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EDITOR'S NOTE: This issue includes a content update for Academicintegrityseminar.org (AIS). Please [click here](#) for student comments about AIS tutorials. Inquiries about AIS tutored seminars should be sent to: contact@integrityseminar.org.

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11.47 Discussing academic integrity with your students

KEY QUOTATION (from essayist Tim Harford in *Forbes* magazine) "Imagine going to the corner store to buy a carton of milk, only to find that the refrigerator is locked. When you've persuaded the shopkeeper to retrieve the milk, you then end up arguing over whether you're going to hand the money over first, or whether he is going to hand over the milk. Finally you manage to arrange an elaborate simultaneous exchange. A little taste of life in a world without trust. . .").

Editor's note: *TPR* isn't published next week (week of a federal holiday). Your next issue will be distributed on October 21.

11.47 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Discussing academic integrity with your students

This is a companion article to *TPR* 11.44: [Advice from students to faculty members on protecting academic integrity](#).

Your editor helped suggest modifications to the academic integrity policy at Syracuse University and prepared a related resource for faculty members titled "Discussing academic integrity with your students." We share a modified version below and believe portions may be useful on your campus. Please credit Syracuse University and *TPR* as the source.

Topic categories:

- [1] A glance at the ceiling;
- [2] Social risks of cheating and fraud: three examples from the national media;
- [3] "An example from the corner store": Successful economies depend upon trust;
- [4] Trust in the classroom: "a slight change in the syllabus";
- [5] "Would you hire someone to learn how to ride a bike for you?;"
- [6] How students can avoid academic dishonesty;
- [7] Academic integrity: A perspective from the instructor's discipline;
- [8] Love of learning: The example of Abraham Lincoln;
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- [10] The impact of timely reminders

NOTE: Exercises discussed below have been tested with student audiences.

[1] A glance at the ceiling.

Ask students to glance at the classroom ceiling. Chances are they'll see tiles covering a structure of heavy beams--balanced directly above their heads. Their lives *at that moment* are dependent upon the honesty and integrity of the architects who designed the building and the engineers and workers who built it. Many comparable examples will come to mind, related to the nature and quality of the food we eat; the water we drink; the machines we use; and the professionals (like doctors, dentists, nurses, and lawyers) we employ.

[2] Social risks of cheating and fraud: three examples from the national media:

- [a] Cheating on nuclear power licensing examinations

"A former supervisor at the disabled Three Mile Island nuclear power plant was fined \$2,000 and sentenced to two year's probation for cheating on re-licensing examinations. James F. Floyd was supervisor of operations at TMI's Unit 2 in March 1979, when it was the scene of the worst accident ever at a U.S. Commercial nuclear plant. He was convicted in November of two counts of making false statements on the federally required exams in June 1979." "[Exam Cheat Sentenced](#)" March 13, 1985 *Washington Post*, (p.47).

- [b] Cheating on air traffic control examinations

"An instructor at the Federal Aviation Administration's air traffic control training school has charged that answers to the final exam were circulated among students and might have enabled failing students to pass. The instructor, who asked not to be named, said a packet of answers to problems from the exam might have been available to students for as long as two years before FAA officials began developing substitute questions. The instructor said students who attended the academy between last August and March certainly had access to the packet." ["Cheating alleged on air traffic exam,"](#) May 8, 1987 *Washington Post*.

[c] Fake EMT training

"The Boston Fire Department suspended 54 firefighters yesterday who were among more than 200 EMTs who state investigators say faked medical training certifications in a fraudulent scheme that came to light last year." "[54 EMTs punished in fake training,](#)" June 24, 2011 *Boston Globe*.

[3] "An example from the corner store": Successful economies depend upon trust

From Tim Harford, [The Economics of Trust](#) July 21, 2010 *Forbes*:

"Imagine going to the corner store to buy a carton of milk, only to find that the refrigerator is locked. When you've persuaded the shopkeeper to retrieve the milk, you then end up arguing over whether you're going to hand the money over first, or whether he is going to hand over the milk. Finally you manage to arrange an elaborate simultaneous exchange. A little taste of life in a world without trust--now imagine trying to arrange a mortgage . . .

If you take a broad enough definition of trust, then it would explain basically all the difference between the per capita income of the United States and Somalia," ventures Steve Knack, a senior economist at the World Bank who has been studying the economics of trust for over a decade. That suggests that trust is worth \$12.4 trillion dollars a year to the U.S., which, in case you are wondering, is 99.5% of this country's income (2006 figures). If you make \$40,000 a year, then \$200 is down to hard work and \$39,800 is down to trust.

How could that be? Trust operates in all sorts of ways, from saving money that would have to be spent on security to improving the functioning of the political system. But above all, trust enables people to do business with each other. Doing business is what creates wealth."

[4] Trust in the classroom: "a slight change in the syllabus"

The importance of trust in the classroom can be highlighted by this exercise:

"Pretend my syllabus states the mid-term examination will be on October 10. Then, at the beginning of class on October 3, I announce:

'I have good news and bad news: the *good news* is that I just found a great fare to Cancun! The *bad news* is I have to leave tomorrow. So, the examination scheduled for October 10 will be administered today. I apologize for any inconvenience, but part of what we do at SU is prepare students for the unexpected."

Some students are momentarily speechless when asked to respond to this scenario. It strikes them as an obvious breach of trust. They should be reminded that the principle of reciprocity applies. Teachers trust students to do honest work; when that trust is broken teachers feel betrayed.

[5] Academic dishonesty is self-defeating: "Would you hire someone to learn how to ride a bike for you?"

This question resonates with student audiences:

Would it make sense to hire someone to learn how to ride a bike for you?

We agree it's not a good long-term strategy if you ever want to ride a bike yourself. Serious learning requires serious effort--and usually entails learning from failure. The same principle applies to lab reports, presentations, or papers. Knowledge might be faked in an academic exercise (at high risk of course failure and a disciplinary record for cheating or plagiarism), but the deficiency eventually comes to light when the knowledge is needed. An article in the March 19, 2010 *Inside Higher Education* ("[The Costs of Cheating](#)") cited empirical support for the view that academic dishonesty is self-defeating:

"Physics students who copy their classmates' work learn less than students who don't plagiarize, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found in a study released yesterday. The researchers created algorithms to determine when answers submitted by MIT physics students through a popular online homework and e-tutoring program had been copied, then tracked how the serial plagiarists did on their final exams. Students who copied answers on problems that required the use of algebra scored two letter grades worse than non-copiers on such problems in the final, while students who copied more concept-based homework problems did not fare any worse than their more honest peers. *Those who copied 30 percent of homework problems were three times more likely than the others to fail.* The study recommends several measures that can reduce academically dishonest behavior, including getting away from lecture-based courses and toward more interactive teaching methods" [italics added].

[6] How students can avoid academic dishonesty

Students should be referred to the guidance: "[What does academic integrity mean?](#)"

Students completing the [Academic Integrity Seminar](#) repeatedly emphasize the importance of *planning in advance* and *not falling behind* in avoiding academic dishonesty. Please give your students course-specific guidance on good study habits and learning strategies. Urge them to keep abreast of the work and to confer with you if they're having difficulties.

[7] Academic integrity: A perspective from the instructor's discipline

Students sometimes think discussions about ethics and academic integrity apply only to them. Many are unaware that most professors belong to disciplines that espouse strong ethical commitments. See, for example, the preamble to the "[Code of Ethics for the National Society of Professional Engineers](#)":

Engineering is an important and learned profession. As members of this profession, engineers are expected to exhibit the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Engineering has a direct and vital impact on the quality of life for all people. Accordingly, the services provided by engineers require honesty, impartiality, fairness, and equity, and must be dedicated to the protection of the public health, safety, and welfare. Engineers must perform under a standard of professional behavior that requires adherence to the highest principles of ethical conduct."

Likewise, in the humanities, consider the "[Code of Ethics for Art Historians](#):"

Art historians must be competent researchers; they must also be fully aware of professional conduct and employ ethical practices. Scholarly integrity demands an awareness of personal and cultural bias and an openness to issues of difference as they may inflect methodology and analysis. Art historians are responsible for carefully documenting their findings and then making available to others their sources, evidence, and data. They must guard against misrepresenting evidence and against the offense of plagiarism. They should fully acknowledge the receipt of financial support and institutional sponsorship, or privileged access to research material and/or original works of art, as well as crediting people in the field who give interviews and/or provide access to materials and works. It is equally important that assistance received from colleagues, students, and others be fully acknowledged.

A good way to remind students about the importance of academic integrity is to introduce them to ethical standards in the subject they're studying. Ask them to read and critique those standards— and discuss whether any standards are necessary. Making such an effort suggests to students that honesty and integrity are core components of most careers or professions, not an obscure idiosyncrasy of academic life. Furthermore, students are often intensely interested in the values and beliefs of their teachers. By discussing the ethics of their disciplines or professions, college professors send the powerful subliminal message that ethical inquiry and commitment can be a source of personal fulfillment.

[8] Love of learning: Lincoln on horseback

The SUNY-ESF/SU campus contains a large statue of Abraham Lincoln reading a book while on horseback. Here's an [image of the statue and several related readings](#) on Lincoln's love of learning. Cheating or plagiarism don't make sense in a context where *engagement in learning* becomes a defining characteristic of a life and a career.

The related idea of a college or university as a community of thinkers, scholars, and researchers could be explored by dialogue with students at the beginning of the course. Key questions include: (1) what do you want to learn from this course? (2) should the course influence any of your beliefs, values, or habits? (3) should the course be taught differently than instruction offered by business, government, or a trade school? (4) what larger questions, challenges, or problems should this course help you address? (5) what does this course have to do with the goals or values of the University as a whole?

[9] Will faculty discussions with students about academic integrity do any good?

One exercise assigned to students taking the [Academic Integrity Seminar](#) entails writing a "gratitude statement:"

"Please read [Book One](#) of the *Meditations* of Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius. Then write a concise statement of gratitude (400 words or less) identifying the ethical and intellectual debts you owe to family members, teachers, or friends. Fictitious names are permitted, but the statement of gratitude should be genuine."Typically, expressions of gratitude to teachers rival expressions of gratitude

to best friends.

By intention or otherwise, teachers teach "ethics" (qualities of character) by their behavior. What academic and personal standards are set? What values are discussed? What principles are affirmed? How are students and colleagues are treated? These and related questions set the ethical tone of the class.

Please consider [this message](#) from Thomas Jefferson to a grandson in 1808. Jefferson met two of the mentors identified in the message (Small and Wythe) while he was a student at William and Mary:

When I recollect that at 14 years of age, the whole care and direction of my self was thrown on my self entirely, without a relation or friend qualified to advise or guide me, and recollect the various sorts of bad company with which I associated from time to time, I am astonished I did not turn off with some of them, and become as worthless to society as they were. I had the good fortune to become acquainted very early with some characters of very high standing, and to feel the incessant wish that I could even become what they were. *Under temptations and difficulties, I could ask myself what would Dr. Small, Mr. Wythe, Peyton Randolph do in this situation? What course in it will ensure me their approbation? I am certain that this mode of deciding on my conduct tended more to it's correctness than any reasoning powers I possessed* [italics added].

The final sentence--from the paragon of Enlightenment reason--highlights the lifelong intellectual and emotional impact of influential teachers.

Is there any research on core qualities of admired teachers? That's always a work in progress, but Ken Bain (Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at New York University) summarized findings from a study of over sixty professors at two dozen universities:

"Highly effective teachers tend to reflect a strong trust in students. They usually believe students want to learn, and they assume, until proven otherwise, that they can. They often display openness with students and may, from time to time, talk about their own intellectual journey, its ambitions, triumphs, frustrations, and failures, and encourage their students to be similarly reflective and candid. They may discuss how they developed their interests, the major obstacles they faced in mastering the subject, or some of their secrets for learning particular material. They often discuss openly and enthusiastically their own sense of awe and curiosity about life. Above all, they tend to treat students with what can only be called simple decency." *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Harvard, 2004), p. 18.

[10] The impact of timely reminders

A commitment to academic integrity merits reiteration. Research by Duke University behavioral economist Dan Ariely (*Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions*, 2008) suggests that *timely reminders* (e.g. a few words about ethical expectations just before an examination) can sharply reduce academic dishonesty. Ariely's book was reviewed by Robert Bliwise in the May-June 2008 issue of *Duke Magazine*. Bliwise reported that:

[T]he Enron financial scandal . . . prompted Ariely to explore the value placed on honesty . . .

[H]e and his colleagues [then at MIT] devised studies that would tempt people to cheat. Student subjects, for example, would be paid for each correct answer on a multiple-choice test. In some cases, they transferred their answers to a sheet that had the correct answers pre-marked-meaning they could, if provoked into dishonesty, readily cover up their mistakes. In different versions of the experiment, the test-taking students were asked to sign a statement, just at the moment of temptation, testifying that the exercise fell under an honor system . . .

Those gestures had a significant impact on his subjects' behavior. Once they began thinking about honesty through firm reminders, they stopped cheating completely. 'In other words, when we are removed from any benchmarks of ethical thought, we tend to stray into dishonesty,' Ariely observes in the book. 'But if we are reminded of morality at the moment we are tempted, then we are much more likely to be honest.'

This topic is also explored in the *TPR* article: [Empirical support for classroom honor codes.](#)