direction to appropriate sources of support (NTSU and Library)

Action plan for courses

1. Standardising approach to academic irregularities

2. Student training and diagnostic assessments

3. Development of resources

4. Considering assessment practices

5. Addressing collaborative learning

6. Monitoring of academic irregularities

1) Standardising course approach

- Action plan for all courses:
  - Standardising approach – training for staff
  - Rolling approach not dependent on changes in course leadership
  - Reduction of potentially erroneous academic irregularity cases

- Staff guides:
  - Module leader decision making chart
  - Example referral forms and guidance
  - Board of examiners guide

- Addresses concerns:
  - Inconsistencies in approach (Student's Union)
  - Appeals (Office of the Independent Adjudicator)

2) Student training and diagnostic assessments

- Student training:
  - Using academic tutorials – safe environment for discussion
  - Explanations of policies and procedures
  - Practical guidance on Turnitin

- Diagnostic assessments
  - Focus on first few submissions (formative or summative)
  - Providing training to students around this point – relevant and contextualised
  - Targeted use of PAPs and discussion about study skills
  - Referring students to support in libraries

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3) Development of resources

- Developing student focused resources:
  - 'Translation' of academic and professional language
  - Previous successes with documents on option selection, exam board procedures and referral work

- Current guides developed:
  - PAP notification pack
  - Support guides for before and after SAIPs

- Guides being developed:
  - NEC reminders
  - Turnitin guide
  - 'Mythbuster' pack for ghost writing companies

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4) Considering assessment practices

- Build academic irregularities into assessment practices:
  - Reminders on assessment specifications
  - Reminders on dropboxes
  - Avoiding the recycling exact assessment questions year on year
  - Being careful when providing exemplar work (contextualise in light of academic irregularities)
  - Where possible, focusing on recent publications (significantly fewer resources / essays to access)

- Consider issue of facilitative failure:
  - Highlighting the difference between a low grade and receiving an upheld academic irregularity – reinforcing that a lower grade is preferable!

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5) Addressing collaborative learning

- Collaborative learning:
  - Very common for students to work together, even on individual tasks - don't assume student won't do this!
  - Potential for this to lead to collusion

- Provide clear / contextualised guidance:
  - Identify modules with collaborative learning
  - Clearly define collusion
  - Reinforce idea of not sharing any work more developed than a draft

6) Monitoring of academic irregularities

- Keeping a rolling record of academic irregularities:
  – Modules and specific assessments effected
  – Student motivations identified during SAIPs

- Engaging in forward planning:
  – Summarise information at the end of each year
  – Form a simple action plan in consultation with module staff
  – See this as a rolling process
  – This will form part of forward planning – responding to new challenges

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Conclusion

- Keep a supportive focus – comparatively few academic irregularities occur due to deliberate cheating

- Keep in mind that you will not be able to completely prevent academic irregularities

- Don't focus on outlining policies as the only approach - these will appear abstract to your students

- View academic integrity as a process – there will always be developments in this area

- Standardise approaches and give clear information

- Invest in appropriate training – it will help your students and save you time in the long run!

Challenges you face on your courses

- I'm really interested to hear how you think this material could be integrated into your own courses and/or the unique challenges that you face on your own courses.

- Happy to continue this discussion now and/or I'm very happy if you want to contact me directly: mark.sergeant@ntu.ac.uk