BLUE OCEAN INTEGRITY: HIGH EXPECTATIONS WITHIN STRUCTURED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Chelle Oldham[i]
University of Glasgow,
The Open University
United Kingdom

Abstract:

This paper examines the intersection of student autonomy, academic integrity, and institutional responsibility through the lens of the "Blue Ocean" strategy, proposing a proactive and educative approach to reducing academic misconduct. Drawing on contemporary theory, including Self-Determination Theory and self-regulated learning frameworks, it argues that when students are explicitly taught the principles of academic integrity, provided with structured opportunities to practise academic skills, and expected to take ownership of their learning, both ethical engagement and academic success are enhanced. The study positions academic misconduct not merely as a compliance issue, but as a developmental challenge that can be addressed through early, embedded integrity education. It synthesises evidence from recent literature and practical examples, such as formative Turnitin use, peer review, and targeted skills workshops, to illustrate how autonomy-supportive environments foster pride in ethical scholarship. The "Blue Ocean" model is advanced as a means of shifting from reactive detection and punishment to a culture in which integrity is normalised, student-owned, and embedded across the curriculum.

Keywords: academic integrity; academic conduct; plagiarism; autonomy; self-determination; Turnitin

1. Introduction

In the last decade, higher education has increasingly recognised the importance of student autonomy and self-regulated learning in fostering not only academic success but also ethical academic engagement. This paper explores contemporary theory and research that highlight the benefits of giving students responsibility for their own learning, particularly in relation to academic integrity (Bertram 2017). It argues that by educating students about the rules of academic engagement, providing opportunities to practise those skills, and shifting expectations towards self-accountability, institutions

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[i] Correspondence: email chelle.oldham@open.ac.uk, chelle.oldham@glasgow.ac.uk

can significantly reduce academic misconduct. This proactive, student-centred approach aligns with the "blue ocean" (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005, 2014) mindset of moving from reactive compliance to embedded ethical culture.

2. Contemporary Theories of Student Autonomy and Responsibility

Recent research continues to affirm that student autonomy contributes to deeper learning and higher engagement. Ryan and Deci's updated work on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2024) emphasises that autonomy-supportive environments enhance intrinsic motivation and academic persistence. Autonomy is not simply freedom, but meaningful engagement with learning choices when students are co-creators of their academic development, motivation and self-efficacy rise.

Zimmerman and Moylan (2017) reaffirm the role of self-regulated learning in academic achievement. Their work highlights those metacognitive skills—such as planning, monitoring, and self-assessment—are critical when students are expected to manage their own learning. These skills are fostered in environments where responsibility is cultivated rather than controlled.

3. Academic Rules, Misconduct, and Student Ownership

Academic misconduct is often a symptom of unclear expectations, lack of skill, or perceived lack of ownership. Researchers such as Sefcik, Striepe, and Yorke (2020) argue that proactive and transparent academic integrity education reduces unintentional breaches. Students are more likely to uphold academic standards when they understand not only what the rules are, but why they exist.

When integrity education includes both rule explanation and opportunities to practise academic conventions, students internalise standards. They are more likely to approach academic writing with pride and ethical commitment (Brickhill 2024). This shift from surveillance to support moves misconduct prevention into the developmental domain.

As Brickhill *et al.* (2024) argue, moral agency develops through reflective and educative practice. By involving students in defining and applying academic integrity, universities move beyond procedural compliance to nurture ethical character. Structured opportunities—such as Turnitin draft checks, peer review, and citation workshops—provide safe and formative spaces for students to learn through doing.

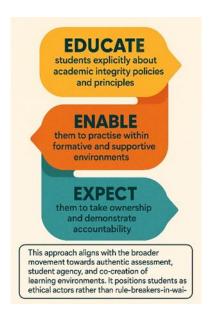## 4. Blue Ocean Strategy and Integrity

The metaphor of "Blue Ocean Strategy" (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015) remains relevant. In academic integrity, the "red ocean" approach for many institutions focuses on policy enforcement, detection tools, and punishment largely as a deterrent response. The "blue

ocean" alternative is an uncontested space where integrity is normalised, embedded, and student owned.

Creating a "blue ocean" of academic conduct behaviours means providing structured but flexible frameworks where students are challenged to meet high expectations. Rather than competing with misconduct through control, institutions innovate by cultivating autonomy and self-reflection. Misconduct is prevented not by punishment, but by cultivating pride in ethical scholarship.

5. Reducing Misconduct through Educational Autonomy

Recent empirical studies support this model. Bretag *et al.* (2019) found that embedding integrity education into assessment design resulted in lower rates of misconduct and higher student confidence. Students who have access to self-paced academic integrity modules accompanied by voluntary expert-led support were more likely to paraphrase and reference correctly (Oldham 2025).

A three-stage strategy emerges:
1) **Educate** students explicitly about academic integrity policies and principles.
2) **Enable** them to practise within formative and supportive environments.
3) **Expect** them to take ownership and demonstrate accountability.

6. Conclusion

Higher education institutions that aim to reduce misconduct and improve student engagement must invest in structured, autonomy-supportive environments. Educating students about academic rules, providing real opportunities to develop and practise those skills, and shifting responsibility for integrity to the students themselves produce

not only better academic outcomes, but a stronger ethical culture. In the "blue ocean" of academic integrity, students thrive not because they are controlled but because they are trusted.

Academics with responsibility for academic integrity may consider approaches such as a dedicated space in the curriculum for academic integrity or specific spaces. They might consider an early assessment where the learning outcomes are primarily related to academic integrity. A successful discussion with a tutor as early as possible in the students' academic journey could also be included in the curriculum.

Overall, once we equip students with the skills they need and the tools they need, it becomes their responsibility to ensure the work they present at the assessment points is the student's own voice.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)
Dr. Chelle Oldham is an experienced lecturer and researcher of education in every phase having spent two decades researching and teaching from Early Childhood through to Adult Education. Research interests include teacher education, alternative education and academic integrity.
Email: chelle.oldham@glasgow.ac.uk, chelle.oldham@open.ac.uk
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9169-8528

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