



WDLC BRIEF

Academic Integrity in Wisconsin Online Programs

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Introduction

The current report is focused on academic integrity in online courses and programs. According to the [International Center for Academic Integrity](#), academic integrity is defined “as a commitment to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility...These five values, plus the courage to act on them even in the face of adversity, are truly foundational.” The remainder of this report is a summary of survey data gathered from Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative members to understand how they think about, set policy for, and uphold academic integrity in their programs/schools. The survey results are shared below to help other programs better understand what key questions, considerations, and practices they may want to consider to best meet the needs of online learners when it comes to academic integrity in online programs and schools. Twelve out of a possible 28 programs responded to the survey.

Academic Integrity Policy

All of the programs that responded to the survey have an academic integrity policy in place and find it to be an essential part of upholding the overall integrity of their program. The policies are maintained in various parts of the programs,

About These Reports

As the field of K–12 online and blended learning continues to evolve, programs around the world work together to discover what fits and what doesn't when it comes to the intricate pieces of the puzzle that make up a school/program. No stranger to this evolution, the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative — consisting of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Virtual School, and the Wisconsin eSchool Network — is working on a collection of topic-based case study reports to share a variety of approaches the programs in their network take to put the puzzle together. The reports are not prescriptive, but intended to stimulate leaders to be purposeful and thoughtful about solutions which will differ based on program structure, student demographics, staff vision, and stakeholder needs. Each report presents associated key questions; taken together, these questions may provide a framework for thinking through these topics and making similar programmatic improvements in processes and services.

**This report was written through a partnership with Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute, the research arm of Michigan Virtual.*

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including, but not limited to, the district that houses the online learning program, the online learning program itself, and/or within the instructional department in the online learning program. Most of the programs (83%) expressed that their concerns about academic integrity mirrored the same level of concern they had in traditional learning environments. As one program respondent emphasized, “It is prevalent in online learning as it is prevalent in traditional classrooms.” Erik Hanson, Director of Appleton eSchool, agreed:

Classroom and online academic honor are closer to the same than ever before. Especially since students are submitting work electronically both online and in the classroom. Ctrl C [Copy] and Ctrl V [Paste] apply to both environments. The one thing that has changed in my opinion is that the Internet has allowed access to answers or keys or work because of crowd sourcing. The distribution and access ability of the Internet is the game changer.

Kim Gauen, Counselor at Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District’s (MCPASD) 21st Century eSchool, added “Since there is less face-to-face connection/relationship with teachers online and because of the ease of copying and pasting between the course, course content and other resources, students have a harder, more important task in determining how they approach completion of their work.” As these practitioners and others reported, in online learning there is still “plagiarizing, sharing of answers, looking up answers during tests, attempting to use electronic devices during tests, getting answers or complete assignments off cheat and assignment sharing websites, and contributing and sharing course lessons to online cheat websites.” Dawn Nordine, Executive Director of Wisconsin Virtual School, pointed out,

The digital access makes it even more important to properly cite resources as there are so many that are instantly available. Teachers creating content or using materials online, F2F, or blended also need to adhere to maintaining the integrity of material. Additionally, I believe password and user name protection and assessment integrity fall under academic integrity as well.

Bottom line for programs is that students need to be held accountable in all settings. As another respondent mentioned, “Students who are intent on cheating or plagiarizing will work to find a way to do so no matter what the format. Simply put, if they can figure out a way to cheat, they’ll do it. If they get away with it the first time, they most likely will keep doing it until they get caught or come across some roadblock that keeps them from doing it.” How do programs uphold academic integrity?

Our online teachers use a variety of different methods to check potential violations (varying by teacher) such as: Turnitin, Googling, creating accounts on homework help sites, etc. When there are infractions, teachers contact the student, guardian, and coach, notifying them of the suspected violation, including evidence. They then set up a plan with the student to rectify the situation, including options such as: a meeting with the student and guardian, having the coach connect with the student for further instruction on what academic integrity means, requiring the student to resubmit the assignment or complete an alternative assignment, etc. If there are multiple infractions (either in the same class or with the same student but in different classes), the student receives a 0 for the assignment, the information is passed along to the administrator for follow up (usually a meeting with student and parent), and the incident is documented as a behavioral infraction.

– Kim Gauen, Counselor at MCPASD
21st Century eSchool

Upholding Academic Integrity – steps, procedures, structures, and supports

As Nordine conveyed, “I think the digital space has made it easier for teachers to recognize and detect plagiarism. The tools and strategies are more robust. If digital resources are implemented early on in the student’s academic path, there are more opportunities to address issues and take advantage of the early learning of academic integrity.” Programs reported using a variety of tools, resources, and strategies to uphold academic integrity, as can be seen from the following list (not exhaustive):

Tools, Resources, and Strategies to Uphold Academic Integrity

- Implement plagiarism checkers (turnitin.com, Google, Other)
- Enable teachers to manage gradebook (formative vs. summative balance) as they would in a traditional classroom
- Use randomized assessment question banks
- Enable teachers to manage their content and online course as they would in a traditional classroom (manage and adjust content, assessments, etc. as needed)
- Require online student agreements/contracts
- Implement student orientations (teaching digital citizenship and academic integrity)
- Enforce academic integrity policy (hold everyone accountable)
- Use discussion-based assessments between student and teacher
- Require teachers to provide synchronous instruction
- Encourage teachers to build relationships with their students to understand their capabilities and learning potential
- Ensure teachers are implementing authentic assessments
- Implement proctored exams
- Use data-based analytics to track work
- Coach teachers to learn the “voice” behind the submitted work
- Require one-on-one conversations with the student and involve parents as necessary
- Add a mentor for additional support if one doesn’t already exist

Gauen emphasized the importance of “first address[ing] academic integrity issues] as a learning experience to help the student understand why plagiarism [or any other academic integrity problem] is an issue, come up with a situationally-appropriate way for the student to address the issue, then pass it on to administration if it happens again.” Another respondent agreed with Gauen, and mentioned that their program “highlight[s] academic integrity as part of our online Student Contract and include[s] lessons on plagiarism and digital citizenship in our Orientation. Students in many cases get a double dip on digital citizenship through 1:1 use at their local schools...and looping in families, counselors, [and other] support staff to continue to work with the student moving forward.”

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– Dawn Nordine, Executive Director of Wisconsin Virtual School

To help teachers keep up with the latest strategies, programs are implementing professional learning specific to academic integrity checking software and resources, as well as to be consistent with enforcing the academic integrity policy in a proactive and communicative way. Some of the programs that are working with both face-to-face and online teachers have comparison discussions offering the teachers an opportunity to share experiences and discover new solutions to their common and unique challenges. These support meetings offer a space where everyone can learn from each other. These meetings for sharing would also be good for program directors and teachers to work together to figure out ideas for advancement in technologies and pedagogical approaches that can help to uphold academic integrity. As one respondent mentioned, “I wish assessments could be taken in a locked down browser so that students could not open up any other tabs while taking the assessments. I wish all classes had the default setting of ‘cannot save and continue’ for assessments...and camera shots [could be taken] of the student while they are taking assessments.” One school’s team worked together,

to develop procedures in our student handbooks which outline the ‘strikes’ and consequences for each infraction. As part of this practice, parents are contacted each time. Escalating consequences occur over time with excessive abuses leading to disciplinary consequences up to the student being dropped from the course or even in very severe cases losing the opportunity to attend the school.

Programs agreed that consistency with adhering to and upholding the academic integrity policy and procedures throughout a program is key. First and foremost, as one respondent emphasized, “Awareness is key to prevention.”



Resources

Appleton eSchool – Student Contract

<https://appletonschool.org/resident/school-year-student-contract/>

Kenosha eSchool – Academic Integrity Policy <https://www.kusd.edu/eschool/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>

Wisconsin Virtual School – Academic Integrity Policy

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rz4eM_9oM1KxuSywlr9s8SJqB_XQRDCmN8dISVOQW3Q/edit?usp=sharing