VIEWPOINTS

Promoting a Culture of Academic Integrity

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Much has been written in recent years about honesty and integrity in the classroom. Academic integrity is a core value in our schools—for teaching, learning, and scholarly activities. However, the education literature contains a myriad of reports that suggest cheating and plagiarizing by students has increased in recent years. The ready availability of technology has contributed to student behaviors ranging from cutting and pasting material from the Internet to sharing online quizzes and texting answers to classmates. In a profession that prides itself on integrity and high ethical standards, how do we address these issues with our professional students, graduate students, residents, and fellows? It begins with establishing a culture of academic integrity and must include our students in educational sessions about the issues and establishing guidelines for appropriate behaviors.

The millennial generation is viewed as valuing efficiency and instant rewards. They are reported to be more concerned about outcome than process. They have different views on what constitutes cheating than previous generations. Perhaps, we have taught them too well to work in groups and collaborate, and they may not know when to stop doing group work and start doing individual work. The Center for Academic Integrity found that 22% of students say they have cheated on a test or examination, but about twice as many (43%) have engaged in “unauthorized collaboration” on homework.¹

Trevor Harding of the California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo has studied student cheating in engineering.² He says that many students do not think copying homework answers is wrong when it is done with technology. He calls it the *technological detachment phenomenon*. In other words, as long as there is some technology between students and their behavior, they do not consider it cheating. One result of this phenomenon is an entire industry of Web sites that supply homework answers for popular textbooks.

Our students are bombarded with information, much of it incorrect. They need direction in learning to judge the quality of the information surrounding them. Students also need a clear understanding that plagiarism is not merely copying word for word, but is also taking an-

other's ideas and thoughts without attribution. These students are also very practical and efficient. Right or wrong, they make judgments about the importance of the work assigned to them and its relevance to their future goals and plans. If it is viewed as busy work, they are more likely to justify inappropriate behaviors regarding its completion. Therefore, it is important in any educational program for the instructor to provide the purpose of an assignment as well as directions for its completion at the time it is assigned.

As long as students view pharmacy and graduate school as just more hoops to jump through on the way to their degree, a culture of academic integrity will be difficult to establish in our educational programs. Students must know they have reached the stage of preparing for a lifetime in an honored and respected profession as a pharmacist, scientist, or educator (to name only a few career possibilities). Completing a pharmacokinetics problem set, answering enough multiple-choice questions correctly to get the desired grade, completing research papers, and preparing manuscripts or other assignments is not the ultimate objective. The goal must be in knowing how to take care of patients, keeping up-to-date with the latest advancements in therapy and the sciences, communicating effectively with other health professionals and scientists, devising the best possible solution to a therapeutic or research problem, and doing it all with compassion, enthusiasm, and dedication to the task.

It is our collective job as pharmacists, scientists, and educators to deliver this essential message that integrity matters. The ultimate objective must be learning. Cutting corners with academic dishonesty will not produce the desired result in any situation or challenge. Students who copy their work from other students learn little as is well demonstrated during examinations and other graded activities.³ Some professors believe this is punishment enough for unauthorized collaboration on homework, projects, and quizzes. But is this really enough if we value honesty and integrity as core character traits in our future pharmacists, scientists, and educators?

Procedures are in place in our schools and colleges to monitor student activities, including honor codes and

ethics or academic integrity committees to enforce them, and use of examination proctors and anti-plagiarism software. However, the most important element is instilling the desire to practice one's profession in an honest, ethical manner. H. Jackson Browne, Jr., may have said it best. "Our character is what we do when we think no one is looking."

Many important steps have been taken within the academy to achieve a culture of academic integrity. Starting on the first day of professional and graduate programs, we must instill the principles of professionalism as an essential step in developing our culture of academic integrity. Using introductory pharmacy practice experiences to immerse pharmacy students in practice settings with good role models in the first year of school is important. Our students need to see where they are headed before they can determine the best route to their current and future practices. Assessing students in performance-based and problem-solving examinations rather than multiple-choice tests is another strategy to shift the focus to learning and away from an emphasis on getting high grades. In addition, we need to articulate the elements of scientific integrity and professionalism during their interactions with faculty members, rotations in laboratories, and in all group research activities for graduate students.

An atmosphere of "us versus them" between professors, staff members, and students is detrimental to establishing the culture we need to achieve in our colleges and schools. Students must be part of the conversation and take an active and major role in setting standards and procedures for maintaining those standards. Student

leaders should facilitate these discussions with the student body.

Technology will surround students during their education and when they become pharmacists, scientists, and educators. We should embrace technology and allow its use to the fullest and logical extent to enhance education, research, and service missions—while educating students to what is appropriate use and to think and read critically and ethically about new challenges that will be associated with advancing technologies such as cloud computing, mobile computing, and open content.⁴ Students should collaborate with other students not just to get the work and projects completed, but to learn in the process and enhance their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. That is the message we must articulate each and every day if we are to truly promote a culture of academic integrity.

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