Building a Culture of Academic Integrity [VanSandt]

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Craig VanSandt "Building a Culture of Academic Integrity"

1. I teach Business Policy and Strategy (the final required course in the business curriculum), and Business, Ethics, and Society (an upper level elective). Both courses naturally lend themselves to student discussion, and because that is my preferred style of teaching I do all I can to encourage it. In addition, integrity is a topic that is not only logical, but also essential to each course. We incorporate discussion about both academic integrity and virtue in one's career, and how they relate.

2. One of the first things I ask my students to do as an anonymous written assignment is to list their objectives for the course. I intentionally do not specify *learning* objectives, in recognition that some students do not take the class to learn, but merely to accumulate credit hours or fulfill a requirement. As one would expect, some students do indicate that they must take the course, or are looking for a specific grade; however, a significant number also indicate that they hope to learn various things, and hope to be able to use course material to be more successful in their careers. This desire to learn allows me to steer the conversation toward the effects on their learning if they do not display academic integrity. Most quickly realize that violating academic integrity impairs their own learning, thus cheating themselves.

3. These early discussions about academic integrity also lead to subsequent conversations about how the courses will be of use to them in their careers and the need for continual learning. One of the best ways I have found of vivifying this process is to emphasize current events, to accomplish two goals. First, this emphasis allows students to apply course content to current "real life" issues in organizations, thus enhancing their academic learning. Second, we explicitly reflect on how that particular current event would require business practitioners to learn. We then invariably tie that conversation back to earlier talks about how academic integrity is necessary for learning.

4. The final point I want to make is the need to create a classroom environment that allows us to model lifelong learning for our students. To create this environment, we have to begin early in the semester. I believe the first step is to provide a safe atmosphere for learning. To me, this means making it abundantly clear that we should all learn from each other. I seek to convey to students that it is completely acceptable to admit not knowing, that one *should* ask questions of others in the class, that one *shouldn't* always agree with others, that everyone learns more

through collaboration and cooperation, and that seeking answers for problems is an honorable endeavor.

5. To me, creating a culture of integrity requires a concerted effort on the part of all students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Certainly, we would all like it if each individual, of his or her own volition practiced integrity. However, that is not reality. Ethics and integrity are team sports that require everyone's full participation. When one person fails to fulfill the standards of conduct, it is up to the rest of the community to lift that person back up, and maintain the corporate expectations.