ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT IN ACADEMIC INTEGRITY PROCESSES: ADDRESSING BARRIERS FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

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The effective handling of academic integrity cases is crucial for ensuring appropriate standards are upheld, reducing the occurrence of misconduct, and the negative impacts on both staff and students navigating the process. However, significant barriers persist from both staff (Crossman, 2019; Hamilton & Wolsky, 2022) and student perspectives (Stone, 2023). This project aimed to address these barriers and enhance engagement with the academic misconduct process. Staff often experience high levels of stress and anxiety due to unclear procedural steps, difficulties in communication with students, and the overall complexity of managing integrity issues. These challenges can lead to inconsistent handling of cases and reluctance to report incidents. Similarly, students face considerable anxiety and confusion during investigations, exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the process, uncertainty about available support, and fears of severe consequences. This can result in disengagement and non-compliance. This project aimed to address these barriers by providing targeted interventions to enhance engagement and improve the overall academic misconduct process, benefiting both staff and students.

Targeted interventions were developed to alleviate stress and anxiety experienced by staff in managing academic integrity issues. Training sessions were implemented to aid less confident staff in navigating the reporting process and facilitate discussions on academic expectations and consequences of misconduct. Email templates were co-created with policymakers, academics, student advocacy services, and students using clear language to reduce the stress associated with allegations of academic integrity breaches. They included links to support services and encouraged students to consult with advocates for clarification of the process and accompaniment to meetings.

Staff confidence in reporting academic misconduct increased by 2.5-fold assessed via a combination of increased reporting and staff feedback. For students, the investigation process induced anxiety primarily due to a lack of understanding, uncertainty about available support, and exaggerated fears of consequences. To mitigate these concerns, the project provided clear and accessible information on academic integrity expectations and support throughout the investigation process. Following these changes, staff reported increased student engagement throughout the academic misconduct process measured by an increase in student responses and connections with student advocacy services. This project demonstrates that targeted interventions can improve both staff and student experiences in handling academic integrity cases, leading to better engagement and adherence to academic standards.

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