

Creating a User-based Website to Support Academic Integrity at the University of Waterloo

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Abstract

The University of Waterloo identified a redesign of their existing academic integrity website as an important step in creating a culture of integrity on campus. This article details how the new website supports students, instructors, and staff by utilizing best practices and approaches suggested in academic integrity research. Next steps will include exploring how to increase engagement with the site and determining the impact of the site on the campus community.

Keywords: academic integrity, Canada, values, website design

Background

The University of Waterloo (UW) Office of Academic Integrity (OAI) is a support unit that promotes and educates students, staff, and instructors on the importance of integrity in all aspects of campus life. The OAI promotes academic integrity initiatives, evaluates academic integrity practices, and identifies gaps and barriers in building a culture of academic integrity on campus. Recent focus groups and surveys done by the OAI on academic integrity knowledge and awareness highlighted that students want increased and ongoing academic integrity support throughout their studies from their instructors and University services. Moreover, many students were not aware that there is an academic integrity website with an extensive list of resources and supports, or that an Office of Academic Integrity existed on campus.

Survey feedback identified a website redesign that aligned with current academic integrity research and best practices as a key step in strengthening ongoing support for students, instructors, and staff. According to Griffith (2013), if academic integrity websites “include reader-centered text, have a pedagogical thrust, differentiate amongst audiences, use image-based components purposely, and are accessible and well maintained, academic integrity efforts made at other institutional levels will be further bolstered” (p. 17). While our former academic integrity website had a number of resources listed for the campus community, it needed to be improved based on the above principles. The goal of the website redesign was to create a comprehensive, well-organized repository of academic

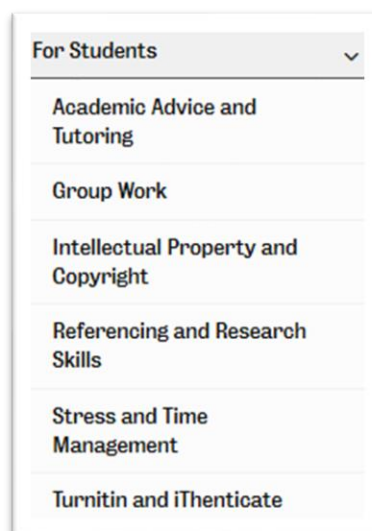
integrity supports for students, staff, and instructors in order to ensure the campus community utilized the site.

Google Analytics indicated that historically, approximately 2,500-5,000 users visited the University of Waterloo’s academic integrity website each month, with increased traffic during the first two months of each term. Approximately half of all users each month came to the website from a search engine, and the other half came directly (i.e., from a bookmarked site or by typing in the website URL). The website had a high bounce rate (approximately 70%), with users spending on average less than two minutes on the site. The website re-design aimed to increase traffic and decrease the high bounce rate by having users spend more time reading and accessing the resources.

Organization

The redeveloped website makes a clear distinction between academic integrity and academic misconduct by separating introductions into different sections. Young, Miller and Barnhardt (2017) note that while academic integrity strategies create a sense of awareness and fear in students that are effective at decreasing academic misconduct, they lack a “principled philosophy that morally grounds students’ sense of academic integrity” (p. 14). The academic integrity section focuses on the fundamental values from the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI): honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage (ICAI, 2014, p.16). This part of the website also explains why academic integrity is important for students and for the institution more broadly. Conversely, the academic misconduct section points students to the academic misconduct policies and procedures. Separating academic integrity from academic misconduct aims to shift away from negatives conceptions of AI towards a positive standard everyone on campus should aspire to.

The website is divided into sections for different user categories: students, instructors, and teaching assistants (TAs), and staff. Users visit the academic integrity website for a variety of reasons (e.g., to access the academic misconduct policy, to find referencing resources, to find instructor support, etc.), and thus the goal of compiling and organizing resources specific to each user category is to improve the user’s navigation experience. Site visitors are able to click on their category, and then are presented with a number of sub-categories that may be relevant to them.



The sub-categories under each user group do not focus on offences such as plagiarism and cheating, but on positive behaviours and skills. Bretag, Mahmud, East, Green, and James (2011) argue that by focusing on “...what is *right*, rather than what is *wrong*, the spirit of the policy can take a dramatically different and more positive direction” (p. 4). For example, the student section includes information on academic advice and tutoring, group work, referencing and research skills, and stress and time management. Much like separating academic integrity and academic misconduct in the introduction sections, this aims to highlight that academic integrity is comprised of positive traits. Information about avoiding academic misconduct is weaved within each section but is not the overarching principle.

Content

Policy on academic integrity and misconduct can be written within a legalistic framework, making it challenging for students understand. A goal of the website was to make it user-friendly, written specifically for each audience. Neufeld and Dianda (2007) recommend moving away from legal jargon towards clear, unambiguous messaging that gives students practical information (p. 5). The website provides clear definitions, examples, and advice, always referring to the reader in first person. The student group work section reads, “For example, you may have assignments in which the instructor permits collaboration during

all stages of an assignment, or during certain stages. You may also have assignments in which no group work is permitted. If you are not sure if collaboration is permitted, it is best to work alone and check with your instructor.” A user-friendly website, written specifically with each of the audiences in mind, aims to ensure the user feels represented and supported, and not burdened by searching for material or trying to understand complicated information.

Each category in the student section connects students with the numerous resources available on-campus to address each of their needs, including our Student Success Office, the Writing and Communication Centre, the Library,

Referencing and Research Skills

Academic scholarship involves properly acknowledging sources. It shows readers where your ideas came from, and gives them the details to find the source themselves.

A citation is a reference to a source, and depending on the citation style, includes details such as the title, author, location and date of publication, and other information. Common citation styles include [APA](#), [MLA](#), and [Chicago](#). If you are unsure which citation style you should use, or what needs to be cited, check with your instructor.

Remember:

- Anytime you use someone else’s work (ideas, words, images, code, etc.), it needs to be cited.
- Students are often using a number of different sources in their assignments. It is your responsibility to keep track of your sources and to cite them appropriately.
- If you paraphrase (i.e. put something into your own words), it still needs to be cited.
- It is an academic offense to re-use work from other assignments without permission from your instructor. If you do have permission, make sure to cite yourself to avoid self-plagiarism.

and Campus Wellness. The website also includes links to helpful external resources, such as Purdue Owl. Beyond connecting students with resources, each category introduces the topic with important takeaways, emphasizing that students should always ask their instructor if they are unsure. For example, the introduction in the Referencing and Research Skills section begins, “Academic scholarship involves properly acknowledging sources. It shows readers where your ideas came from and gives them the details to find the source themselves. If you are unsure which citation style you should use, or what needs to be cited, check with your instructor.” Encouraging students to ask their instructor for clarification, permission, or assistance aims to avoid instances of inadvertent academic misconduct and reinforces to students that their instructors are there to support their success.

The section for instructors and TAs similarly connects users with a number of resources across campus for both themselves to use (e.g., Centre for Teaching Excellence workshops and online resources), and supports to which they can refer students to. Each category includes an introduction with important points, emphasizing that instructors need to be explicit about academic integrity expectations and instructions. For example, the Referencing and Research Skills section begins, “It is important to discuss citation expectations with your students, and not assume they know how to cite. Instructors should provide information on how to credit academic sources and refer students to resources for additional support.” Encouraging instructors to give students clear instructions and encouraging students to ask questions in the student sections of the website, aims to bridge the gap and create a culture of integrity in the classroom.

Currently, there is no uniform training for TAs across campus and thus TAs were identified as an important group to target and support. TAs play a varied and important role in courses, including grading, proctoring midterms, and exams, running classes, seminars, and tutorials, and holding office hours for students. As a result, it is critical for TAs to know what constitutes academic misconduct, what to do if they suspect misconduct, and academic integrity best practices, resources, and support. The “Academic Integrity for TAs” sub-category covers these topics, which are also captured in a document that instructors can give to their TAs.

The section for campus staff (e.g., academic advisors, coordinators, schedulers, food services, etc.) encourages staff members to familiarize themselves with resources for instructors and students. Staff members often interact with instructors and students on a daily basis, and so it is important that they are aware of the resources they can connect both groups with. Further, this section encourages staff members to take the core Organizational and Human Development Workshop “*Integrity Matters*”, which was developed and is co-facilitated in partnership with the OAI. Though not focused on

academic integrity, the workshop explores what the International Centre for Academic Integrity values look like in action and gives participants the opportunity to explore how their own personal values influence their everyday interactions and decisions.

Next Steps

It is important that the academic integrity website is well-maintained over time. The website is a reference point and redirects the user to other sites and resources, increasing the potential for broken links. Griffith (2013) noted that broken links were an issue for multiple years on many academic integrity websites in Ontario, leaving the user to wonder how seriously students and the institution take academic integrity (p. 17).

The new website has a wealth of advice and resources for students, instructors, TAs, and staff. Feedback from our surveys evidenced that students were not aware of the OAI or the academic integrity website, and thus a key goal of the OAI is to ensure the campus community is aware of what the Office does and how to access and utilize the website. Both are now more prominently featured in the presentations the OAI gives to undergraduate and graduate students during orientation and throughout the semester, which include a website overview and tutorial. The website will also be highlighted in the mandatory Graduate Academic Integrity Module (Grad AIM) that new graduate students are required to complete. Similar training is in development for undergraduate students, and the academic integrity website will also be highlighted in the module. Further, the OAI will be visiting department meetings to talk to instructors about academic integrity best practices and the redesigned website. The OAI will be evaluating these efforts using Google Analytics by monitoring areas such as web traffic, bounce rates, average session duration, page views, and pages per session on the website. We will continue to explore different ways to promote the website as a tool to educate and support the entire campus community.

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