

# Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Practice

## Academic Integrity

*Developing an Approach Students Can Own!*

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At Penn State Altoona, undergraduate students consistently miss the mark with MLA in-text citations, Works Cited page citations, and articulating an understanding of the purpose of citing. A likely underlying cause is the impact of the decline of public school librarians over the last two decades. Current post-high school approaches to help remediate this issue, including collaborations between a librarian and a general education history instructor at Penn State Altoona, are explored. Their informal project to incorporate online academic integrity training modules in the Canvas learning management system is outlined with next-step measures.

### Introduction

The idea to develop an informal project that incorporates online academic integrity training modules in the Canvas learning management system was born from a conversation between an academic librarian and a history instructor of general education courses at Penn State Altoona. Their post-high school students were consistently missing the mark with MLA in-text citations, full citations on the Works Cited page, and being able to articulate a clear understanding of the purpose of citing. It was clear that covering citations in an already information-crowded one-shot library instruction session was not enough. Nor was it enough for the instructor to spend time in the classroom talking about academic integrity principles and why it is important to cite sources properly. The lack of a basic understanding of any information literacy skills was most troubling. It underscored an ongoing trend seen by both the instructor and the librarian each semester that suggested these students were not learning foundational information literacy skills in high school.

One possible explanation for this trend is captured by a study that analyzed data collected between 2000 and 2013 from the annual National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The study summarized that the ratio of librarians per public school fell to its lowest level in a decade with one librarian for every 2.28 schools, and the ratio of librarians per 100 students also fell to its lowest level with one librarian for every 1,129 students (Tuck & Holmes, 2016). More recent data from the NCES revealed that, between 1999-2000 and 2015-16, the library profession lost more than 10,000

full-time librarian positions nationwide. The most rapid decline happened from 2009-10 to 2013-14. The decline slowed, but resumed larger losses in 2015-16, the latest data available (Lance, 2018). What implications does this decline have for students bridging from high school to colleges and universities?

A 2012 survey on e-dishonesty (any form of acquiring and using unauthorized online content) indicated that e-dishonesty is a considerable problem among freshman students. Şendağ et al. (2012) explained that “since the survey was administered early in the fall semester, freshman may be reflecting on their high school experience. That considered, it may indicate that many first-year college students arrive with a lack of education about the nature and importance of academic integrity at the university level” (p. 857). Similarly, a 2017 study that investigated information literacy skills among high school students revealed that the majority were not familiar with using library resources. Moreover, undergraduate students were not prepared to use library resources due to limited information literacy instruction from high school librarians. Thus, it is not surprising that students also revealed that they were interested in learning library skills and that understanding academic integrity and knowing how to avoid or reduce the risk of plagiarism was most appealing (Tang & Hungwei, 2017). D. Loose (personal communication, December 13, 2019), a first-year student at Penn State Altoona corroborated these findings but with a surprising twist. A dedicated state-certified librarian was in-place at his school, yet his preparation in information literacy for college was inadequate. His high school class schedule was highly regimented with “no time to go to the library” and most students viewed the library as a “computer lab.” In addition to understanding academic integrity, he wished that he had learned how to “cite materials.”

But in cases where there are no school librarians or programs, similar concerns were echoed by Neyer (2014), an academic librarian at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. She argued that librarians in public, school, and academic libraries all play a role in literacy development and that students are less prepared for college if they have not had a school library program. She further explained that, in 2014, the administration of a Pennsylvania high school believed that having a 21st-century librarian was a luxury for the district, not a necessity. In *Advocating for Change in School Library Perceptions*, the author asserted that “school librarians must identify and engage in advocacy initiatives to alter the perception of the school library and influence others to support the library program” (Burns, 2018, p. 8). As a result of the decline in school librarians, more remedial programs in colleges and universities may be needed.

One such remedial program is the three-part library component of the Volunteer Bridge Program at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. An institutional initiative to improve first-year retention rates, this program provides at-risk students the opportunity to transition from high school to a large public research institution. Fleming-May and Radom (2015) related that the instruction offered by the library helped students complete assignments and prepared them for research papers assigned to lower division students. Part one is an introduction to research, part two is centered on plagiarism, and the final part focuses on finding and citing sources. The tasks related to citing and avoiding plagiarism proved the most difficult for students; however, students acknowledged that the instruction they received made an impression. Remedial approaches are also taking place beyond the first year. Sophomores at the University of Puget Sound review skills developed in their first-year seminar where they completed an academic integrity tutorial with immediate feedback via a quiz. After the review, the students begin to learn citation management tools. Kuglitsch and Burge (2016) assessed that “with that grounding in the students’ past preparation and likely future needs, citation management tools were clearly a topic that fit in our plan for their information literacy development” (p. 84). A 2018 critical case study suggested a remedial approach for international students. After learning about plagiarism by participating in interview questions asked by the research team, students still struggled to understand the significance of the concept because of cultural differences. The overall results indicated that a more basic explanation of plagiarism in an introductory course was needed (Isbell et al., 2018). Even for graduate students, Thompson et al. (2017) concluded that institutions of higher education must provide adequate orientation programs to all incoming graduate, domestic, and international students, especially if there is confusion about paraphrasing practices. This assessment was based on results from a sequential mixed methods research design of a workshop on

multiple concepts related to academic integrity. In addition to remedial approaches, successful solutions can be found among innovative approaches.

One such example currently in action at Radford University in Virginia is music sampling. As it relates to academic integrity, Arthur (2015) stated that “the conventions inherent to the academic research process and hip hop production often diverge, if librarians are well-versed in the two practices, they can help students engage in the conversation authentically” (p. 133). To implement this active learning experience, Arthur explained to students the relationship of the acceptable academic process of quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing other’s work to the acceptable ways to use other’s music when creating hip hop music. When the context of an example was given and music was played, students could choose to move to the other side of the room if they believed the example violated hip hop convention. The activity was then reversed, with students moving back if they believed academic conventions were violated. Inevitably, some students refused to pick a side and moved to the middle of the room.

Another inventive and forward-looking approach promotes academic integrity through a stand-alone online course at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis. The online site is housed in the university’s open access portal for online courses and is available to those within the university as well as the public. Lowe et al. (2018) related that the free course, *Learning with Integrity*, was created in Canvas to allow first-year or transfer students to self-enroll and complete the course. It is self-paced with a timed assessment. The course design includes a seventeen-question pre-test, scenarios for various types of academic misconduct, and a post-test (identical to the pre-test). The scenarios are presented as a video with student actors demonstrating misconduct. At the conclusion of each scenario, students must complete three assessment questions that evaluate their ability to identify academic misconduct and why. After students complete the course, an optional follow-up class discussion is available. Students must receive 75% or higher on the post-test after two attempts to generate an electronic certificate of completion. Assessment data indicates students are learning and enjoy the format while a satisfaction survey shows that students are satisfied with the course and its design. There are similarities between this large-scale program, and the much smaller project undertaken at Penn State Altoona to help post-high school students with little or no foundational citation skills.

## Project

The main similarities between Lowe’s case study and the Penn State Altoona project were self-pacing, the option to engage with online academic integrity training in Canvas, and the opportunity to generate a certificate of completion. To accomplish this, it was decided to offer approximately 60 students in two sections of the general education course more opportunities to learn academic integrity concepts with a low stakes grade attached to it. The two overarching questions the librarian and instructor sought to answer in the project were: 1) Would students voluntarily participate in online training modules to supplement what they were already receiving through formal instruction in the library and in the classroom, and 2) Would students voluntarily own academic integrity by successfully completing the training despite it not being mandatory? The training modules used in this project were integrated into the instructor’s Canvas course. This was a convenient option since the Penn State training modules were already available and in-use throughout the libraries and other academic units. The modules had been developed by a Penn State task force committee on which the librarian had served, and were accessible on many course LibGuides for any student to voluntarily complete. However, the embedded course LibGuide for this general education class was several clicks away from the top tier course links in Canvas. The decision to move the modules out of the LibGuide and integrate them several tiers higher within the Canvas course made them more visible and enticing.

The informal project was dubbed *Own It* by the librarian and the instructor. The reward for participation was either extra credit or bonus points, with an additional reward of a certificate of completion. Over a period of six semesters, from the fall 2016 semester through the fall 2018 semester, the Canvas entry point to *Own It* was either a

course module for extra credit or an assignment that included bonus points. To facilitate ease of tracking, the former was used during the fall semesters, and the latter was used during the spring semesters. Once a student logged into the Canvas course, they could then *Own It* by linking to the online suite of academic integrity modules. There was no pre- or post-test, but rather a series of self-paced training modules organized the same way for consistency. The training included an assessment and offered an Academic Integrity Certificate of Completion (AICC) with a successful score of 80% or higher. Seven learning objectives were articulated in the training:

- Define academic integrity
- List reasons for adhering to principles of academic integrity
- Describe ways to avoid plagiarism
- Identify behaviors that are considered intentional copying
- List ways to avoid academic integrity violations when collaborating in groups
- Identify examples of unauthorized study aids
- Outline the procedure and consequences of academic integrity violations

Each of the learning objectives were also organized within an outline of modules:

- Technical Requirements
- Plagiarism
- Intentional Violations
- Group Work
- Watch Out! Other Serious Academic Integrity Violations
- Academic Integrity Violations Process
- Training Assessment
- Final Assessment

For example, our focus on citations was found within the Plagiarism module. The overview for this module states that on completion of this section, learners should be able to:

- Describe how to avoid plagiarism
- Give reasons for using proper citations in academic discourse
- Recognize when and what you need to cite
- Recognize the difference between paraphrasing and copying

The module also relates the direct importance of citations to learners by explaining how their well-cited paper or project advances scholarly conversations by:

- Establishing personal reliability by mentioning the works of others
- Distinguishing a unique voice from the voices of other researchers
- Creating additional opportunities to find further information

Learners then explore citations as they pertain to media in research, media as audiovisual aids, text, and citing oneself before ending the module with the difference between paraphrasing and copying.

To avoid influencing students, there was no encouragement from the librarian or the instructor to participate. Instead, it was briefly pointed out with the other extra credit or bonus points opportunities available in the course. The idea was to see if students voluntarily placed value in completing the modules knowing any grade would be low stakes. After six semesters, a total of 220 students out of a possible 375 voluntarily completed *Own It* with a score of 80% or higher to earn the AICC. The final course grades of the students who completed *Own It* did not necessarily correlate with all the students who achieved an "A" grade in the course, nonetheless they still *Owned It*. They earned the AICC and understood the added value to their class experience, especially if evidence of completion was honored for credit in other classes. The two overarching questions the librarian and instructor sought to answer revealed that

59% of students voluntarily and successfully *Owned It*. Anecdotal feedback revealed student satisfaction, but limitations to the project indicate a more rigorous approach is needed. A formal assessment rubric is essential for quantitative analysis, as well as comparison data from the non-participants. Overall, the use of *Own It* provides interesting clues into how students approach their academic study and suggests further investigation with a required course component and assessment rubric is warranted.

## Moving Forward

Since academic integrity is integral to meeting strategic requirements for a general education experience, it should be noted that novice learners may struggle to understand their rights [and responsibilities in scholarship] in an environment where *free* information is readily available (ACRL, 2016). One way that an educator can ensure that academic integrity is communicated to students is through the standard institutional statement about academic integrity on the course syllabi. Another way is to put it into practice with a less punitive style of instruction in favor of active learning, such as the music sampling approach discussed earlier, and engagement to promote student ownership of academic integrity. Looking ahead, the *Own It* project will undergo several changes.

The instructor has since undertaken a new career path, but the librarian hopes to partner with another instructor to explore a formal approach to this project. This means creating and implementing a required course component in order to move beyond extra credit and bonus points. The existing academic integrity modules cannot be edited, and the certificate generated does not have a letter grade attached to it since it is a pass/fail tool. However, much of the content can be repurposed in a new template that can easily be modified in the learning management system based on ongoing assessment needs. The new graded component should implement hands-on practice to foster critical thinking and use accessible and positive language that general education students can identify with. In order to fully compliment course learning objectives, the new content should be introduced early in the course agenda and scaffolded throughout the semester with activities to promote mastery.

Another possible approach is to develop pre-recorded lectures to be used in tandem with the existing academic integrity online modules, followed by an exam. Henslee et al. (2015) conducted a study comparing online tutorials to pre-recorded lectures on academic integrity. The results from the experimental group and the comparative group concluded that there were no significant differences in the incidents of plagiarism between the groups, with the potential for success being equal. With that takeaway, the implication is that online academic integrity tutorials or a recorded lecture on ethics could be implemented by faculty as an alternative to live classroom lectures. To be sure, the end goal of producing and understanding citations will remain the same: Citing sources correctly has value in academe and in contexts that may relate to students' professional or civic lives after graduation (Bury, 2016). Stoesz and Yudinseva (2018) conclude in their synthesis paper on the effectiveness of tutorials that while "short workshops and tutorials can result in behavior change, efforts to increase students' knowledge and skills as they relate to academic integrity are likely to result in greater success for students over the long term if practice or hands-on experiences are included in the teaching approach" (19).

Without question, consistent student engagement with ethical practices needs to be scaffolded throughout a student's educational experience, across all K-12 school programs, as a foundational bridge to college expectations. To build on that foundation, information literacy integration can be achieved in core campus general education programs through key partnerships. As Orr (2018) notes, "In addition to simply outlining specific ethical practices and principles, a comprehensive effort to infuse ethics in information retrieval and use needs to be implemented across the curricula of the college" (p. 199). Indeed, academic integrity should be an intentional and transformative learning experience that students can carry with them throughout their academic career. Moreover, students should be able to relate academic integrity to a greater understanding of human ethics. Such a proactive rather than reactive campus-wide approach

would allow for the potential of comparing the general education learning experience to the capstone learning experience.

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