



## The Teaching-Research Nexus

A guide for academics and policy-makers  
in higher education

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### Examples from Australian universities

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#### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: Research-based Approaches to Teaching Students about Academic Integrity**

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**Broad discipline area:**

Arts and Humanities

- Criminology and Criminal Justice

**Year level:**

- Across year levels

**TRN strategy:**

- Research-informed teaching and policy development

**Teaching and learning context:**

- Ethics and standards
- Assessment

**Brief description of the initiative:**

This initiative describes the close connections between a senior academic's teaching experiences, particularly in relation to assessment and plagiarism, her research and an institutional academic integrity framework. This academic has applied her research background in psychology and criminology to develop an institutional framework for preventing academic misconduct (plagiarism). She has drawn on:

- 15 years of undergraduate teaching experience;
- academic research background;
- a review of the literature on academic misconduct and academic integrity;
- institution-wide research using a staff survey.

This framework, which is still under development, is intended to establish an organisational culture of academic integrity among staff and students. The project aims to create favourable learning environments through the introduction of comprehensive research-informed prevention strategies and procedurally fair management strategies to enhance confidence in the institution's responses to plagiarism. This academic has applied research on the prevention of deviant behaviour to the issues of academic misconduct. The principle of diversion, a feature

of the juvenile justice system involving formal or informal warnings introduced to deter young people from re-offending, underpins the framework.

### **Prevention Strategies**

- **Developmental prevention** interventions focus on preventing misconduct through addressing the individual causes and risks of deviant behaviour. Such interventions recognise that university students are typically inexperienced and need opportunities to learn from their mistakes. The framework encourages an educational response to concerns about student misconduct.
- **Situational prevention** mechanisms apply the rational choice perspective of crime. Humans are seen as rational actors who weigh the costs and benefits before making a decision. By reducing students' opportunities to engage in misconduct, changing students' perceptions of whether they can get away with misconduct and reducing the rewards to students, misconduct is prevented.
- **Minimising opportunities for students to engage in academic misconduct** through **assessment design** and assignment submission and return strategies that make plagiarism more difficult. The introduction of 'text matching' software increases students awareness, aids detection of misconduct and acts as a deterrent.

### **Management Strategies**

Institutional surveying of staff indicated that many were confused about the policy for managing misconduct and that practices varied considerably across the university. Students' indicated that they were very aware of, and frustrated by, this variability.

The new framework for preventing academic misconduct is guided by the principles of procedural and natural justice; processes for dealing with academic misconduct are consistent, fair and transparent. Students' rights are protected and the decision-maker hears all sides of the story and takes relevant circumstances into account. Therefore, justice is 'seen to be done'.

### **Evidence of effectiveness**

This research-based approach to academic misconduct aims to improve the quality of student learning and ensure the assessment process is fair. The management system was trialled in selected elements in 2007. Staff considered the new process led to fairer and more consistent outcomes than previous academic integrity policies as it allowed academics to make decisions but also utilised processes to achieve consistency across the university. The introduction of a centralised management system, including recording the incident in a central database, reduces the administrative burden on staff and provides them with support in making decisions about student behaviour. Staff considered the new framework was preferable to either leaving decisions to individual staff members (lack of consistency) or decisions being made centrally (too bureaucratic).

### **For further details:**

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