Conversations on Integrity  
Western Coalition for Integrity

Background

The subject of academic integrity gained the attention of Faculty Senate when the Academic Coordinating Council (ACC) was in the process of revising Appendix D of the University Catalog, Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure. Besides improving the clarity and coherence of Appendix D, there was interest in ACC and Faculty Senate to take a more proactive, affirmative, and educational approach to academic integrity, rather than just manage instances of dishonesty when they occur. Discussions led to the formation of the Academic Integrity Task Force, an *ad hoc* Senate committee made up of staff, students, and faculty. The mission of the Academic Integrity Task Force was “to explore ways and means to support, sustain, and expand the culture of integrity at Western Washington University.”¹ With the support of the Faculty Senate, the Academic Integrity Task Force met over a period of two years (2012-2014).

The group soon arrived at several compelling conclusions. First, while academic honesty was the initial impetus, integrity is greater than research and academics alone, touching every aspect of campus life, including athletics, recreation, residences, work relations, and community involvement. As such, everyone at WWU—staff, students, faculty, and administration—is impacted by and has a stake in integrity. Consequently, the group changed its name from Academic Integrity Task Force to Integrity Task Force to reflect the broader scope. Second, consistent with ACC’s revisions to Appendix D, the group believed a proactive, preventive, educational, and affirmative approach that fosters a culture of integrity was needed. Third, while cultivating integrity is a shared responsibility, active and meaningful student participation in all aspects of integrity, including planning, promotion, implementation, and evaluation, is paramount.

Besides deliberating on these issues, the Integrity Task Force performed several tasks, including searching for resources, creating a website (www.wwu.edu/integrity), and presenting to various stakeholders, including new faculty and academic advisors (Summerstart and Transitions). In order to continue and strengthen these efforts, as well as to generate resources and create programs, the Integrity Task Force recognized early on that effective and lasting change would require a permanent group supported by sufficient resources. Consequently, it recommended finding “a location supported by resources where work on integrity can permanently continue.”²

Subsequent meetings involving the Integrity Task Force, the President’s Office, the Provost’s Office, and the Senate Executive Committee led to the decision to locate

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¹ Report of the Integrity Task Force to Faculty Senate. April 30, 2014.  
² Ibid
the Integrity Task Force in Academic Affairs. Having been assigned a permanent home, the group agreed to adopt the name *Western Coalition for Integrity* to convey a campus-wide commitment. During its first meeting, Provost Brent Carbajal charged the group with exploring and vetting principles that support a culture of integrity.

**Campus Conversations on Integrity**

Virtually all colleges and universities are concerned with integrity. Many have created programs, and some have gone so far as to institute offices of integrity. As such, resources are plentiful and readily accessible on the Internet. *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity* (Fishman, n.d.), a product of the International Center for Academic Integrity at Clemson University, was particularly impressive as a solid source for starting conversations on integrity.

According to *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity*, academic integrity is a “commitment to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility” (n.p.), which are quoted directly below:  

- **Honesty**: Academic communities of integrity advance the quest for truth and knowledge through intellectual and personal honesty in learning, teaching, research, and service.
- **Trust**: Academic communities of integrity both foster and rely upon climates of mutual trust. Climates of trust encourage and support the free exchange of ideas which in turn allows scholarly inquiry to reach its potential.
- **Fairness**: Academic communities of integrity establish clear and transparent expectations, standards, and practices to support fairness in the interactions of students, faculty, and administrators.
- **Respect**: Academic communities of integrity value the interactive, cooperative, participatory nature of learning. They honor, value, and consider diverse opinions and ideas.
- **Responsibility**: Academic communities of integrity rest upon foundations of personal accountability coupled with the willingness of individuals and groups to lead by example, uphold mutually agreed-upon standards, and take action when they encounter wrongdoing.

In addition to these values, *courage* was included as a quality necessary for achieving the five values of integrity, as “Translating the values from talking points into action—standing up for them in the face of pressure and adversity—requires determination, commitment, and courage” (n.p.).

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3 *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity* has received support from over 80 colleges, universities, and organizations, including seven centers devoted to ethics.
Of course, integrity and related values are defined and expressed in a variety of ways, *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity* representing just one example. The Western Coalition for Integrity believes that there is sufficient commonsense understanding of integrity to begin conversations with students, faculty, staff, and administration on how to work together to promote a culture of integrity. Examples of questions include:

- What personal actions, attitudes, and circumstances foster a culture of integrity?
- What actions, attitudes, and circumstances constrain and undermine a culture of integrity?
- What can be done to get the most commitment and involvement from as many people as possible?
- Where is integrity found and how is integrity modeled, practiced, learned, and experienced?
- If resources were unlimited, what activities and programs would you recommend to build a strong and lasting culture of integrity?
- How should integrity be recognized and celebrated?
- In what ways might integrity remain relevant for students after they have graduated?

The aim of “Conversations on Integrity” is just that—to start and sustain an ongoing dialogue throughout the Western Washington University community on the meaning, value, and practice of integrity in all aspects of campus life.