

## Academic Integrity Issues: Working with International Students

See [academicintegrity.as.ua.edu](http://academicintegrity.as.ua.edu) > For Faculty > Faculty Resources > scroll to “Resources for Teaching International Students” for an archive of helpful articles, several of which were consulted in the preparation of this handout or are referenced below.

In her “Guide to Advising International Students about Academic Integrity,” Gabriela Gillespie (2012) cites the work of Pandit (2007) and Douglass and Edelstein (2009) to explain the many benefits—especially the pedagogical benefits—for having a diverse student population that includes international students. However, working with an international student population also presents challenges, especially if there are cultural difference regarding plagiarism.

### Challenges for all students (including International Students)

Research by James Lang (*Cheating Lessons*, 2013) indicates four elements that are typically present when students (all students, not just international students) decide to cheat:

1. External motivation (for instance, just wanting a grade or certification or degree), as opposed to Intrinsic motivation (for instance, a desire to learn) [David Tomar, in “The Ghostwriting Business,” calls this “the overarching condition in which the ‘grade imperative’ far exceeds the ‘learning imperative’” (p. 18)]
2. Focus on performance, rather than on mastery (for instance, focus on task completion rather than skill mastery)
3. High stakes situations (few grading opportunities that carry high grading weights; limited types of assessment)
4. Lack of confidence, belief that a task is impossible or unfair, rather than self-efficacy

All four can be countermanded by the creation of a supportive **teaching environment** (which he explains in detail in his highly regarded book)

Lang adds a fifth issue—peer pressure—that is beyond a teacher’s control, but he argues that adjusting teaching with an awareness of the other four cheating motivators can help to instill a confidence level that can also neutralize peer pressure.

## Challenges for International Students

Macgregor and Folinazzo ("Best Practices in Teaching International Students in Higher Education," 2018) identify a number of what they term "skill area weaknesses" (p. 301). While many people assume that the issues are largely language-related, in fact, they show often there are cultural issues as well as issues with academic background. Some things they consider:

- Unfamiliarity with the technical vocabulary in a given field
- Unfamiliarity with local (or even Western) cultural references and idioms that might be used in examples or classroom explanations
- Fast-paced class, instructor talking too fast for students to catch meaning
- Unfamiliarity with how to take notes
- Not understanding instructions; instructions too complicated; unclear expectations for course and for individual assignments
- Culturally unfamiliar with a lecture style that strays from the textbook
- Too embarrassed to ask questions, culturally wired NOT to ask questions of an authority figure, not enough confidence to ask questions
- Lack of confidence to participate in oral activities (including class discussion), culturally unfamiliar with a classroom model that allows for discussion or for sharing opinions
- Considering some discussion topics as inappropriate
- Unfamiliarity with complex writing structures (for reading comprehension or for writing)
- Grammar issues
- Citation and reference skills (which may be culturally different)
- Unsure how to revise
- Culturally different definitions of plagiarism
- Underpreparedness or general lack of confidence
- Unfamiliarity with Western pedagogical strategies; Cultural academic background that
  - values memorization
  - values lecture over discussion or interactivity
  - devalues expressing opinions
  - encourages students NOT to criticize or question authority, including textual authority
  - values passive rather than active participation

Macgregor and Folinazzo don't call this culture shock but "learning shock" (p. 303).

## Corresponding Strategies – First-day/First-week/Syllabus

- Speak more slowly
- Discuss how to take notes for your delivery style
- Encourage questions; pause to ask “What are your questions?” rather than “Do you have questions?”, discuss cultural differences that may exist about questions and questioning, and reassure students about your accessibility
- Discuss with students how the concept of plagiarism may differ in Western culture (and specifically in the US and at UA) from that of other cultures; ask about their culture’s definition of plagiarism; emphasize UA’s definition of plagiarism and how to avoid it (do this in class, on syllabus, and via handouts or other teaching materials that specify the educational and ethical problems with intentional plagiarism).
- Discuss the difference between intentional plagiarism (contract cheating like ghostwriting or downloading papers) and unintentional plagiarism (uncertainty about how to correctly use sources in writing), and plan to cover in class how to use source-based writing skills like summary, paraphrasing (and avoiding patchwriting), and quoting ethically and correctly and how to cite and document sources. Also discuss the reasons WHY we need to learn and use these skills (such as to demonstrate ethos and professionalism in later courses or career).
- Consider including some boilerplate syllabus language about “Original Work” as part of your Academic Integrity syllabus section. (See EXAMPLE, attached)
- Discuss student goals and the role of writing in achieving those goals
- Explain the consequences of plagiarism (including ghostwriting) and include on syllabus; emphasize that ignorance of US and UA plagiarism policies does not excuse academic misconduct; offer information/explanations; encourage and be accessible for policy questions
- Be sensitive to and offer support for cultural and academic adjustment (culture shock, language barriers, low confidence levels, cultural issues about student engagement or participation, perceptions of underpreparedness for college writing in English)
- Provide information about campus resources (ELI, Center for Academic Success, Writing Center)
- Determine and discuss what kinds of accommodations you will allow (can student use a dictionary in class? During exams or tests? Can students use language translators? Can they have extra time to complete course work? Are will willing to give out lecture notes before or after class meetings?)
- Build a rapport with students and show interest in learning from them about their cultures and backgrounds and interests

## Corresponding Strategies – Lesson Plans and Writing Assignments

- A number of teaching strategies are included in “Teaching International Students: Pedagogical Issues and Strategies” from University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (see [academicintegrity.as.ua.edu](http://academicintegrity.as.ua.edu) for link). These largely include things like
  - slowing down the pace to allow for note-taking and participation,
  - including checks for reading comprehension or comprehension of assignments and assignment procedures,
  - asking students to summarize or paraphrase class readings in class for instructor feedback,
  - including recaps or pointing out key takeaways for each lesson,
  - using PowerPoint slides,
  - creating reading and study guides
- Consider “Internationalizing” your curriculum (with readings or topics or course themes that would be of interest to international students; with activities that require interaction and sharing of cultural knowledge to encourage diversity and awareness)
- Refresh your course assignments regularly (Tomar suggests annually)
- Offer or advertise or arrange for plagiarism tutorials or academic integrity workshops
- Simplify written instructions and ask “What questions do you have?”
- Include examples or models so that students can visualize expectations
- Incorporate learner-center teaching strategies
- Consider and vary how you deliver information (offer visual aids, graphics or infographics, bulleted lists, highlighting, examples or models)
- Include oral defenses of essays or oral reflections on the composing/research process of each essay as part of the essay grade
- Include practical experiential projects (real-life writing based on course service projects)
- Group assignments where students work collaboratively in class to produce writing.
- In-class writing or written in-class final exam (though this undermines process writing)
- More faculty conferencing at various stages of the writing process
- Using TurnItIn (which probably will not find any text matches but may find significant matches to essays submitted to other schools)
- Using TurnItIn’s PeerMark function at the draft level to allow for peer and/or instructor feedback on an early draft of the assigned writing

Macgregor and Folinazzo suggest that instructors focus on:

- Academic writing skills of paraphrasing, summarizing, and citation or source references
- Expression skills of opinions/responses, analysis, evaluation, and argument structure

## **Ghostwriting is a Problem:**

Ghostwriting—the practice of hiring or contracting with someone (whether for pay or not) to write an “original, non-plagiarized” paper using a specific course assignment prompt—is not limited to international students, but David Tomar (“The Ghostwriting Business”) does identify international students as the first in the top-three “customer bases” for the vast ghostwriting industry:

- English Language Learners
- Composition/Research Deficient Students
- Lazy Students

Ghostwriting is difficult to detect because it generally involves professional writers, writing by contract to specific assignment prompts and deadlines. The essays generated by ghostwriters are not plagiarized, making tools like TurnItIn ineffective at detecting them. They are also difficult to adjudicate because there is usually no concrete (actionable) evidence beyond an instructor’s suspicion.

## **Detection**

- What Tomar calls “professorial vigilance” (“Detecting and Deterring Ghostwritten Papers, p. 23) – being so familiar with your students’ knowledge base and personal writing styles that you know their habits and quirks.
- Consider using portfolios for collecting and archiving a student’s drafts and revisions, so that a repository of examples exists for comparison against suspicious papers
- Relying on “human analysis” (p. 24)—“the critical eye of the professor” to notice things like tell-tale vocabulary quirks, sentence structure patterns, verb usage patterns, and the like.
- Use “Properties” or “File Properties” on a digital MSWord doc to locate a file’s author, machine used to create file, creation date, modification history, etc.

## **Strategies for Deterring Ghostwriting**

- **In-class Writing:**
  - include enough in-class writing to become familiar with student writing ability and writing voice
  - Begin the semester with a long in-class writing assignment to establish a baseline (or what Tomar calls a “fingerprint”) for student writing skills and personal style.
  - ask students to do small (and collectible) writing activities in class (things that promote critical thinking or reading comprehension or free-writing on a class-relevant topic, for instance)
  - create a verifiable written record of student work
  - Consider also asking students to contribute to class discussion boards in BBL
  - Consider asking students to write you e-mails (not attachments, but actual e-mails in lieu of reading quizzes or as a prelude to class discussion)

- Be aware that students may try to bring ghostwritten essays to class on a phone or smart watch in order to copy them in class (in other words, to subvert the intention of an in-class writing assignment).
- **Process Writing:**
  - Require multiple drafts for each assignment (perhaps some written in-class)
  - Require explanations of revisions at each stage in the process, perhaps including oral defenses of revision choices
  - Ask students to share orally their research or writing experiences at each stage of the writing/research process
  - NOTE: students may still use a ghostwriter, but asking a ghostwriter to write multiple drafts will cost more (and at some point may make the bill cost-prohibitive)
- **Instructor Conferences**
  - Regular and mandatory
  - Allows for more scrutiny of student writing
  - Allows for more familiarity with a student's research or writing progress
  - Allows for more one-on-one support of student writing
- **Personalized and/or Course-specific Assignments**
  - Include a personal element (an experience or personal interest) into the assignment; ask students to find a connection with their culture, their background, their major—anything that might personally engage students with the writing assignment
  - Include class materials as research materials
  - Include class discussion as an element to be included in an assignment
- **Vary Assessment Types**
  - Include written tests or mixed-format tests (essay, multiple choice, short answer)
  - Include a written test of summarization, paraphrasing, and quoting skills
  - Include oral presentations or oral defenses of research or revision
  - Include group presentations
  - Include a class participation grade
  - Include an “exit interview” or written reflection on the learning that happened during the writing process on each assignment
- **“Identify struggling students and see that they get help” (p. 29)**
  - include campus resources on the syllabus and/or on each assignment sheet
    - ELI
    - Writing Center
    - A & S Academic Integrity Initiatives workshops or online resources (academicintegrity.as.ua.edu)
    - reference librarians
    - Counseling Center and Women's Resource Center

**EXAMPLE of an ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AWARE SYLLABUS PAGE:** (you may also need to add definitions/policies on group work, collaboration, use of study aids like translators, etc.)

### Policy on Academic Misconduct

Students will be expected to uphold the **Academic Honor Code**:

**“All students in attendance at the University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academically related matter and any knowing or intentional help or attempt to help, or conspiracy to help, another student. “**



[The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy](#) will be followed in the event of academic misconduct. Students will also be expected to uphold the **Capstone Creed**:

**“As a member of The University of Alabama community, I will pursue knowledge, act with fairness, integrity and respect; promote equity and inclusion; foster individual and civic responsibility; and strive for excellence in all I do.”**

### My Policy on Original Work

The work you submit for this course must be your own original work. This means that it should come from your own ideas and observations. “Original,” here, doesn’t mean that you are the only person ever to have these ideas; it means that your ideas evolve uniquely from your own knowledge base and experiences, demonstrating connections you are making between your life and our coursework. “Original Work” means that all work turned in for this class should be your own work and should be written BY YOU in response to assignment prompts for this course/section in this semester. You may not submit papers written by others (no matter how you acquire them—by contract, downloading, copy/pasting, etc); nor can you “recycle” papers written by you for other classes or in other semesters. In addition, you may not submit work that contains patchwriting (failed paraphrasing). All use of outside sources MUST be correctly and ethically cited within your papers and documented in a Works Cited list. If you have questions, please talk with your instructor before you turn work in for grading.

### Turnitin

The University of Alabama is committed to helping students uphold the ethical standards of academic integrity in all areas of study. Students agree that their enrollment in this course allows the instructor the right to use electronic devices to help prevent plagiarism. All course materials are subject to submission to TurnItIn.com for the purpose of detecting textual similarities. Assignments submitted to TurnItIn.com will be included as source documents in TurnItIn.com’s restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. TurnItIn.com will be used as a source document to help students avoid plagiarism in written documents.

In this class, we will use TurnItIn at the draft stage in the writing process so that you can **check your source usage and ask for help before your assignment is due for grading**. We will also use TII PeerMark for online peer review, and your papers will be submitted electronically via TII GradeMark for online grading.