

Academic integrity at UCL: Student & Staff perspectives

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UCL Education Conference 19 April 2023



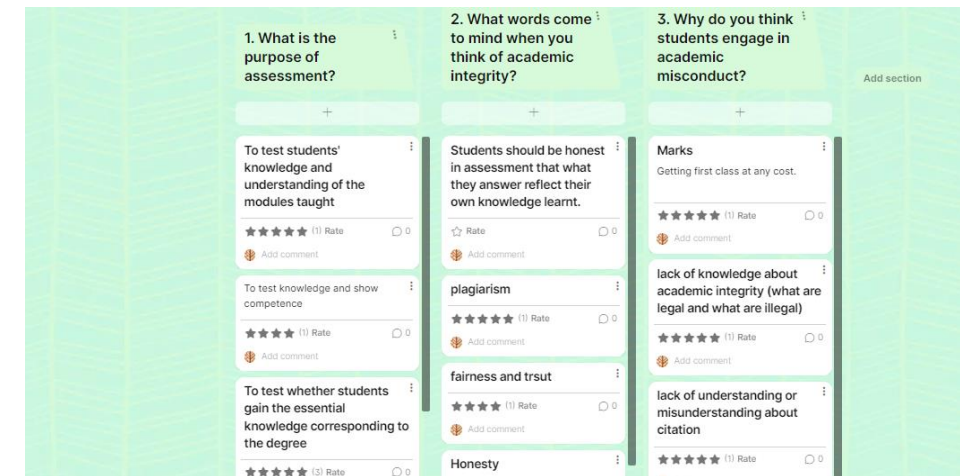
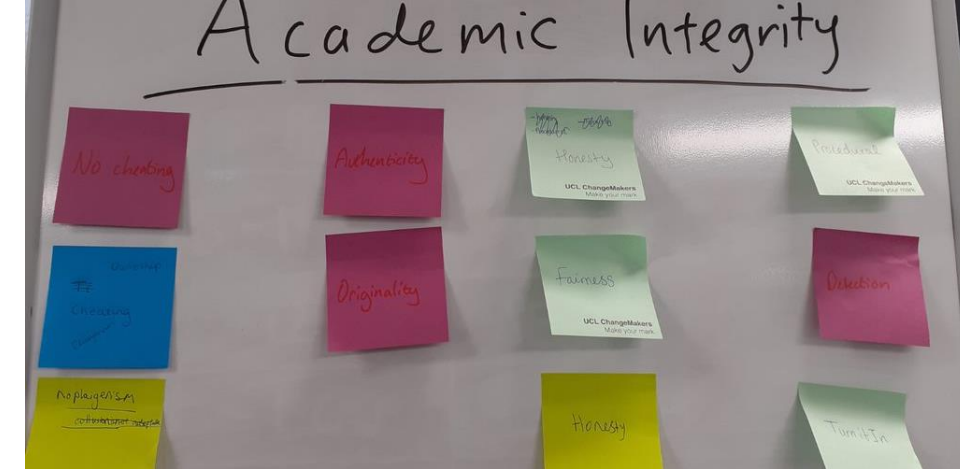


Context

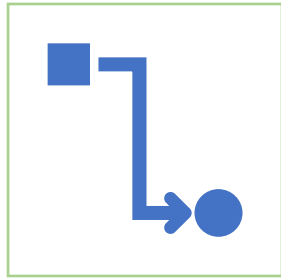
- UCL's shift to "digital first" online exams
- Rising staff concerns over academic misconduct
- We wanted to ask staff and students: how can assessment environments promote academic and professional integrity?

Method

- Worked in collaboration with Changemaker student partners
- 3 student focus groups (21 students)
- 3 staff focus groups (21 staff)
- Mix of in person / online
- Qualitative coding
- Review process



Focus group themes



1. Causes of Academic
Misconduct



2. Support



3. Assessment design
strategies

Theme 1: Causes of Academic misconduct - overlap

- **Staff and students both spoke about**

- Lack of understanding of academic integrity/misconduct
- Lack of academic writing skills leading to unintentional plagiarism
- Academic "cultural" background
- Lack of confidence
- Stress / Pressure
- Competition for grades

And then like the pressure built up for a while because I don't know about the school, I don't know about the practices (PG student)

The explicit, outright kind of deliberate cheating is almost always related somehow to extreme time pressures thrown up by something (Staff)

Theme 1: Causes of Academic misconduct - differences

Staff raised language skills

Language is a huge issue...with regards to even trying to get them to understand what academic integrity is as a definition for UCL because ...the language is not even easy to understand in English.

Students raised:

- **confusion over collaboration vs. collusion:**

it's good to ask for different opinions because you can learn not just copy and paste, you're learning how to solve it. (UG)

- **referencing and word count penalties**

they count citations as words like it's just it discourages using silly things like books with long titles...Certainly discourages you from using a wide variety of sources or God forbid, putting more than one source on a single citation.(UG)

Theme 1: Causes of Academic misconduct - differences cont./

- **Staff were generally sympathetic to students but also at times frustrated:**
(academic misconduct) is so avoidable if they would only take the time in most cases to learn how to reference and use all the resources that are so widely available

when students say they don't understand it, I struggle because ...we spend a lot of time giving induction talks on all these things

criminal intent

- **Students spoke more about emotional difficulties in terms of peer pressure, fear, confidence.**

I think students often feel shameful or are in denial about their lack of understanding. Sometimes, it's easier to cheat than ask for help (Mixed student)

Theme 2: Support -overlap

Student awareness and use of UCL's academic integrity resources and Turnitin

- *I think [the short Moodle course on academic integrity] made it very clear in my head what is academic integrity. (student)*
- *you can upload your work on turnitin and...check if like unintentionally you have not cited something...I think this is the most helpful part that UCL has done, at least for me. (UG student)*
- *What we introduce now is once they've done the library session in term one, they do... the online course[The academic integrity course] and actually they submit certificates as evidence (staff)*

Shared concern between staff and students on effectiveness of guidance

- *There are like a lot of resources floating around UCL about citations and academic integrity, but we're not directed to them in a way that's useful. (UG student)*
- *I think there's a [more realistic] way of giving the information...relating it to how it is going to affect them and stressing the importance of engaging with those tools using the training that we have online and those sorts of things. (Staff)*

Theme 2: Support - overlap cont./

Both staff and students expressed confusion over the meaning of Turnitin scores.

it's quite variable as to how much a department will kind of allow in terms of plagiarism showing up on Turnitin...we think it's useful to kind of help people interpret that as well, because if it's the first or the second case that people have come across, they're not quite so sure what they're doing (Staff)

they were getting a plagiarism point for like just having the equation there. So people were all panicking up to the exam and our group chats just like emailing the departmental tutor like, oh, is this some plagiarism? (UG student)

Theme 2: Support - differences

- **Students emphasised how support varied at UCL**

In our first year [Geography] we had like a whole section of our module like based on citations, how to cite, what is considered plagiarism... We had it all laid out for us, but talking to my friends. I know a lot of them are shocked at that. They weren't told at all, they were just expected to know. (UG)

- **Staff emphasised how much support was provided for students**

First of all in the induction week, there's always a whole session on academic integrity, what it is. We do exercises and give them assignments for them to mark and also detect instances incidents of academic integrity in some programmes I try to advocate for all programmes to do the same. (Staff)

Theme 2: Support - differences cont./

Students raised:

- **the importance of dialogue with staff**

I'd like to speak more about...having a working relationship with the professors ...One of the easiest essays I have had to write was one where the professor so strongly encouraged us to come to his office... That was like that was massively helpful. (UG)

- **Feedback and assessment**

I think a lot of people kind of collude within a module because there's such a huge variation on levels of feedback.' (UG)

if we ensure that feedback of every single assessment is robust and clear and gives areas to develop and congratulations on what you've done right, then it will build the students kind of resilience and confidence and ability to in future assessments do better (Staff)

Theme 2: Support - differences cont./

Staff commented on complexity of providing effective formative assessment

I think formative is something that perhaps is always an add on. (Staff)

So basically students, especially for postgraduate student, they are not engaged on the group or formative assessment (Staff)

the formative would have to be relevant to the overall assessment....it's usually not the format of the assessment, but in the end, is that really productive to helping us produce like a 3000 word essay or doing an online assessment? (student)

Theme 3: Assessment design strategies -overlap

Support for rethinking assessment design to address misconduct including AI

if anything.. [AI]..is pushing us to find to fine tune our essay questions... the biggest thing which is flagged in the assessment criteria is critical appraisal and critical engagement and demonstrating of critical understanding (Staff)

Rather than just talking about ways to detect the use of AI...I think institutes like UCL need to fundamentally examine the way that students are assessed and ...a potential first step would be to move away from assessments that simply involve testing one's ability to gather and organise information, because this is the kind of task that these AIs are quite proficient in. (UG student)

educating ourselves on [AI] so that we can limit the possibilities and the temptation to cheat... that's certainly what I'm going to be spending some time on over the summer. I think everyone probably could benefit from rethinking how they do things in terms of assessment design (staff)

Theme 3: Assessment design strategies -differences

Students tended to:

- **view assessment design in terms of written assignments or exams.**

I think the best way ...is just doing in-person exams because...loads of people have never attended maybe a single lecture and they can still produce an essay. (UG)

UCL may...use some kind of softwares for examinations...software which will prevent you to use other applications in your computer during the examinations (PG)

- **be critical of lack of time in online exams:**

time limited exams are usually unfair to people who have ADHD because it's sometimes really hard to like get into the zone and like be really focused on one thing... (PG)

they usually give you one minute or so per question. I think it doesn't really disincentivise academic misconduct because you could just google it (UG)

Theme 3: Assessment design strategies -differences

Staff discussed:

- **a range of ideas, including group work and vivas**

giving them a tasks where they have to collaborate and...where they're not ...marked down for sharing idea...gets over some of the academic misconduct issues.

group work is actually fundamentally useful and also helps reduce that idea that they're competing against each other.

For the modules that have oral exams, actually we don't find cases of plagiarism .

- **the importance of and as barriers to diversifying assessments**

The reality of life...to prepare them for the big world, then any type of assessment, coursework, oral presentation, summarising something in three minutes. All of these are going to be useful ...

When someone new is inheriting [a module] that is the best time to rethink...but you are not allowed to change it then because that's missed all the deadlines...the bureaucratic slowdown here is holding back ...tangible progress.

Conclusions (provisional)

- There is a clear correspondence between student perceptions and current institutional/departmental views of assessment (e.g. emphasis on referencing, Turnitin scores, written/invigilated exams).
- There is a need for ongoing dialogue between students and staff around academic good practice.
- Making assessment relevant and meaningful for students needs to be balanced with support for staff in terms of workload, effective strategies etc.
- There are questions around what the implications of AI are for academic integrity and assessment design.