

On graduate teaching assistants' understanding of the six fundamental values of academic integrity at a Hong Kong university

Introduction. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) defined academic integrity as the individual and collective commitment to six fundamental values (including honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage) in academic settings even in the face of adversity (Fishman, 2013).

Aims. This study aims to understand how Graduate Teaching Assistants' (GTAs) at a research-intensive institution in Hong Kong perceive academic integrity before and after participating in the Trail of Integrity and Ethics. The trail makes use of Augmented Reality technology to help students acquire abstract concepts (Wong, et al., 2018).

Methods. This project targets to study the GTAs who completed mandatory research ethics and teaching training courses. It adopts a qualitative approach to interpret how the GTAs perceive academic integrity against the ICAI's values. Participants explained academic integrity in 100 words before and after participating in the trail. Qualitative data collected were analysed by deductive thematic analysis method (Caulfield, 2019), referring to the ICAI's values.

Results. The findings indicated that the participants generally demonstrated understanding of the ICAI's six fundamental values. Among the values, it suggested that honesty and respect might be the most familiar values to the participants prior to joining the trail. The other four values seemed to be less familiar to them even after joining the trail. Interestingly, on top of the above six values, increasing concerns about empathy and mindfulness were identified as two other important attributes of academic integrity from the participants' perspectives.

Discussion. Though some participants might perceive empathy as an important attribute in developing academic integrity, there is no direct evidence from literature to support this. Rather, to borrow insights from other relevant studies on ethical decision making and morality, there is a dark side of empathy that could lead to unethical decisions. Educators should pay extra attention to this perception and avoid any misinterpretation. There is a need to delineate the limits of empathy in personal decision-making for upholding academic integrity. To prevent students from falling into the traps induced by empathic emotions, a well-developed mindfulness might help them to overcome the struggles and make an informed decision in uncertain circumstances.