

Tips for Engaging Students in Discussion of Academic Integrity

Make it personal: The value of academic integrity may seem obvious to you, but students are often puzzled by academic integrity standards, particularly with regard to use of sources and collaboration. Students are accustomed to the exchange of unattributed ideas and information on websites and in social media. They know that politicians and corporate leaders deliver speeches written by unnamed assistants. They may realize that unspecified editors substantially revise the words of journalists. And many students notice that some faculty take tremendous care with citation in written work but fail to cite sources for oral and visual work, for example, in classroom Power Point presentations.

Recognize that expectations vary when it comes to collaboration: Some instructors encourage students to study exams from past semesters and require group projects, writing and lab work. Others forbid collaboration entirely. Students need to hear directly from you. Why do you value academic integrity in your classroom? How do you define academic integrity in your classroom? Where do you draw the line between allowed and prohibited collaboration on group work or joint studying?

Draw on your own experience: What experiences have you had with academic integrity – or the lack of it? How do concerns about academic integrity affect your teaching and your research? Talk with students about ethical dilemmas you have encountered in your career and how you have responded. Discuss what you hope students will gain from your class and how their own academic integrity and that of other students affects their learning. Compare failure to cite sources to physical theft or to omitting a relative from a family tree. Students will laugh if you ask how many of them stole a cell phone last summer or left grandma off the family tree, but they will get the point.

Connect academic integrity to learning: News coverage of higher education focuses on its cost, the economic importance of a college (or graduate) degree, and the need for colleges and universities to do a better job to ensure that students who begin a degree complete it. What is missing from this conversation? Often, there is little or no discussion of the learning a degree is designed to represent. Engage students in discussion of what they are learning in your course and its significance.

Explain the key role citation plays in academic research: Ask students what they know about your job. Most students know little about the work faculty and instructors do beyond teaching. Telling students about your area of expertise, the role that research plays in your career, and how citing and being cited by other academics affects you will help explain the value placed on citation in academia – and the expectation that students will cite sources they use even though only a minority of students expect to enter academia themselves.

Use published research to demonstrate how research works: Students often imagine academic research as a discrete event that confirms a hypothesis immediately – and forever. Walk students through an exercise illustrating the evolution of a key research question in your field – ideally one in which consensus on answers has shifted over time – to help them appreciate the value of tracing individuals' intellectual contributions over time. Or assign students to read a peer-reviewed journal article in your field and analyze the structure of the article: How many sections are there? What is the purpose of each? Which sections contain citations, and what role do these citations play? Many students are surprised to see how important a role citation plays in published research.