Final CALT report on 2013 University Teaching Development Grant

What aspects of academic integrity do students learn as they experience supervised undergraduate research?

Research team: Professor Kerry Shephard (HEDC); Dr Tiffany Trotman (Department of Languages and Culture and Humanities Divisional Office, Senior Lecturer and Associate Dean Academic, Humanities) and Mary Furnari (HEDC) with Dr Erika Löfström University of Helsinki (Senior Lecturer and Academy of Finland Research Fellow)

Overview and introduction

Higher education understands that we cannot educate our students to know the difference between honest, ethical practice and dishonest, unethical practice, and to behave appropriately, with webpages, policies, text inserted into course booklets and threats of punishment. The educational outcome involved in 'knowing the difference' is far more than simple knowledge to be recalled. The educational outcome involved in 'behaving appropriately' probably requires a complex combination of cognitive and affective elements. If we were to design afresh the educational processes for both 'understanding the difference' and 'behaving appropriately' we would need to introduce, support and reinforce these attributes using sophisticated and integrated pedagogical approaches.

None of this is entirely new to higher education. Reporting someone else's work as your own, or fabricating it, has always been a problem. We suspect that higher education has always taken academic integrity seriously and has always taught it. We suspect that the processes involved are diffuse, and depend on the totality of the higher education experience, but are nonetheless focussed around university teachers practising their teaching and their research in integrious ways. But we lack research-level knowledge of how these things have worked. What is in doubt is the detail of how we have traditionally taught academic integrity, how well we have taught it and how well we understand the processes involved in teaching it. Given the nature of the current debates in higher education, particularly around plagiarism, perhaps it is timely for us to ask **who** is teaching our students to be integrious and to focus our questions about the processes involved on university teachers. We would be worried if those traditionally charged with this responsibility no longer thought it part of their role.

Rather than address these issues generally within higher education we have focussed on supervised undergraduate research. For many undergraduates this is the first occasion when research ethics becomes something real, rather than read-about, and the first occasion where their actions are guided by a practising researcher in a position to role-model ethical practice.

Our project aimed to address the following questions at the University of Otago in parallel with a related project at the University of Helsinki, Finland.

- How do university teachers, who supervise undergraduate research, understand academic integrity in general and within the academic research environment?
- Do these university teachers attempt to affect the academic integrity of their students?
- Do they conceptualise this impact as the consequences of a formal academic role?

- If they do, how do they perform this role? What teaching/learner support tasks are involved?
- How well prepared for this task do they feel? And what knowledge, disposition, skill or other factors such as financial, ethical or cultural, limit the impact that they have?

Methods and results

We used Q Methodology to make sense of the complex phenomenon known as academic integrity through the viewpoints provided by university teachers. Our research was in 4 phases.

In phase 1 we explored the literature and interviewed university teachers, researchers and students to better understand the diversity of perspectives on academic integrity, on who teachers it and how they do it. We developed 42 statements about this area of interest.

In phase 2 we invited 39 research supervisors at the University of Otago (and 17 at the University of Helsinki) to sort the statements in relation to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with them.

In phase 3 we analysed the data and identified five relatively discreet groups of research supervisors who have statistically different viewpoints on academic integrity and their role in teaching it.

Phase 4 is still underway but essentially we are continuing to producing resources that will support the professional development of research supervisors and university teachers to help them better understand the nature of academic integrity and diversity of opinion about what it is, how it can be taught and who is to teach it in higher education. A workshop on AI will be developed for HEDC in 2014.

Outputs so far

The project has resulted in two conference presentations and two articles are currently being reviewed for peer-reviewed publications. More articles are planned.

Conferences/presentations

- Shephard, Kerry, Tiffany Trotman, Mary Furnari and Erika Lofstrom. "Developing a research instrument to explore university-teachers' perspectives on which aspects of academic integrity students learn as they experience supervised undergraduate-research. Panel. Spotlight on Teaching and Learning. University of Otago. August 2013.

- Tiffany Trotman, Mary Furnari, Erika Löfström, Kerry Shephard "Developing a Research Instrument for Academic Integrity in Higher Education: Let's Start by Asking the Right Questions". *6th Asia-Pacific Conference on Educational Integrity*. Macquarie University, Sydney. October 2013.

Conference Proceedings

- Tiffany Trotman, Mary Furnari, Erika Löfström, Kerry Shephard. "Developing a Research Instrument for Academic Integrity in Higher Education: Let's Start by Asking the Right Questions". *Proceedings of the 6th Asia-Pacific Conference on Educational Integrity*. Macquarie University, Sydney. pp. 112-134. October 2013.

Conference contribution under review

- Erika Löfström, Tiffany Trotman, Mary Furnari & Kerry Shephard "Academic Integrity – Whose role is it to teach it?" Paper submitted to the symposium "Fostering integrity in Academia: Conceptions and experiences of academic staff and students" at the *EARLI SIG 4 "Higher Education" Meeting*, Leuven, August 20-22, 2014.

Chapter for book from Sydney conference

- Tiffany Trotman, Mary Furnari, Erika Löfström, Kerry Shephard. What *do* we think about academic integrity?: Developing a research instrument for academic integrity in higher education. Springer (Under review)

Paper submitted to the journal Higher education

- Erika Löfström, Tiffany Trotman, Mary Furnari, Kerry Shephard. "Who teaches academic integrity to our students and how do they do it?"(Under review)

Implications

Higher education will find it difficult to please all of its academic staff as it develops policies and strategies around academic integrity; as these people do not share common views on important aspects of academic integrity. We suggest that there may be a stark choice to be explored between policies that seem reasonable to many, but alienate others; or policies that benefit from the viewpoints of all, developed by consensus.