

## Glitches and hitches: Sessional academic staff viewpoints on integrity and academic misconduct

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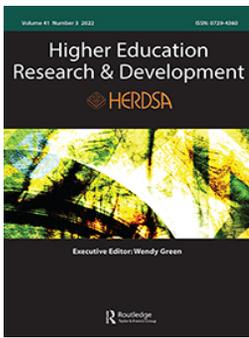
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## Glitches and hitches: sessional academic staff viewpoints on academic integrity and academic misconduct

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### ABSTRACT

Increasing incidents of academic dishonesty are a problem for universities globally. The traditional approach to dealing with academic dishonesty has been to detect and punish, which may not be the best solution.

This study explored the perceptions of sessional teaching staff (a growing but often neglected workforce) on academic integrity and misconduct issues at an Australian university. Findings from the focus groups revealed a deep-seated concern for the size and extent of the problem.

While some participants were of the view that students should be punished, others provided interesting suggestions to reduce instances of academic misconduct. This study found that prevention is preferable to punishment as a guiding principle for policy development to address academic misconduct in universities. Students should be educated on the importance of mastering established academic protocols as a way of learning the discipline. Universities need to provide sessional academic staff with contextualised professional development activities.

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## Referencing practices and academic integrity

The capacity to use and cite sources correctly is a skill ‘that students need to learn as they become part of the academic community’ (Vardi, 2012, p. 921). Teaching referencing practices requires academics to balance supporting students’ learning and ensuring academic integrity.

There are many definitions of academic integrity. Some are founded on the characteristics of honesty and being able to identify instances of dishonest behaviour. This is the view of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (Bretag et al., 2013). Trustworthiness and respect are values often associated with academic integrity (Bretag & Mahmud, 2016), whereas others emphasise that academic integrity is the guiding moral code of academia (Brown et al., 2018). Regardless of how academic integrity is defined, maintaining the integrity of scholarly activity has become a central

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concern of post-secondary institutions globally. Universities are concerned about the impact of inappropriate academic behaviour by their student populations. A seminal role of universities in society is knowledge creation, hence universities' reputations are dependent on the quality of academic practices and knowledges of their graduates. When instances of improper academic behaviour are discovered, the academic community (academics and administrators) are obliged to address the problem.

### *Academic misconduct*

Charles Drake (1941), an early observer of academic misconduct, proposed that the competitive nature of institutions nurtured students' desire to cheat. This view is regarded as having some validity in courses such as engineering, which are highly competitive (Bretag et al., 2019). Another theory suggests the propensity to cheat is inversely related to the need for academic fulfilment (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2015). Students are less likely to resort to academic dishonesty if they are provided a satisfying environment to work and study (Bretag et al., 2019). Increases in academic dishonesty in recent years have also been attributed to the sense of entitlement that millennials have regarding their education (Stiles et al., 2017). The reasons for committing academic misconduct are a continuum from deliberate intent to entirely unintentional because 'students do not possess knowledge that enables skilful application of the conventions of acknowledgement practice' (Bretag et al., 2013).

Some studies suggest academic misconduct is not a solitary activity. Scrimshire et al.'s (2016) study of the relationship between students requesting help and those providing it revealed that requests to copy and collaborate were commonly made to classmates and likely to be accepted – particularly if a close friendship existed. However, their study found that these requests did not extend to seeking assistance in exams.

Ghost-writing, also known as contract cheating, is the practice of outsourcing the writing of an assessment item to a third party (Lines, 2016). Often students pay extra for a service that ensures a high degree of originality in the ghosted work to mitigate the risk of being caught.

The ubiquity of technology provides another opportunity for students to cheat (Bain, 2015). Akbulut et al. (2008, p. 463) described three factors influencing students to cheat in online environments are:

- (1) individual factors, such as time pressure, the desire to obtain higher grades and/or a lack of confidence in producing quality work;
- (2) institutional factors, such as not imposing sanctions for instances of academic misconduct when detected; and
- (3) peer pressure to participate in academic misconduct.

Some students are tempted by the ease with which technology, such as mobile phones and smartwatches, can be employed to gather information to assist them answering exam questions. This form of cheating can be mitigated through the use of surveillance and detection technologies (Nazari et al., 2019) and the development of appropriate policies and protocols to govern the administration of assessments in an electronic environment (Landes & Freeman, 2019).

### *Types of academic dishonesty and how to deal with academic misconduct*

Keresztury and Cser (2013) classified academic misconduct as classical methods (practised before the advent of electronic examination methods) and methods specific to electronic means of examination. The classical methods include information exchange, encompassing actions such as passing written information by hand, or text messages; using forbidden materials or devices, such as calculators, written notes or personal digital assistants; and manipulating the examination process by arriving late to surreptitiously obtain examination questions prior to starting an exam. Cheating methods that have evolved with the advent of electronic examinations include the misuse of portable storage devices, such as by transferring answers on a USB flash drive from one student to another, communicating with external helpers during an exam and reading the answers from other computer screens in a lab environment (Keresztury & Cser, 2013).

The issue of how to deal with academic misconduct cases is a particularly vexed one. Central record keeping is considered an effective strategy in dealing with breaches of academic integrity (Bretag & Mahmud, 2016). This ensures that other areas of the institution are cognizant of the breach and assists in facilitating a uniform approach to implementing academic integrity policy across the academic community. A recent investigation into the handling of academic integrity infractions in China (Yi et al., 2019) revealed that Chinese institutions are starting to take the phenomenon seriously. The study found that punishments included academic sanctions, such as the retraction of awards or cancellation of funding, institution-imposed sanctions that could include demotions or dismissals and even referral to the Communist Party for consideration of further punitive actions. A study by Dalal (2015) in the United States of America (USA) on the use of reflection as a tool to address an infraction and to correct the offender's behaviour, was touted as having much promise. In his study of plagiarism violations at a USA-based university, Dalal (2015) studied 26 students who opted to write a reflective essay on the incident rather than attend an academic dishonesty hearing that would have resulted in a record on their transcript. These initiatives can assist in creating a culture in which academic misconduct is avoided by students. How institutions respond to academic misconduct should be cognizant of students' intent, appropriate punishment and education for deliberate breaches and specific training and support for unintended breaches.

Research into institutional practices that address academic misconduct tends to focus on full-time, tenured academic staff with a regular teaching load. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (2017) offers several recommendations and good practice notes that provide usable techniques for combating plagiarism in higher education. They specifically note the need to engage academic staff by making information available online and ensuring this information is reviewed by staff regularly. Bretag et al. (2013) consider a holistic approach to academic integrity and highlight the need for professional development for staff, including a whole-of-institution approach to promoting a healthy academic culture. However, few studies consider casual or sessional academic staff perspectives and their unique issues with academic integrity despite the rapid increase in the casualisation of academic staff across the globe over the last two decades (Hitch et al., 2018). This project aims to address this gap in the research.

## Research design

This research utilised a case-study design approach to allow the exploration and description of a phenomenon through a variety of lenses (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This approach was chosen because the focus of the investigation was on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2014), which enabled an understanding of the experiences of sessional academic staff regarding academic integrity.

Focus-group interviews were employed to collect qualitative data from sessional academic staff teaching undergraduate and postgraduate information and communication technology units. Focus groups provide ‘a rich and detailed set of data about perceptions, thoughts, feelings and impressions of people in their own words’ (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 140). Because 80% of all themes in research studies are usually discoverable with two to three focus-groups, with a modal size of eight participants (Guest et al., 2016), each focus group had nine participants. Two two-hour, face-to-face, focus groups with eighteen sessional academic staff were conducted at two locations.

The focus groups were recorded and then transcribed verbatim by a transcriber. A thematic analysis of the transcripts was executed using NVivo software. The first step was to identify keywords and phrases that were then used to manually code nodes to detect themes. When quotes from the focus groups were reported, the participants were given a code that represented the location of the group they were in and a participant number to preserve their anonymity, for example, SFG\_P1, MFG\_P2. The insights gained were used to inform the research problem, which was to explore the issues experienced by sessional academic staff when engaging with academic integrity.

### *Characteristics of the students taught by participants in this study*

Most of the students taught by the sessional academic staff in this study were international students (>95%) because the research was conducted at campuses where most students are international. International students in Australia accounted for 22.8% of all higher education enrolments in 2017 (Ferguson & Sherrell, 2019), a figure that rose to almost 31% in 2018 (Department of Education and Training, 2020). Foreign nationals are granted entry into Australia to pursue post-secondary courses under certain conditions that include a requirement for satisfactory progress in a programme of study (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2019). International students were also required to pay full tuition fees for their programme of study (unless granted a scholarship) and were ineligible for the government support provided to domestic students (Australian Government Study Assist, 2019). International students experience different challenges and stresses than their domestic counterparts, such as learning a new education system and/or undertaking a degree in a second language, for example, English.

### *Characteristics of sessional academic staff participants in this study*

Sessional academic staff are employed on temporary contracts and are remunerated for the hours worked. A typical contract specifies the number of teaching hours assigned to each course. There are payments for grading student assessments which are based on a

standard time allocation. It can be more difficult for sessional academic staff to be involved in professional development activities and workshops than it is for permanent staff (Ryan et al., 2013). The staff who participated in the focus groups were paid academic rates for their time.

Sessional staff usually only engage with their students in the classroom (or via video-conferencing). This is partly because they may have other employment and associated time commitments and partly because they are typically not remunerated for attending meetings, committees, and other non-teaching activities. This means that they have limited contact with permanent staff, which may leave them feeling isolated when it comes to dealing with academic integrity matters. This study is an important step in bridging the gap between the views and experiences of permanent employees and the often 'invisible' cohort of sessional academic staff.

## Findings and discussion

In both focus groups, there were diverse comments by participants on examples of academic misconduct. Some of the participants expressed a feeling of anger when they discovered their students had intentionally cheated, while others were visibly distressed and upset at the thought their students had committed academic misconduct accidentally because they had not engaged with any training. The participants' quotes indicate their individual perceptions of the students they teach. A thematic analysis of the focus-group transcripts revealed the main issues identified by staff could be categorised into contract teaching, inappropriate referencing, manipulating text-matching software and academic misconduct by international students.

### *Contract cheating*

Contract cheating is the engagement of third-party professional services by a student to complete a piece of academic work and can be paid or unpaid (Harper et al., 2018). Paid contract cheating is becoming a profitable industry in Australia, and many providers openly advertise their services online. Contract cheating can be difficult to detect unless academic teaching staff continually monitor each student's progress to detect deviations in writing style that are not consistent with the student's work.

The comments from participants demonstrated that issues with contract cheating were understood by sessional academic staff. One participant highlighted their belief that contract cheating was widespread:

[When I was] a student ... that was absolutely what people were talking about in the cafeteria ... the amount of places that you can go, in order to find someone who will be able to write your assignment for you, and achieve a certain amount of marks, and how much it would cost. (SFG\_P1)

Another participant suggested the demand for these services was related to the lost opportunity to earn money if actual effort was expended on completing an assignment:

More profitable to either purchase or copy/paste from the Internet rather than spending time on assessments; time that could be spent on working and earning money ... was discussed by students in a class one term. (SFG\_P8)

Another reason provided for engaging contract writing services was that it was considered culturally acceptable for students to pursue this practice:

... from a cultural perspective, I don't think there is any perception that is wrong. It is simply a form of work, it's a form of outsourcing, it's a kind of consulting. I don't think, for the vast majority of students who do that service for others, that they perceive that there is anything that is wrong. (SFG\_P1)

Another participant implied that the often poor English language ability of international students might make them more likely to engage in contract cheating. Some participants assumed that academic misconduct was always intentional and not because some students struggled to understand the deeply embedded ways in which knowledge is produced in different disciplines.

### *Inappropriate referencing*

An important feature of academic integrity is the standardisation of the referencing process to which students are expected to adhere (Yap et al., 2018). If referencing practices are incorrectly applied, even unintentionally, this can lead to accusations of plagiarism. An example of a writing practice that could lead to unintentional plagiarism is patchwriting, where students alter passages of text by changing the grammatical structure or replace keywords with synonyms (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014). Students, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds, need time and practice to develop their academic writing practices. For many students, patchwriting is a necessary step towards mastering academic writing (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014).

Inappropriate referencing, where students copied another person's work without attributing the source, and concern about random use of references with no bearing on the subject matter of the assessment were evident from this quote:

They have falsified citations, so they don't read the citations and just randomly pop in in-text references and the in-text reference has no bearing on the preceding sentences ... (MFG\_P2)

There was some sympathy for students caught in plagiarism accusations arising from a lack of understanding of proper referencing techniques:

It is expected of the good students to support the others. This student was someone who did not 'share' his work but ended up copying and pasting from the Internet while citing correct references. Perhaps a case of poor referencing skills. (SFG\_P8)

Another participant emphasised that even experienced researchers struggle with the complexities of referencing:

I think there are times when we all struggle with these issues. It could be as simple as referencing style. I've written so many research papers, but we were struggling about a particular aspect in a reference style because it was so minute that we didn't know the answer. (SFG\_P8)

This comment is particularly poignant because it highlights the complexity and ambiguity of modern referencing systems that all academics (novice and experienced) face. There is an argument that 'referencing infractions' resulting from inexperience should be addressed more as an opportunity to instil sound referencing practices than a

trigger for punishment. This point is reinforced by Vardi (2012), who proposed that universities should rethink the definition of plagiarism and embrace the development of academic practices that need to be acquired alongside the knowledge of the discipline areas rather than view referencing as a technical skill. Academic staff need to be aware that there are minute technicalities in referencing, but infractions do not generally emerge from these technicalities, they emerge from a lack of understanding of the purpose of referencing to build claims in academic writing.

### *Manipulating text-matching software*

To assist academics in detecting instances of plagiarism in written assessments, many universities require students to subject their work to text-matching software before grading. Turnitin is a text-matching software application intended to promote academic integrity and reduce instances of plagiarism (Batane, 2010). It requires a high degree of human intervention to assess the similarity reports of submitted assessments to determine if there are any instances of plagiarism. Turnitin has an international reach and can compare assessments retained in repositories in participating institutions across the globe, along with other databases of scholarly articles and internet-based resources.

Numerous comments were made by participants about the efficacy of the Turnitin system and how students attempt to fool the text-matching process. One participant explained that Turnitin reports often lack perspective and scrutiny from markers is required:

I don't know what they do, but in Turnitin, it doesn't show anything to you, but actually, I could find like one sentence and through that, I started to search and then I found that they actually copied [a] professor[s] paper on entropy in Nepal ... (MFG\_P1)

Another participant suggested training might improve academics' effective use of Turnitin:

These types of things could be included in your training module and plus how to use Turnitin. Turnitin is just a similarity tool, not a plagiarism tool. We should not rely on Turnitin, itself, to detect plagiarism; that is another thing that you must consider. (MFG\_P6)

Some of the elaborate ways by which students attempt to 'deceive the software' are often difficult to comprehend. This misplaced effort hinders students in the development of the discipline-specific referencing practices learnt through explicit engagement with the knowledge dissemination norms of the discipline (Lines, 2016).

Participants provided examples of how students attempted to avert Turnitin when submitting assignments, for example, the use of images to replace text, as Turnitin cannot match the text when uploaded as an image:

Turnitin does not capture it if it's a screenshot... another trick that students follow. (SFG\_P7)

Another popular method reported was to change words in the extracted text using a synonym generator:

Some staff cannot identify matches if they are not clearly covered in Turnitin—i.e., use of synonym generators and false citation of references are a few examples where some staff haven't been able to identify academic misconduct. (SFG\_P8)

Word spinning software are synonym generators used to circumvent text-matching systems like Turnitin. Students use this software to conceal origins of copied passages of text. Using it is a serious breach of academic integrity rules (Kannangara, 2017). However, the use of such software requires human intervention to ensure the meaning of any transformed text is not undermined by the substituted words. Students without a good command of English are unlikely to find this tool helpful as it can produce text that is senseless.

The use of text-matching software by itself is not a panacea for addressing academic integrity issues. Many universities employ tools such as text-matching software without taking any proactive steps to adjust assessment parameters to reduce attempts to plagiarise (Rees & Emerson, 2009). Text-matching tools have value beyond the detection and reporting of instances of suspected academic dishonesty. When used as a teaching strategy, they could have a formative function in the learning environment by helping students to improve their understanding of acceptable referencing practices, rather than viewing the software solely as a tool to detect plagiarism.

### *Academic misconduct by international students*

Participants commented about international students and their relationship to academic dishonesty. Simpson (2016) found students from collectivist cultures may value group work over individual work and accept that helping other students and receiving help is an acceptable way to proceed with one's studies. This can cause tension for staff used to working within an individualistic culture where they believe students need to work on their own to complete assessments. Simpson (2016) also argued that international students whose first language is not English might resort to plagiarism to compensate for lack of language fluency. These pressures and given that international students must pay tuition fees and may need to work to support themselves can drive them to seek ghost-writing services to complete their assessments. This form of academic dishonesty is particularly insidious because the use of text-matching software is not very effective by itself in detecting ghost-writing (Lines, 2016).

Some participants believed that academic dishonesty was ingrained in international students' home cultures:

[previous person] mentioned the prevailing culture, the student's learning culture and how that's engrained over time and it emanates from the [home] country. (MFG\_P1)

Other participants acknowledged plagiarism is committed by domestic students too, which is consistent with the Bretag et al. (2019) study on contract cheating:

In my experience, the plagiarism happens with the local students as well, because although you don't see many on this campus, I have been teaching to local students in some other universities. (MFG\_P6)

Another viewpoint on why plagiarism is prevalent among international students:

... people come from a different system, they are not used to this particular [education] system, and it is very hard, at the age of 20, really to shift from one system to another system, and the mind shift to take place. (SFG\_P4)

Comments in both focus groups implied that many participants believed issues of academic dishonesty are widespread amongst international students. There is no evidence that plagiarism is more likely to be identified in the written work of non-native English speakers than it is by native English speakers. The unique characteristics of many international students – lack of English literacy, non-exposure to sound principles of academic integrity and acute financial pressures (Brown et al., 2018) – make it challenging to create conditions in which international students could be intrinsically motivated to avoid cheating. Improved awareness by academic staff of the cultural and situational stresses of international students would assist staff in creating learning environments that promote the importance of academic honesty.

### **Strategies for reducing academic misconduct through teaching academic integrity principles**

Many universities are adversely affected by the rising phenomenon of academic dishonesty (Bretag et al., 2019). The internet has made the issue of dealing with plagiarism particularly difficult. One approach to dealing with academic misconduct is to employ technology to authenticate student identity, such as face and voice recognition, keystroke analysis and text-matching systems. However, the implementation of such systems raises significant concerns about surveillance cultures and privacy issues.

Educational initiatives are also being employed to counteract the potential for students to plagiarise. Curtis and Vardanega (2016, p. 1168) argued that while iInternet technologies have assisted students in plagiarising, they have also ‘provided a platform for delivering educational interventions such as referencing skills mastery tasks, which recent studies suggest increase understanding of plagiarism, improve attitudes regarding plagiarism, and reduce instances of plagiarism’. The use of text-matching software can have a formative influence on students’ understanding of plagiarism. Providing clear assessment specifications and academic skills development also improves students’ awareness and reduces incidences of plagiarism (Curtis & Vardanega, 2016).

The rise in the casualisation of academic work can have specific consequences on sessional academic staff. For example, they may not be included in regular staff development opportunities. The provision of ‘scholarly professional development activities embedded within disciplinary and practice contexts’ is needed to support sessional academic staff (Hitch et al., 2018, p. 286) in providing them with the knowledge and skills to teach citation and referencing practices to their students. This would have a longer-term benefit than providing generic workshops on referencing skills offered by people who are not themselves knowledge creators in the discipline. The sessional staff should also be encouraged to be active knowledge producers in the field in which they are expecting their students to write. These professional development activities need to form part of their workload.

Participants suggested useful strategies to mitigate plagiarism. They can be categorised into four themes:

- (1) explaining plagiarism to students;
- (2) prevention is better than punishment;
- (3) restructuring assessments to make them more difficult to plagiarise; and
- (4) testing academic integrity knowledge.

### ***Explaining plagiarism to students***

Mason et al. (2019), in a study of plagiarism in software coding, found that providing an explanation of academic dishonesty and its consequences before assessment distribution reduced instances of academic misconduct in assessments. Jiang et al. (2013, p. 370) argued that students working in a professional capacity should be expected to ‘conduct themselves according to the highest possible standards of academic integrity and, thereby, recognise and resist risks and temptations relating to plagiaristic behaviour’. They posited that academic staff need to understand plagiarism to facilitate the development of their students’ skills in academic integrity.

Many participants agreed a class discussion of educators’ past experiences with students who had been caught cheating and the consequences of that infringement was essential:

I tend to rely on a discussion around the consequences. I often take the opportunity to discuss the situation that I have had in the past or with different classes or subjects. (SFG\_P9)

Given that, for many students, employment after graduation is a goal, one participant shared how he explained to students why they should be actively engaged in their learning:

I say, ‘Put up your hands those of you who want to or think that you may want to apply for a local job’. I am very specific. I say, ‘Local job means apply for a job in one of the big four banks, or Telstra, ... well-known companies, not the SMEs [small to medium enterprises]’. Quite a few hands go up and I say, ‘Look, if you are seriously wanting to apply for a job, ... your real learning counts. Because if you strike someone like me on your job interview, I’m going to be asking you some very searching questions like, ... ‘Name three things that you learned at your university’. (MFG\_P1)

Another participant felt the use of audio-visuals was an effective way to convey the message:

A couple of subjects that I teach, the unit coordinator ... [has provided] plagiarism advice on slides, which I run through. (MFG\_P4)

What constitutes plagiarism is often explained in orientation programmes where the presenters tend to explain the policies and punishments, but it is imperative to explain plagiarism and teach referencing practices in individual units of study where it can be contextualised within the discipline.

### ***Prevention is better than punishment***

There were suggestions for facilitating students’ understanding of academic integrity and rewarding good practice over punishment. Some participants felt punitive actions to deal with instances of plagiarism were not in a lecturer’s job description:

I completely agree with the philosophy that we’re not a court. We are not a police station ... (MFG\_P2)

Others were adamant that Turnitin is inherently punitive but could be used positively:

Yes, so what my idea is to use Turnitin not as a punitive, but as an investment for them to rework and resubmit. It works very well because I ask them until it gets to a reasonable level, I encourage them to do it. (MFG\_P8)

Self-reflection was another quality worthy of fostering when students breached academic integrity principles:

Self-reflection. Communicating the problem as being a condition rather than a crime, where students need to be given clear instruction as well as a good reason not to engage in misconduct. (SFG\_P9)

How to educate sessional academic staff on the importance of preventing plagiarism, rather than having the students punished once it is detected, was a central theme of this study. While some staff understood the importance of training students in how to avoid academic misconduct, universities need to do more to ensure that punishment is a last resort when dealing with plagiarism offences. Academic integrity training for sessional academic staff, ensuring they understand the norms of referencing within the discipline, is imperative if they are to enhance their students' understanding of academic integrity.

### *Restructuring assessments to make them more difficult to plagiarise*

Academic misconduct is a threat to the validity of assessments as a measure of student performance. Bretag et al. (2019) argued that assessment design should consider the prospect of academic misconduct, and the assessment development process could limit options for plagiarism. Examples of assessment types they reported as minimising academic misconduct were reflections on practicum, oral presentations, allocating individualised tasks, and assessment activities completed in the classroom. Bretag et al. (2019) found that although there is a belief that authentic assessment design is a solution to contract cheating, authentic assessments tasks are being outsourced by students. Therefore, academics face significant challenges in designing assessments.

One participant suggested the impetus for restructuring assessments should come from the fact that many assignment tasks were perceived as boring:

Why not have a training session for the course coordinators and course reviewers, ... go through the past assessments and do a redesign of assessments, so that we can prevent, rather than ... identifying [academic misconduct] and punishing. (SFG\_P7)

One way of mitigating academic misconduct is to ensure assessments for each student has a different context:

Recently, the unit I have been given really makes it very difficult for students to plagiarise in any form, because ... all students are given a separate company. (MFG\_P3)

Another approach was to include student presentations as part of the assessment:

If there is a class presentation, and they muck it up big time ... but their assessment is just beautifully written, we know it's cheating. (SFG\_P7)

Invigilated examinations were cited as an approach to enforcing originality and integrity in an assessment:

I've come from the old school, [where] one would answer, have an exam, or a test, an in-class test. All the units I have taught, do not—they don't have an exam. (MFG\_P1)

Opportunities to engage in academic dishonesty are influenced by assessment design. Assessments tailored to individual students, for example, are less likely to result in attempts to plagiarise than assessments based on the same scenario for everyone. Suggestions such as requiring students to orally present their work can also minimise instances of academic dishonesty.

### **Testing academic integrity knowledge**

Learning Management Systems (LMS) are used to support teaching and assessing students (Turnbull et al., 2019). They can be used to create interactive learning communities for students and to disseminate learning materials to students, to assess performance and to provide educators with data about student progress (Romero et al., 2008). One participant shared that he had already used the data analytics in Moodle (LMS) to monitor student engagement with course materials:

... something very interesting. ... we can go to Moodle and find out how far the students are really engaging with the Moodle content. You can see if it's red coded, or orange coded or green coded and so on. (SFG\_P7)

While low LMS engagement does not necessarily indicate that plagiarism may occur, such data may trigger a need for further investigation into students who achieved high results when they did not demonstrate a strong degree of engagement with the course materials. One of the facilitators commented that Moodle should have a module for staff that would assist them with how to process academic dishonesty cases:

There is a module within Moodle, but ... it's just pointing you to the policies. It's not giving you ... any practical, hands-on, 'What do I do and how do I do it?' There is a need for academic integrity training ... for staff and students too. (Facilitator 1)

This analysis demonstrates that the participants had a common-sense understanding of how to address plagiarism. A key strategy in reducing plagiarism is to facilitate ongoing explanations of referencing as integral to the academic process of knowledge production (Bretag et al., 2013). LMSs can play an integral role as a platform for disseminating academic integrity training to both staff and students. Along with staff, it can also be used to inform students about academic integrity best practices, provide examples and case studies, and test their knowledge and understanding.

### **Conclusion**

Universities depend on knowledge creation, which is informed by existing literature. Hence, students must learn that citation practices are integral to the relationship with the discipline areas in which knowledge is created. There is evidence that academic dishonesty in Australian universities is increasing and that traditional 'detect and punish' approaches addressing student misconduct are not effective in reducing the incidents. Students may commit academic dishonesty through ignorance of established academic practices, such as referencing, rather than malicious intent.

This study revealed that sessional academic staff are aware of the diverse ways in which students intentionally or unintentionally commit academic dishonesty when completing written assessments. Examples of student academic dishonesty included contract cheating, inaccurate or non-existent referencing and wilful attempts to deceive text-matching systems.

This study identified some strategies and approaches that universities and academic staff could take to reduce attempts to plagiarise. These include explaining academic integrity principles as an integral part of course delivery, finding opportunities to transform potential punishment into learning opportunities for offenders, redesigning assessment content and submission requirements to reduce opportunities for academic misconduct, and using LMSs to educate and test student knowledge of academic integrity practices. There is a strong case for universities to take a more proactive role through professional activities for sessional staff to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach students that referencing practices entail coming to understand how knowledge is made within a particular discipline area.

While the results of this study reveal useful insights into the role of sessional academic staff in teaching students about academic integrity and detecting infringements, the study's limitations may mean that these findings do not present an Australia-wide picture of academic misconduct. The study was restricted to two teaching locations within a multi-campus university where the enrolments were predominantly international students. By design, only sessional academic staff participated in the focus groups to provide their views and insights. A significant contribution of this study is the exploration of the views of sessional academic staff. Participants in this study taught mainly international and not domestic students; hence, the findings are reflective of the issues surrounding teaching international students, who may have different reasons for engaging in academic dishonesty than their domestic counterparts. Despite these limitations, the study presents some insights that have value for universities interested in establishing training programmes for sessional academic staff on how to promote academic integrity among students and prevent academic misconduct.

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