

**Reflections on 'Promoting Academic Integrity  
Week'  
Starting a Conversation with Academics and Students**

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## **Abstract**

In October 2019, the Teaching Enhancement Unit (TEU) at Dublin City University (DCU) organised a week of events for academic staff and students called ‘Promoting Academic Integrity Week’. The purpose was to provoke discussion with academics and students about academic integrity, why it is important and what can be done to uphold it. The TEU has been involved with an Erasmus+ project to create resources for academics around assessment design approaches to embed academic integrity. They wanted to collate these resources in a central ‘hub’ for academics and launch and promote it during the week of events. They also wanted to engage students in thinking about academic integrity and what it means, through an online quiz and inviting contributions to a ‘Declaration Wall’ in prominent campus locations. This paper discusses the TEU experience of planning, organising and rolling out the week of events. The paper also explores the reflections of the TEU on how the events were received by academic staff and students and ideas for refinements for a future iteration.

## **Keywords**

Academic integrity, professional development, assessment

## **1. Introduction**

The Teaching Enhancement Unit (TEU) in Dublin City University (DCU) is approaching the conclusion of an Erasmus+ project titled INTEGRITY. It was funded under the KA2 strand and involves collaboration with colleagues in partner institutions in Georgia, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Austria. The TEU led the development of a suite of professional learning resources for academics to support the design of assessment which actively encourages academic integrity (DCU Teaching Enhancement Unit, 2018). Academic integrity has been defined by the International Center for Academic integrity (ICAI) as “a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values; honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage” (Fishman, 2014). As the project is reaching its conclusion, the TEU turned its attention to sustaining the outputs produced as part of the project and keeping academic integrity and the resources created as part of this project on the radar of academic staff in DCU. The TEU discovered an annual international event run under the auspices of the ICAI called ‘International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating’ and decided to become involved, with the intention of provoking discussion around academic integrity with academic staff and students and to draw attention to the resources that have been created. This international day was scheduled for 16 October 2019.

## **2. Planning**

Promoting academic integrity as part of the university experience can have a positive lasting impact on society and economics (business). Egan (2017) conducted a scoping review of the literature to investigate how educators can promote academic integrity. She draws on the work of Dick et al (2002, p.172-173) who highlight the risk of ‘graduating incompetent professionals...[as they] may produce work that fails or is even dangerous to human life’. Jones (2011, p.142) supports this proposition and points to a correlation between ‘academic honesty and workplace ethics’. Thus, attention to promoting academic integrity across the university is of the utmost

importance, and any opportunity afforded to us should be welcomed - the ICAI and their recommendation of an 'International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating' provided the impetus and idea for such an opportunity. The ICAI provides suggestions around what institutions can do for International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating. Many institutions choose to collect pledges from students, in which they vow to act with academic integrity in their studies. The ICAI also suggests that the event can be localised, renamed, or extended beyond a single day. They also recommend engaging with student representatives to include their voice and to compose a clear message for the event (ICAI, 2019).

Given the work the Erasmus project the TEU were involved in, we settled on a message of 'Promoting Academic Integrity' as it was felt this would strike a positive note. DCU Library and DCU Students' Union came on board as supporting partners for this initiative. After discussions with the team it was decided to run a week of events from 14 to 18 October 2019 dedicated to both students and academic staff.

### **Students**

An online quiz branded an 'Academic Integrity Challenge' was made available for the week on DCU's virtual learning environment. Its aim was to test students' knowledge of academic integrity and related practices. Students were encouraged to take the challenge with the prospect of winning Ticketmaster vouchers in a raffle.

For one hour at lunchtime over three days, the TEU team manned a 'Declaration Wall' in prominent locations in two campus libraries and the student centre building and invited students to make pledges around academic integrity or share their thoughts and opinions on integrity, plagiarism and cheating. These were captured on post-its and affixed to the wall.

### **Academic staff**

The academic integrity resources were collated and made available on a new 'Academic Integrity Hub' on DCU's virtual learning environment. These resources included a list of 12 principles of academic integrity, a checklist, a glossary, case studies, discussion scenarios and a suite of screencast videos showing how to use technology to embed good academic integrity. Academics were given access to this

hub and two lunchtime webinars held during the week explored the hub and resources with them.

### **3. Reflections**

Although planning for this week of events commenced in September 2019, and its planning was kept low-key, the TEU was very pleased with how the events ran and were received by students and academics. Keeping it low-key was an intentional approach by the TEU as this was the first time getting involved with the International Day of Action and organising an event of this kind. The TEU was cautious about widening participation in the organisation of the events as they were uncertain about how it would be received or how manageable the planning workload would be. The TEU was the lead behind the events and both DCU Library and DCU Students' Union were supportive partners, but if the events were to be run again, more time for planning and preparation would give opportunities for others to be involved. In particular, the TEU feels that there could be a role for lecturers from different faculties across the university to become involved and promote the message of academic integrity locally with their own students in their own programmes. Similarly, there would also be scope for student representatives to become more centrally involved and be the 'face' of the events as this might lead to greater engagement and impact with the wider student body. Beginning the planning with more partners much further in advance could also lead to additional events or innovative ideas being incorporated into the week.

The lunchtime webinars were well-received by those who attended. They did not impinge much on academics' time, as they lasted for 45 minutes each, and academics could log in and participate from any location. This was a bonus in terms of making it accessible to as wide a group of academics as possible. The webinars explored the new Academic Integrity Hub and the resources located therein, but were this week to occur again, perhaps an academics' event in which they contributed themselves, or completed practical activities around assessment design would have greater impact, rather than simply exploring resources. It could be difficult to get engagement in

something like this, however, as it would require more commitment and effort from academics, rather than just logging into a webinar.

The event over which the TEU was most uncertain about were the student ‘Declaration Walls’. The TEU had never engaged in such an activity before and had no baseline from which to gauge potential student reactions. Nonetheless, the TEU proceeded, as they felt these ‘Declaration Walls’ would create a visual representation of the week’s events and become a collaborative artefact of the discussion around academic integrity provoked during the week.

The TEU felt the ‘Declaration Walls’ worked well. Students who were approached by TEU staff and invited to add to the wall were curious and open to participating. The majority of them did not immediately have a contribution to make, nor did it appear that academic integrity was to the forefront of their mind. However, after engaging in discussion with TEU staff and being prompted to think about plagiarism and cheating, they articulated an opinion thereupon. Most of the students with who the TEU spoke then wrote their opinion on a post-it and affixed it to the wall. A ‘snowball effect’ could be seen. As the TEU stopped more students to speak to, and as more students added to the wall, passers-by were drawn to the wall as it became larger and as more people gathered around.

Over 120 contributions were made to the walls. The TEU is currently collating and transcribing the individual contributions, with a view to producing them into a digital artefact for disseminating throughout DCU and further afield. Some initial rough themes that have emerged include:

- Fairness — plagiarising and cheating is not fair on others, e.g.  
*“it’s not respectful”*; *“when my friends try to cheat I feel disappointed”*; *“it’s bad form”*; *“it’s wrong to take credit for somebody else’s work”*
- Right and wrong — plagiarising and cheating is just simply wrong, e.g.  
*“cheating is disgusting”*; *“it’s morally wrong”*; *“honesty is the best policy”*;  
*“plagiarism is theft”*
- Value of degree — plagiarising and cheating affects the value of the degree for all students, e.g.

*“undervalues my hard work”; “uphold the reputation of DCU”; “we don’t cheat because we want to be ethical nurses” “success should be earned”*

- Learning — plagiarising and cheating leads to no learning, e.g.  
*“only the dull cheat”; “I don’t cheat because I want the work I produce to be authentic”; “leaves you unprepared for practical work”; “the results are not real”*

We also got a few amusing outlier comments that are worth mentioning: *I don’t cheat because...“my mother will disown me”; “I am already too smart”; “ they are always watching...they are everywhere”; “I don’t trust the person I am cheating off”,* demonstrating the fun that was had through discussions at the declaration walls.

**Figure 3.1: Photos of the three ‘Declaration Walls’**



**Figure 3.2: Photo of combined ‘Declaration Walls’**



## **4. Conclusions and Future Work**

Overall, the TEU was satisfied with how ‘Promoting Academic Integrity Week’ was received by academics and students and intends to run it again in 2020, incorporating the improvements that were identified in their reflections. In particular, the TEU invites commentary from other institutions on this initiative and is eager to collaborate with other institutions who may wish to run an event like this in the future.

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