



Case Study

Implementing mandatory academic integrity training at the University of New England



Development

The University of New England had already been delivering mandatory training in academic integrity for a number of years when they heard about the opportunity to collaborate on the development of Epigeum's *Academic Integrity* programme through the project's Lead Advisor, Associate Professor Tracey Bretag. The university's existing training programme had been developed in-house, and although it was fit for purpose at the time, it was 'bare bones' in its coverage, and had become quite dated.

As Jennifer Lawrence, Programme Director – Academic Success, explains, this development process represented an opportunity to update that existing training provision into 'something more thorough', which 'would better scaffold students' understanding of academic integrity and how best to manage that effectively in their own work'.

For Dr Ingrid Wijeyewardene, Team Leader – Academic Skills at the University of New England, the new programme would also introduce a more 'holistic' and 'comprehensive' approach to training – raising awareness of the topic amongst members of staff, as well as students. And, crucially, by involving multiple Australian universities, it could also lead to greater consistency in their approach to academic integrity – potentially allowing training to be more readily transferable between institutions in the future.

In fact, the act of collaborating with a group of subject experts and other universities on the programme's development was a key part of its long-term value and usefulness. For Jennifer, this process allowed the university to 'draw on a level of expertise that we don't have in house' and produce materials to 'a level of quality that we can't attain on our own'. With academic integrity already a core principle of the university, involvement in the project made strategic and practical sense: 'we wanted to be part of that team', adds Jennifer.

Implementation

When the time came to roll out the student-facing part of the programme, Jennifer and Ingrid convened a consultative group of key stakeholders from across the university, including members of academic staff from various schools, and those with responsibility for academic integrity investigations.

After making some small tweaks to the programme to ensure its relevance to the university's context – including pointing to the 'academic skills office' rather than the library; adding a short introductory video; and expanding on the feedback provided in the summative quiz questions – the overwhelming response from this group was that they should "go all in" with the roll-out of the programme at the start of the second trimester, in July 2019.

From that point onwards, the programme has been compulsory for all new students, although there are no restrictions on the amount of time that can be spent on the training.



Students are required to progress through each module and pass each summative quiz in turn, before receiving a digital badge, and access to their course assignment drop-boxes in Moodle – ‘so, in order to submit any of their assessments for any other units, they have to complete the *Academic Integrity* module first’, explains Jennifer. This expectation is communicated via various first-year commencing units, and all face-to-face and online orientation activities, where the Academic Integrity programme is ‘front and centre, so they can’t miss it!’.

Jennifer and Ingrid were surprised by the ease with which the programme was rolled out – ‘when you implement any new EdTech system you inevitably have bugs, and we didn’t really have any’, reflects Jennifer, ‘we were expecting there to be something, somewhere that we’d missed in testing, and there just wasn’t’.

Engagement

Although Jennifer and Ingrid acknowledge that this approach is ‘quite unique’ to the University of New England, undertaking compulsory training in academic integrity is generally accepted as ‘a well-established idea’ by all members of their academic community.

In particular, the level of engagement from the consultative group and their ‘strong buy-in’ have been critical to the success of the programme – not only did those key stakeholders ensure support from their colleagues, but that in turn also reduced the potential for pushback from students. And, although the programme is administered centrally, Jennifer feels that ‘the schools are all very aware of it, and quite engaged’, with some developing complementary, subject-specific resources to explore particular referencing systems, for example, and using the programme as a ‘starting point for discussion’.

The Future

So far, over 12,300 students have completed the *Academic Integrity* programme at the University of New England. Looking ahead, Jennifer and Ingrid are considering introducing more institution-specific customisation; integrating the modules into the university’s Pathways Enabling Programme; and using the modules as a ‘teaching tool’ with students who have been found to have committed plagiarism.

They also look forward to the roll-out of the staff-facing modules, which have been trialled with a group of new-starters. The hope is that these two initiatives will complement each other – one reducing the number of students tempted to engage in academic misconduct, the other supporting members of staff in effectively detecting any cases that do take place – as part of a truly ambitious and forward-thinking approach to educational integrity.



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