



Tertiary Student Engagement Research report

Prepared for the Tertiary Education
Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

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Background, objectives and methodology



Background

The Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) is Australia's independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education. It works most closely with the higher education provider network that it regulates. More recently, its efforts have been focused on certain compliance priorities including ensuring academic quality, upholding student wellbeing and safety, protecting sector integrity, maintaining information security and monitoring financial standing.¹

These compliance priorities are also reflected in the work that TEQSA does to support higher education students directly. It offers advice for students on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (or AI), how to maintain academic integrity, protection of student interests particularly with respect to the quality of education, and resources to support student wellbeing and safety.

In order to fulfill its obligations, there is now a need for TEQSA to better understand the student perspective directly. The outcomes from this research among higher education students will *“support TEQSA in delivering our regulatory and quality assurance work by informing programs such as our Annual Compliance Program, educative and engagement activities.”*²

The overall aim of the research is to *“engage with higher education students on key issues and their impact on student interests.”*²

The key issues TEQSA are interested in revolve around

1. academic integrity
2. artificial intelligence
3. student wellbeing and safety.

For each of these three issues, specific research objectives were addressed:

- Awareness. Identify students' awareness and understanding of the specific issue.
- Experiences. Explore students' interaction and experiences with the issue.
- Expectations. Explore students' expectations with respect to the issue as well as concerns or other related issues to be considered.
- Supports. Identify the knowledge and awareness of the support services available relating to the issue.
- Engagement. Understand students' communication channels and preferences regarding the issue as well as more broadly.

1. Information noted here is drawn from [TEQSA Annual Report 2022-23](#), accessed 12 March 2024.

2. Student Focus Group' research brief, pg 5.



Research methodology

Qualitative research in the form of **group discussions and in-depth interviews**, were conducted with undergraduate students from metropolitan areas and regional locations. The discussions were structured as follows:

Group type	Undergraduate students:	Total	Number of participants
Online group discussions	University student, domestic, metro	2 groups	6 + 8
	University student, domestic, regional	1 group	8
	University student, international	2 groups	7 + 6
	Total	5 groups	35 students
In-depth interviews	Non-university undergraduate student	3 interviews	3
	Undergraduate student – First Nations	2 interviews	2
	Undergraduate student – Disability	4 interviews	4
	Total	9 interviews	9 students

Six to eight participants took part in each group discussion, and nine students participated in the individual in-depth interviews. A mix of genders were represented within each group discussion. All students were studying an undergraduate degree regulated by TEQSA, including a Bachelor's Degree, Associate Degree and Advanced Diploma.

All the fieldwork was conducted from 22nd to 29th May 2024.

The research was conducted in compliance with AS-ISO 20252. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature and represents the views and opinions of those included in this research study. As such, qualitative findings can be subjective in nature and indicative only, not necessarily fully representative of the target populations.



Reporting notes: segment definitions

The following table shows the definitions of sub-sample segments described throughout the report:

Label	Description
Domestic, metro	Domestic undergraduate students attending an Australian university and living in metropolitan areas
Domestic, regional	Domestic undergraduate students attending an Australian university and living in regional areas
International	International undergraduate students attending an Australian university
Non-university	Undergraduate students studying at a university college or other institute of higher education in Australia
First Nations	Undergraduate students who identify as being of First Nations origin
Disability	Undergraduate students with disability



**Executive
summary**

Awareness of academic integrity matters is high, but many 'grey areas' a source of frustration among students



Breaches of academic integrity seldom the intended course of action

For the most part, students engage in academic breaches unintentionally or out of necessity, often due to time constraints. Two main scenarios tend to occur.

- When seeking further ideas or inspiration, students operate in the 'grey areas' and inadvertently breach academic integrity, often by way of plagiarism.
- Some students have to juggle study with jobs and may feel forced to breach academic integrity to keep up with academic commitments.

There are many grey areas in academic integrity regarding what constitutes a breach

Students claim to clearly understand what an academic breach is in some scenarios. However, in other situations (e.g. the use of AI, sharing ideas for assignments with peers), students remain unclear about these boundaries, inadvertently crossing that line. This confusion is compounded by unclear and inconsistent standards, which seem to vary by faculty.

Students question 'fairness', given inconsistencies in consequences of breaching academic integrity

There appears to be a general understanding of the penalties for breaching academic integrity. However, students share their frustration as standards appear to vary across lecturers, institutions and even among student enrolment type. There is a perception among both international and domestic students that international students receive more leniency.

Use of AI is fast becoming an integral part of the business world, should be integrated in academia

The majority of students believe that the education sector should embrace the use of AI, considering its widespread adoption in the modern work life. For some students, AI is viewed as a tool to augment their learning experience. As such, students expect educational providers to:

- legitimise the use of AI to prepare them for its imminent use in their careers
- offer a clear understanding of its implications and applications, so they may avoid breaching academic integrity.



Students aware of safety and wellbeing services; communications to them can be easily missed

Safety and wellbeing services well known but for some, barriers appear too high to access them

Students demonstrate a high awareness of the safety and wellbeing services available at their respective institutions, though often and intuitively associating these with onsite mental health support. While students who have accessed these services offer positive feedback, long wait times represent a major pain point for both students who have accessed these services and a barrier for those who have not. Other barriers to using institution provided services include:

- limited availability outside of business hours (coincidentally, this is typically the timing in which students most require these services)
- perceived approachability of staff
- burdensome administrative processes to access these services.

It is worth noting students report feelings of safety while on campus, which serves as a testament to the effectiveness of safety protocols and the execution of these measures by their providers.

Communications must resonate with the younger generation to effectively engage them

Students are frequently inundated with communications, necessitating messages with attention grabbing qualities that resonate with current youth cultural trends to effectively capture their interest.

Currently, students have minimal awareness of TEQSA but do expect the existence of such an organisation. While students do not anticipate TEQSA to directly contact them (as the expectation is for providers to do so), they are not averse to TEQSA's outreach. Regardless of the source, early communication is key to ensure students know where to seek information when needed (often in times of desperation).

Some differences exist among diverse cohorts although mostly similar in mindset, experiences and behaviours



The most prominent differences noted were of those between **international** and domestic students. Key insights include:

- Their context is such that they are somewhat more isolated during their study experience - limited opportunities to 'mingle' with domestic students, they lack the friends and family support and there is a greater need to financially support themselves.
- They have a greater mistrust of the Government. As such, they are less likely to reach out to the Government for help. Their response to TEQSA is also more guarded as a result of this mistrust.
- They also have a fear of deportation or other repercussions on their visa for inappropriate behaviours. This leads to a heightened awareness of academic integrity matters and ensuring they are not behaving inappropriately. That said, there is a perception among both domestic and international student cohorts that international students are treated more leniently for breaches of academic integrity and/or use of AI, given the financial implications of such a breach.
- International students are particularly more positive to the safety and wellbeing measures in place having accessed support when they have needed to travel back to their home countries.



First Nations students claim to have positive experiences with their tertiary education, being able to connect with Indigenous specific support services and other First Nations students. This provides a more supportive environment to meet their needs. Beyond this, no real differences were noted.



Some students **living with disability** similarly claim a more supportive environment. Although others equally echo the challenges experienced by mainstream students. This experience appears to vary from institution to institution.



Smaller student cohorts, including those at private and/or regional universities, appear to enjoy a more nurturing environment where 'everyone knows everyone', providing a supportive and familiar atmosphere. This also acts as a barrier to behaving outside social norms. That said, some shared challenges in connecting with like-minded individuals, particularly those from diverse groups (e.g. LGBTQIA+).



There were minimal differences noted between students attending a regional versus metropolitan based institution. Any differences noted tended to reflect those of smaller student cohorts. Additionally, regional students struggle to fulfill requirements when seeking support (e.g. getting a doctor's certificate).



Detailed findings

The tertiary student experience in Australia



Common challenges experienced by students, impacts on their tertiary education experience



Students across all institutions, courses and backgrounds have similar experiences with tertiary education in Australia, revealing several commonalities.



Variable faculty support. Expectations for support from lecturers and tutors often go unmet, with students reporting delays in responses and inconsistent standards on activities (e.g. use of AI).



Autonomy in time management and responsibilities. Students report the main difference in the tertiary education experience with their previous educational experiences is in managing their own schedules and responsibilities, which can come as a shock. Tertiary education is more self-directed, requiring greater initiative from students.



Part-time work and internships. Given today's economic realities, most students juggle part-time jobs or internships. By extension, this sometimes limits their ability to complete set tasks or assignments in the necessary timeframes.

The adjustment to university life can be challenging and surprising for some students unaccustomed to self-management and self-directed learning. Combined with the inconsistencies in levels of support from faculty, this has implications for how and when they seek support, often leading them to feel isolated in their challenges.

"It's really self-led. You have to sit down and think about – how do you manage your time? Besides that, my teachers, my lecturers, they're not too helpful. If I try to email them or try to reach out, they're always kind of busy and stuff like that." (Domestic, metro)

"When it comes to negative impacts, it's more of like a class by class case where it's like, it depends entirely on who the tutor is, what the course is about, what the class is about. I think that a lot of the negative stuff will be due to specific tutors." (Disability)

"The online course with that many students each year is very much 'you're just a number'. They pump you through. There's very little support. You generally have to figure things out for yourself, and it's very much – just kind of left to your own devices and sink or swim." (Domestic, metro)

"I will sometimes just email a teacher. And I've had help that way before, which is really good, but some teachers don't always reply, and they're not always on their emails." (Non-university)

International students share distinct challenges and issues, adding further stress to their education experience



International students naturally compare and contrast their experiences in Australia with those from their home countries, noticing differences from the outset.

- At orientation, international student activities are scheduled for different times, so students have **limited opportunities to 'mingle'** with domestic students.
- Some international students find themselves **overqualified** for the courses they are studying, using them as a means to an end, mainly, to gain permanent residency or citizenship in Australia (e.g. a qualified doctor studying homecare).
- International students face **higher tuition fees**, exacerbating the need to support themselves while studying in Australia. Furthermore, international students are only permitted to work limited hours, putting further pressure on financial matters.
- Some international students report **lacking the friends and family support** they had back home.
- The fear of **deportation or visa repercussions** adds to their stress and serves as a deterrent for some students to behave inappropriately.

"Can I just also mention that the fact that we're international students, they've made sure to make that very clear to us that – you are international, you're not our people, you're different. Like on the orientation day, domestic students to the left, international students to the right." (International)

"For most of the South Americans that are here, we are already professionals. We already had a path, a career, years of experience in my country, like me, personally, I've been a doctor for 10 years. So, community services is not something that I'm doing because I want to. It's because I have to, in order to get a visa, and that's a reality with most South American international students. You're doing that for the visa to stay while you're building the path to be able to stay in Australia." (International)

"Give us a bit more reassurance as an international student, like, 'If you're in trouble, we will help you. You're not going to get deported. You're not going to get in trouble'." (International)

"I do think it's very hard to make friends just because there's so much diversity and people are from everywhere. It's a good thing, but it's just hard initially for us to make friends. You have to try really hard, I guess." (International)

Diverse student groups and smaller student cohorts enjoy a more nurtured environment, improving overall experience



Diverse student groups have additional supports in place to assist their learning journey

First Nations students claim to have positive experiences with their tertiary education, being able to connect with Indigenous specific support services and other First Nations students. This provides a more supportive environment to meet their needs.

Some students living with disability similarly claim a more supportive environment. Although others equally echo the challenges experienced by mainstream students. This experience appears to vary from institution to institution.



Smaller student cohorts are particularly nurturing

Smaller student cohorts, including those at private universities, appear to enjoy a more nurturing environment where 'everyone knows everyone', providing a supportive and familiar atmosphere. This also acts as a barrier to behaving outside social norms. The level of support from faculty and other members of their respective institutions is high.

Nevertheless, some students from smaller colleges share challenges in connecting with like-minded individuals, particularly for those from diverse groups (e.g. LGBTQIA+).

"I have a pretty unique situation. One of my courses is a BA in Western Civilisation out of Wollongong. It's privately funded by an external institution. It's what I anticipated I would be studying, but I find that the degree that's funded with external money is delivered better because I think the lecturers and the teaching staff have more time and resources and less students to focus on." (Domestic, regional)

"I'm in the Ngarara Willim, which is the Aboriginal centre for RMIT. Before I got accepted into IT, I didn't get the ATAR, and I was a bit scared. So I just called the school and they just asked a couple of questions. Then they transferred me to the Ngarara and they explained everything to me. They were like, no, you'll be fine.. They connected me with another student. So I was talking to her a little bit before I started school. And before I attended school in March, I attended a welcome barbecue. Really nice. It was a bit awkward, but it was nice." (First Nations)

"It's also quite small, so I love small class sizes. I love that I get to know my lecturers. If I just need to have a chat, I can pop into one of their offices and it's quite personal, you know, everyone kind of knows everyone. The only downside of that experience is also probably the fact that everyone knows everyone, so sometimes things can get a bit too personal. Everyone knowing what everyone's doing and so it's hard to be anonymous." (Non-university)



**Academic
integrity**

Students across all cohorts Are familiar with academic integrity issues and understand its purpose



When asked what comes to mind when they hear 'academic integrity', students spontaneously mention references to plagiarism, Turnitin and AI. They also speak to ensuring their work is referenced and the information sourced correctly.

Students across all cohorts Are familiar with academic integrity issues, encountering them through various experiences, such as hearing about breaches by peers, university announcements or accidental incidents. There is also typically a requirement to digitally sign a Student Statement upon submitting each and every assignment that verifies that the student has met their academic integrity obligations.

Further, students seem to grasp the purpose behind academic integrity and why it is important. They reference the need to maintain quality standards as well as the institution protecting its reputation.

This highlights that academic integrity organically permeates students' lives and they embrace it as a part of student life.

"The first thing that comes to mind is, like, the use of AI."
(Domestic, metro)

"When I think of academic integrity, I just sort of think about scholarly sources and making sure that you're referencing correctly if it's not your source. That's what comes to mind for me." (Domestic, metro)

"What it means to me is to that work that you're submitting to university must be yours and yours only. Not copying it from anything or not copying anyone else's work." (International)

"In my degree, I guess everyone does the work themselves because at the end of the day, we will be those people who are sitting in front of a patient, and it's our sole responsibility to give them an answer. And to give them a very tangible way to digest something or give a result." (Domestic, regional)

"Academic integrity is a good base for the university students before they go into the workforce where it may become really, really important." (Domestic, metro)

"Like, the whole reason we're going to uni is to get a degree that shows that we have done the work. If you don't do the work, then it kinda invalidates the degree." (Domestic, metro)

However, students question where the line for breaches of academic integrity is drawn



Maintaining academic integrity can be perceived as overwhelming, tedious and time-consuming. The boundaries between acceptable practices and breaches of integrity are often blurred, particularly for new tertiary education students.

Examples of where students question the line of breach includes:

- Using Getty Images in assignments without proper attribution.
- Sharing one's assignment with a peer to help spark ideas, raising questions about where the line is between helping and breaching integrity.
- Contributing pre-developed work (e.g. code) to a group assignment.

These scenarios illustrate the complexities and challenges students face in adhering to academic integrity standards.

"We're allowed to use royalty free sounds [for our project], so I'll use royalty free images to do the little, video aspect. And when we showed the teacher our progress, she was like, no, you can't do that. You know you're taking those images. I thought it was kinda odd because we have to give a reference list anyway." (Domestic, metro)

"You know someone's cheating because they obviously copy the whole text from AI, and there's no referencing. But the thing with programming is you can't reference it. It's just what you know, and you just gotta code it out. And if you copy the whole section of code that you didn't do yourself, no one would ever find out. Unless it's something that you've never learned before and they find suspicious, but it's really hard to catch when people do that." (Domestic, regional)

"I guess the only question I had at the start was how much could you help somebody in their essay. Say, if someone saying 'I'm stuck, can you read this and then give me some tips or something like that'. I wasn't sure whether that was something that would be allowed or not?"
(Non-university)

"I know of a lot of cases of people who, if there's a quiz-based assessment, they take it in groups. And there's always the teachers who always say 'We've got a couple of mechanisms in there to stop people', but in the grand scheme of things, you can't really do a whole lot to mitigate people doing that."
(Domestic, metro)

Students share their personal experiences with breaching academic integrity, both deliberate and unintentional



Jane (Domestic, metro)

Jane shared an old assignment with a friend at university who was struggling with the subject, with the intention of providing inspiration. Unbeknownst to her, the friend submitted that assignment in its entirety as her own. Naturally, this was flagged as soon as it was handed in and Jane was called into a disciplinary meeting, where she was made to understand that she had breached academic integrity. Even just sharing her content (regardless of the intention), she was now marked as an at-risk student as a result.



Chloe (First Nations)

Chloe had a recent group assignment, where she felt compelled to upload the completed assignment to an AI detector. She discovered that an entire section by a group member was flagged as AI content. She approached the member who admitted to using it, and re-did his part of the assignment in time to hand it in.



Anita (International)

Anita used ChatGPT when it first came out in early 2023, which coincided with the beginning of her course. While she did seek feedback on the quality of her work from her lecturer, Anita did not divulge that this was written by ChatGPT. Nevertheless, she thought she had gotten away with using AI given her lecturer did not pick up any misconduct. Unsurprisingly, upon submitting her assignment, Turnitin immediately flagged her as having breached academic integrity. Given there were no formal guides around use of AI at the time, the university let her off with a warning.



Jay (Domestic, metro)

Jay had an assignment due and did not have enough time to see a doctor to obtain a medical certificate in order to request an extension. Out of desperation, he falsified the necessary medical documents to get the extension, understanding very well that this is committing a fraud. Upon discovery, Jay was suspended for a semester.



Rashid (Domestic, metro)

Rashid had a take-home online exam with no measures of invigilation. Despite having to 'sign' a form to abide by academic integrity, Rashid undertook the exam in a group setting where he and his peers shared their answers. The faculty never found out.



Students aware it is their responsibility to uphold academic integrity but expect institutes to assist

Students recognise that it is first and foremost their personal responsibility to uphold academic integrity, understanding that university ultimately prepares them for their future careers. They acknowledge there is no excuse for not checking their work, given the availability of software that can check for plagiarism (and to an extent, the illegitimate use of AI).

However, students believe that institutions also bear the onus of setting clear rules and regulations for both students and lecturers and leading by example.

Consistency is crucial, as students note discrepancies in how different faculty members approach elements of academic integrity.

For example, students share personal experiences of some lecturers encouraging the use of AI while others have a blanket rule against it. As such, some students urge their lecturers and tutors to share the marking rubric for greater transparency, although this is not always forthcoming.

These experiences cause confusion for students and opens a risk for misinterpretation of what is allowable and not, and inadvertent breaches of academic integrity.

“For accountability, we are accountable for us, but the university will be accountable for looking if we have followed the rules. So the faculty and professors are responsible for creating the rules for student integrity. And the faculty needs to follow them as well.” (International)

“Yourself, so me. The university definitely plays a part like if they’re going to be using any references or anything like that in the lecture notes or anything as such, then it should be cited.” (First Nations)

“I think it’s anytime we tick a box that says you haven’t breached academic integrity and then it doesn’t matter who you are, whether you are an undergraduate student, postgrad or a lecturer. I think at the point of which you tick a box you’re contractually obliged. I think then you need to make sure that you’re not shady or breaching whatever the terms and conditions are.” (Domestic, regional)

“I think it’s students, but also, the academics, like the people within the university as well. Let’s use the example of ChatGPT, so I’m thinking, if that’s sort of portrayed to students and then students are like – okay, we won’t do this if our lecturers aren’t doing it. I think it’s a bit of a push and pull between institutions and student.” (Domestic, metro)

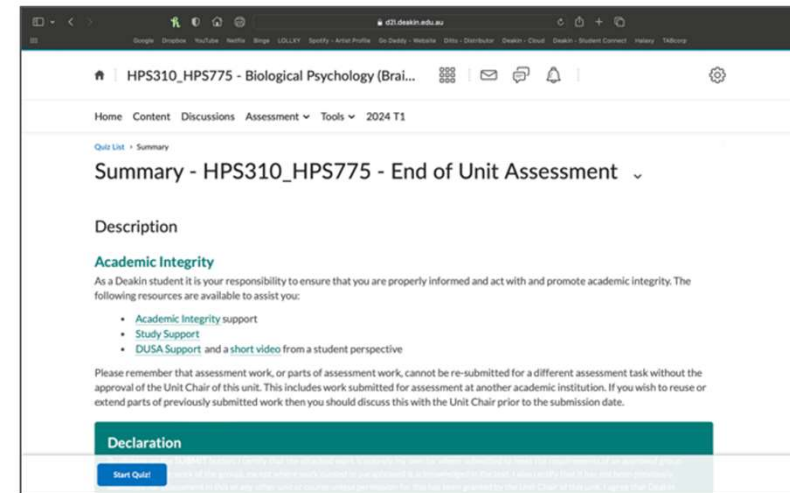
Students are exposed to information on academic integrity everywhere, but depth of information varies by institution



For most tertiary education students, information on academic integrity permeates every facet of their studies.

Academic integrity is typically introduced as a module to be completed as part of student orientation, before any units commence. Generic information on academic integrity is ubiquitous, with students often required to sign declarations when submitting assignments and encountering reminders in lecture notes. Some students have noticed recent updates to include AI-related guidelines, while others who have not seen any guidelines on AI use for academic work urge institutions to create one.

However, some students warn that this pervasive approach can backfire as people learn to tune out.



“Every single time you submit an assignment, you have to upload the document and then it gets you to sign the student statement, which basically is about confirming that you haven’t plagiarised or done anything else bad. Like, it’s all your own work and everything.” (Domestic, metro)

“They keep reinforcing it every single time. They give you constant reminders that you cannot do that (cheat).”
(International)

“I feel like in every class, they will have like a module at the very beginning that says, like, the usual spiel about academic integrity.” (Disability)

“The student statement, which to be honest I’m not sure if I’ve ever read it, but I know that it’s about... I might have read it once in first year, but I don’t remember.” (Domestic, metro)

Breaches of academic integrity are often unintentional or used as a last resort in certain circumstances



At their core, students do not want to breach academic integrity and this is consistent across all student cohorts. They understand that genuine learning is essential for future success. Students generally do not intend to cheat the system and see breaches as one-off incidents rather than systemic habits.

Laziness is often cited as a reason for academic misconduct, but students recognise that various factors may contribute to such behaviour:

- **Life circumstances.** Students may feel they have no choice due to personal or financial pressures, such as balancing work and university.
- **Poor support and denied extensions.** When legitimate requests for extensions are denied or support is unavailable, students may resort to dishonest practices.
- **Honest mistakes.** Incidents like improperly using Getty Images can lead to unintended breaches.
- **Low barriers.** Cheating becomes easier with take-home exams, non-invigilated tests and opportunities to share answers in group settings.

Some students share experiences of being accused of breaches (mostly in their first year), feeling it was part of their learning process but highlight the need for more guidance and support from their institution.

"I think it's just laziness." (Disability)

"Students are desperate and I understand that, and to get through their degree, to get through life and balance work life, maybe then it might be okay just to pass." (Disability)

"When you do have circumstances like I have had... I had numerous instances where I've had to go to a doctor for anxiety related issues. I can understand why they've got principles and stuff that they have to abide by, but sometimes it just comes across as insensitive or it can be disrespectful." (Domestic, metro)

"I understand like sometimes situations do happen with people and they're left with no choice. Sometimes when life happens and you're really stuck or emotionally drained, you just wanna get things done. So I think that's when a lot of students get tempted to use these services." (International)

"You could be doing so well. And then this week, suddenly you find out something awful has happened on Thursday. You've got an assignment due on Sunday that you were always gonna spend this weekend doing. So now it's the weekend. I've got to get this through and I can't access these support services because it's the weekend." (Non-university)



The stated definition of academic integrity aligns with students' expectations

"There was one unit with no marking rubrics. There were just four assignments listed in the entire sheet, and you had to do four of them. And whenever you asked the Professor, he said, 'Yeah, I'll tell you when the exam is about to happen'. And the students were panicking, two or three weeks before, because he hasn't released any marking rubrics or anything. And the first three assignments were not graded until the last one was submitted." (International)

"It does definitely come down to everyone's got a part and a responsibility to play. It's important that we as students know when to show academic integrity, but it's important that teachers and researchers and all that keep the academic integrity up to date. So I think the responsibility falls on everyone, and I completely agree with that definition." (Domestic, metro)

"I guess I didn't really think about the academic community and people who put out the resources have the expectation, but it makes sense. You can't pull something out that's not your own and not act with academic integrity and then it be able to work without some sort of flow on effect." (Disability)

Definition of academic integrity

The expectation that teachers, students, researchers and all members of the academic community act with honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

There is little surprise from students, when exposed to the above definition. While most acknowledge they have not encountered it articulated in this specific manner, this definition aligns with their expectations of what academic integrity should be.

That said, some students challenge the notion of 'fairness', providing some examples to support their scepticism.

- Domestic students observe that international students tend to receive more leniency in terms of scoring assignments and allocating penalties when academic integrity is breached (i.e. cheating).
- Some students share their frustration with the lack of marking rubrics and the possibility of unfair evaluations as a result of that.



Artificial intelligence (AI)



The overriding sentiment is that not using AI is the epitome of being left behind

Artificial intelligence (AI) permeates a student's life with students very aware of its existence and potential uses as part of their studies.

There is a sense that not using AI means being left behind, given how AI is fast becoming an integral part of modern work life. Indeed, students suggest that it will be important to understand its potential applications in their field of study as this will be their reality upon graduating.

Given this, students believe there is an immediate opportunity for tertiary education to incorporate AI into the curriculum rather than to completely avoid it, the latter observed as the current stance.

"I think it is something that they probably should introduce more of because it is something that's in the workplace in five, 10 years time in almost every industry. It's going to start being included more and more and more."

(Domestic, regional)

"Somebody who is not using it is just wasting their time because they can get things that easily. And that person is actually the epitome of a person who's left behind."

(International)

"If you incorporate it in a way that students can use it progressively and meaningfully, you sort of equal the playing field there and it's less of a concern." (Domestic, metro)

"They have a sort of chat about academic integrity, and it's really hammered home, but then also, the college has currently been changing their curriculum a little bit to try and combat some of the AI usage that's been caught from some students. And so they've had some meetings with all of the students to explain ways that they're going to try and change the course so that it could perhaps be a better way to make it, like, even for everybody." (Non-university)



Students use AI in a multitude of ways they consider acceptable

Students share their experiences using AI to assist with their coursework.



Idea generation. Most students admit to using AI to formulate ideas, noting that AI-generated ideas can sometimes be inaccurate. They are aware that they need to be prudent in their use of AI and still employ their own thinking.



Practical uses. Some students use it to help with summarising notes, referencing, organising content and paragraphing for essays. They justify that use of AI here is to make study more efficient and elevate their work quality rather than to meet minimum requirements.



Spelling and grammar. Students regularly use spelling and grammar tools (non generative) to check their assignments prior to submitting.

Some students admit to using paid versions of AI tools for its enhanced features. They consider this a prudent investment to elevating their learning and quality of assignments.

There is a general sense among AI users that when employed appropriately, using AI for assignments should be no different to sparking ideas through Wikipedia or discussing ideas with friends and peers.

"I use that to summarise my notes when I have a massive slideshow about 80, 90 slides. Don't have physical time to read every single slide. I would just copy and paste everything into Claude AI." (First Nations)

"And actually, because I'm lazy and we have to order A-Z, I get it to list all my references A to Z, tell me which one goes where." (Disability)

"I'd say probably an appropriate use of it would be for research. Once, I gave it an essay question and said, 'do you have any recommended sources that I could use, for this question?'. So things like that, it's kind of using it as a more intelligent form of Google." (Non-university)

"I've definitely seen people who generate an idea or a paragraph and then what they do is they don't copy and paste it. They just look at it and then reword it themselves, and I think they're sort of writing about a dot point AI generates." (Domestic, metro)

"I've used Grammarly, now I think about it, and that's a form of AI. I've had lecturers encourage you to use Grammarly to pull you up for certain mistakes. But I just don't think it's anywhere near the same as ChatGPT because there's no original ideas, especially on the free version." (Domestic, metro)

A few different tool students are aware of and/or have used



Commonly used tools are Grammarly, Google Scholar and ChatGPT. Interestingly, some students are not aware Grammarly and Google Scholar are AI-powered tools.



Grammarly predominantly used for spelling and grammar checking as well as finessing language in written assignments.



Google Scholar predominantly used to help with writing literature reviews, as it is considered a more reliable and acceptable tool to help with assignments.



ChatGPT predominantly used for sparking ideas, developing a resource list and summarising large volumes of source content into a smaller, digestible format.

Less used tools include QuillBot, Course Hero, Co-Pilot and Claude AI.



*The use of these tools were not seen to be a breach of academic integrity in and of themselves. Rather it was **how** the tools were used that determined their acceptability for use.*

The application of AI is unclear for many; desire for clearer guidance and/ or further integration into courses



Despite some students using AI in what they consider to be appropriate ways, there are still some 'grey zones' with a lack of clear understanding about what may be allowed and what is not. This is exacerbated by mixed messages from lecturers on its use and application, some who actively use it in the classroom setting.

Students suggest that **clearer guidance is needed**. There is currently not enough information on the legitimate use of AI. While some students appreciate that detailed guidelines is a big ask given the evolution of AI in tertiary education, there is a perceived need for institutions to appropriately manage and update their policies accordingly. This is mainly because the use of AI is currently considered a breach of academic integrity.

Integrating AI into the curriculum is a further student expectation. Students expect faculty members to incorporate AI into their course content and assignments in a consistent manner. Other students suggest a step further, that lecturers create AI-proof content – describing these materials as less 'copy and pasting' and more 'critical thinking'.

Notably, students share that some lecturers, albeit a small proportion, have already started doing so.

"Some subjects like, do not use it whatsoever. If you do, there will be, consequences for it. But I do know some other subjects are a bit more lenient with it." (Domestic, metro)

"I find that one of my lecturers, she does a really good job at integrating it with class. She will type in answers and she'll be like we'll come up with whatever we think it is and then she'll type it into ChatGPT and then say alright, 'This is right, this is wrong about the response that we've given. This is right, this is wrong about ChatGPT. This is the actual response that I want to say.' So, she demonstrates the advantages and disadvantages of using a platform as such." (First Nations)

"There are certain subjects that you don't even think of using AI. And then there's some subjects where it's encouraged. Some of my tutors were super against it, but some tutors actually encouraged us to take some ideas from AI and then develop our own thoughts on it. So I think there needs a proper distinction between tutors' expectations."
(International)

There is still mistrust around the accuracy and quality of AI outputs



Invariably, there exist a group of students who do not trust AI, for the following reasons.

- AI's inability to reference back to its original source, a function enabling students to validate the credibility of the information provided.
- The recent advent of AI hallucinations, which has further eroded trust among students on the credibility of its output.
- A general mistrust of the quality of the information.

"AI technology is a black box technology. It can't retrace itself back to its sources, right, not properly anyway. So, I don't use ChatGPT right now because they can't explain what they did."
(International)

"We just have to be careful that what is being presented by artificial intelligence that it is actually legitimate information. That it's not off a blog post or Facebook or a social media platform, that it's actually, reputable. So it's like from a government source." (Disability)

"I don't use it because I don't trust it. I don't really use it because I just don't trust the content that it puts out."
(Domestic, metro)

"I've had a few instances where I've put something in and I know the answer, but just to test it. And it's always wrong."
(Domestic, metro)

The use of AI is not always detectable, giving students an opportunity to misuse AI



Despite its permeance, students note that the use of AI varies depending on the nature of the assignment and the individual's willingness to use it (despite understanding the risks of breaching academic integrity). Some applications appear more detectable than others, suggesting there is opportunity for students to misuse AI.

Written coursework is easier to detect for AI-generated content, which acts as a barrier to using it. Notwithstanding, some written assignments, designed to encourage critical thinking (rather than copy-pasting), makes it more difficult to use AI.

Technical work, such as coding or Excel formulas, is expected to be harder to identify as AI-generated – thereby making it easier for students to use AI to complete their assignment.

Some **course types** (e.g. medicine, physiotherapy) require students to interact with other people (patient, clients), making the use of AI pointless. Notably, some students admit to using AI to improve their communication skills with patients.

“Just the nature of the course is a very interactive. You're touching people, you're moving joints and stuff around.”
(Disability)

“One of my friends made his entire Excel finance assessment from ChatGPT and it went through. I mean, it's very difficult to catch an Excel assessment because it's usually the same thing.” (International)

“Some people might do it, but they're not going to be at the top of their class, you know, they'll use ChatGPT, and it'll spit out something that's possible, but it's not going to spit out anything that's really that great. So, it's not going to give you HDs, especially for those degrees like psychology and things like that, you know, where you need to get into Honours to actually become a psychologist. It's not really going to help those students.” (Domestic, regional)

The stated definition of artificial intelligence aligns with students' expectations



*"It sounds like it is taking into account that AI exists and it's not really going anywhere. That makes sense."
(Domestic, metro)*

*"I was gonna say, I think like this portion of text says, like, it's a helpful tool and it's probably even encouraged in some subjects."
(Domestic, regional)*

*"I'm happy that an expectation is set on the use of AI right now."
(International)*

*"It's a positive thing. I think it's just how you approach and use it. If you mistreat it, it's not very good, but you can use it for a bunch of things and get the really good use of technology."
(First Nations)*

Using Generative Artificial Intelligence or AI

Generative Artificial Intelligence, commonly known as generative AI or AI, is progressing at a rapid rate. This form of technology includes AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT. It's important to understand that, depending on your university or college's policies, using AI as part of your studies may be restricted or banned. Alternatively, there might be subjects or tasks where the use of AI is encouraged or even required. Where use of AI is permitted, you will need to understand how the use of these tools is referenced. Use of AI in a way that is not consistent with your institution's rules can result in a finding of academic misconduct.

Students are generally aligned with this definition of artificial intelligence. It makes sense to them and highlights the fact that AI is in use in an educational setting.

It also sets the expectation for students around its use.

That said, it does validate students' perceptions around the lack of consistency in the use of AI across institutions, citing that AI is sometimes banned but at other times encouraged.



There is also alignment with stated uses of AI that are appropriate and inappropriate

Generally acceptable uses of AI

Using tools like Grammarly for spell checking and grammar checking, using artificial intelligence to spark ideas (e.g. to help getting started with an assignment or project, where to find relevant resources, to brainstorm topic ideas), using artificial intelligence to help you explain or understand a topic.

Students concur that this statement around acceptable uses of AI aligns with what their own spontaneous thinking is on the subject. There is nothing noted in this statement that surprises students in the way AI is generally accepted to be used.

"I think that's good because you're allowed to use a calculator to do maths. There's no reason you shouldn't be allowed to use tools available to you for other things like that."

(Domestic, metro)

"I think most of that sounds fine." (Non-university)

Use of AI that might be seen as inappropriate

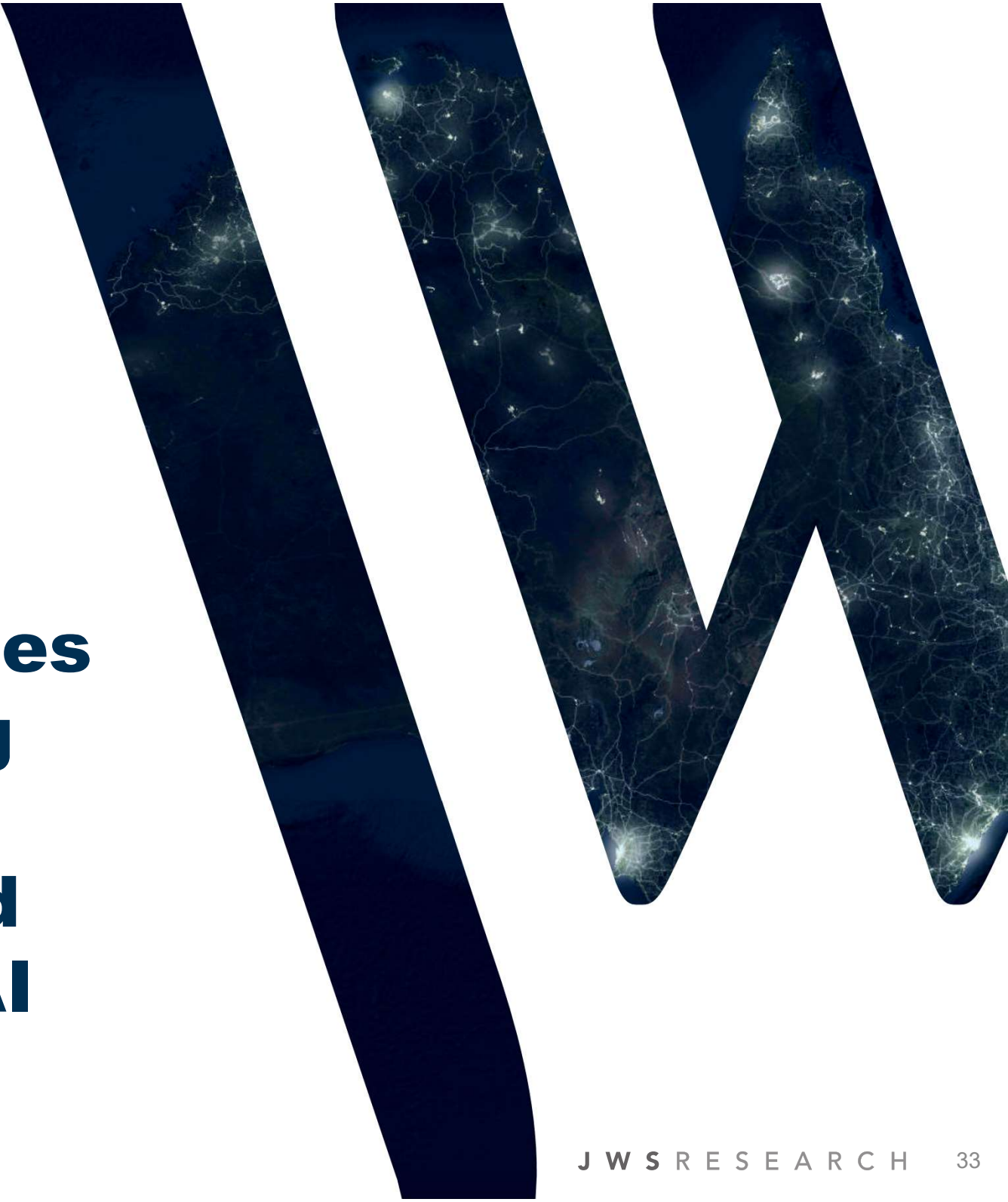
Using a bot to write a lab report, using artificial intelligence to write your essay or complete answers in a take-home exam, relying on AI generated information as your primary source, not appropriately referencing AI when it is used, using AI in a way that is against your institution's policies.

For the most part, students concur with this statement. There is clarity on which elements of the use of AI that are seen as inappropriate to use.

For some, it is a surprise that using AI provided it is referenced might be an acceptable use of this technology, with most believing that it's use in this way (referenced or not) would not have been acceptable. This is 'new news' for some students.

"It's what I expected about inappropriately. I think the only thing that stands out here is not appropriately referencing. As far as my university goes, I don't think I've heard anyone talk about the university actually asking us to reference AI. They just simply don't encourage it." (International)

"Nope. I think there's anything super groundbreaking in that." (Domestic, regional)



**Consequences
of breaching
academic
integrity and
mis-use of AI**

Students aware there are consequences but expect them to be appropriate to the breach committed



Most students are aware that there are consequences of academic misconduct (e.g. failing a subject, having to retake a course). Notably, standards appear to differ across different institutions, especially towards the use of AI.

Expulsion is considered overly severe, though most students are aware that this may be needed for repeat offenders.

Essentially, students expect punishment to be commensurate with the nature and frequency of the breach. They believe consequences should escalate as needed but should not immediately result in penalties like expulsion.

"I mean, some universities have more severe penalties. If you use AI in a subject or a course, you're not allowed to re-enroll with that university. If you breach academic integrity, it then affects you, your study record and admissibility for other courses into other universities. It really just depends. I think having a black mark against your name on your study record just because of AI is a bit much, but I suppose people have to maintain their academic level of respect and integrity."
(Disability)

"I think if it's like a repeat offense, then, yeah, it should be more severe." (Domestic, metro)

"It seems like as long as the punishment is in line with what the action was, and the university has communicated what that looks like, then it seems fair enough."
(Domestic, regional)



There is a general perception that domestic and international students are penalised differently



International students appear to have a heightened awareness of academic integrity matters as they face substantial implications on their visa conditions and heavier financial consequences for breaches.

Interestingly, students perceive differences in treatment between domestic and international students when it comes to consequences of breaches.

Both international and domestic students observe that institutions tend to be more lenient with international students, attributing this to their higher tuition fees and that the expulsion of international students may have a greater impact on the institution's reputation. This leads to the belief that penalty standards and expulsion risks are lower for international students.

Some domestic students (who have been personally penalised or observed a peer through the process), report feeling that penalties assigned to them are harsher than those given to their international peers.

“And I found out other students who were international who were paying more money, had the same issue as me, and they never got an email saying they were kicked out of the course.” (Non-university)

*“When it does come to expulsion, I think when you get really harsh penalties like that, especially when it impacts, say, international (students) with their visas, I think that's be got to be really, really careful. We're not just talking about just going back home if you get expelled. If I get expelled, I can just keep going with my life. If it's with an international student, we're talking about people being deported back home.”
(Domestic, metro)*

“My friend got charged for academic integrity or something, and he explained the entire situation to my Professor and the Professor understood that. And she was like, ‘OK, I'm here for you.’” (International)

*“I've copied some bits of my stuff and, put them into my assignment and I've gotten away with it. But I have a relationship with the tutor. I have a relationship with the lecturer. And they understand that I'm putting efforts into this.”
(International)*

Perception for some that the consequences can be longer term, impacting on job prospects and career paths



Some students spontaneously identify the longer term impacts of breaches of academic integrity.

In particular, the **loss of job prospects** or potential to interrupt a career path is seen as a potential impact for students.

Some also note that even having a **'black mark' against your record** for minor breaches of academic integrity can potentially negatively impact students' career.

These consequences are not immediately evident to all students, but certainly act as a deterrent for intentional breaches.

"I think having a black mark against your name on your study record just because of AI is a bit much." (Disability)

"I know it could be the absolute last option [to cheat] if it even is an option because that could ruin your whole study. Your whole career almost. It's like once you're able to cheat at one university, like, I don't know if it links up..." (Non-university)

"I'm thinking, in the long term, that it's not worth the repercussions, when it comes down to it." (First Nations)

"This means that you lose out on certain potential, like, good employment opportunities because especially after doing a Bachelor, that's very important to get a good job. I think that's the entire point of people doing a Bachelor's so that you can get some practical experience. And if the consequences of academic integrity hinder that, then I think that's a really big thing to be concerned about." (International)



Stated penalties for breaches align with student expectations

Upon showing students an explanatory note around potential penalties for breaches of academic integrity (including the inappropriate use of AI), students claim that these align with their own expectations around the types of penalties that might apply. Indeed, some students have experienced these penalties themselves and/or have peers who have received these penalties. As such, for the most part, students claim an awareness of these penalties.

As noted previously, their expectation is that the penalties would be applied as commensurate with the breach committed.

In this light, the impact on an international student is seen by some as potentially quite severe. Penalties, especially expulsion may potentially have wide-reaching implications, including on a student's visa.

Most expect these penalties would only apply in certain circumstances.

Penalties for breaching academic integrity

Having to repeat the assessment task or unit of study, failing the assessment task, unit of study or course, being expelled from your institution, which may impact your student visa (if you are an international student).

"They're all pretty fair. If you choose to do it, you kind of run the risk." (Domestic, regional)

"This is pretty perfectly what I've been told."
(Domestic, metro)

"Definitely. But I do think that expulsion would be substituted for suspension because at the end of the day, they do want you to come back to uni and try again, do well and succeed. These institutions aren't set up for failure." (Domestic, metro)

"That last one, student visa, I hope that people get a couple of trials before they just get their entire visa cancelled. That'd be mental. So the they should definitely get a chance to uphold academic integrity." (Domestic, metro)



Attitudes to those who breach are a combination of derision and empathy



Those who are empathetic...

These students are more likely to relate to someone else's situation and assume they are struggling in some way, driving them to commit a breach. Or, they assume an honest and unintentional mistake has been made. Either way, they display empathy towards these students and would want to see lenient penalties apply.

This represents most students.

"If I hear someone get busted for it, it really doesn't affect me. I more feel empathetic towards their circumstances that might have led them to that because I've heard a lot of cases where it's just being completely accidental." (Domestic, metro)

"I feel sorry for them. I understand that some situations do happen with people and they're left with no choice." (International)



Those who are derisive...

These students assume the breach was intentional. For the most part, they see students who have committed a breach as being irresponsible or fail to understand why someone would risk their academic position. Further, they are more likely to want to distance themselves from this behaviour (and by extension, students who have breached or are at risk of intentionally breaching academic integrity), claiming that it does not align with their own values.

"I know of people that have breached academic integrity. And I kinda just look at them and go, 'Well, I don't know what you wanted me to say to you other than you're an idiot, why would you think that's okay?'" (Disability)

"I think the purpose of doing a degree is really to learn more about the world, to shape your worldview. You're kind of taking away some of that education if you're not actually putting in the work for your assignments. I was thinking that's your business." (Non-university)

Students aware of external services that offer to help with assignments and the risks associated with using them



SCENARIO

You're doing a collaborative assignment, when one of the other students tells the group that they know other students are using work from a file sharing site for the assignment. They suggest your groups does the same.

This scenario often prompts students to share their own personal experiences (struggles) with group assignments.

While very few students have had direct experiences with group members using file sharing sites, the common pain point is a peer using AI to generate their portion of the group assignment, jeopardising the entire group's academic integrity. There have been instances where group members were fortunate enough to detect this and had to re-work that portion of the assignment at the last minute. That said, some students share that they can appreciate that the 'cheater' had only done so, so as not to disappoint the group by not turning in any work at all.

Overall, most students are against using other peoples' materials (especially from corporatised businesses) but seem clear that it is not a breach of academic integrity when helping a friend or peer with assignments.

SCENARIO

You receive a message on WhatsApp telling you about a service which can write assignments for you. You've been busy at work, and you're struggling with your deadlines. What are your thoughts?

Students appear very familiar with this scenario, offering that they are consistently and constantly 'bombarded' with these messages on Whatsapp. Two main concerns arise:

- **Quality.** Students expect assignments to be of poor quality, either from personal experience or word of mouth (i.e. feedback from or observation of peers who have used these services).
- **Plagiarism.** Most students expect service providers to recycle work from other students, posing an unnecessary risk of plagiarism.

For most students, these combined risks are compelling enough for them to complete their own assignment. There is a sense that even if they produce poor quality work, there is a chance that it would be better than that of those delivered by service providers.



Students are generally not aware of ‘integrity’ materials; preference for supportive messaging over threats

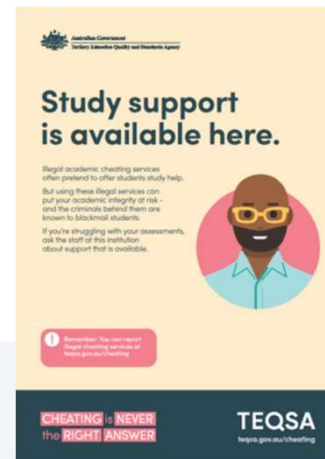
Students recognise these posters provide information on academic integrity, but find the deployment of scare tactics unnecessary. There is a stronger preference for a more reassuring tone with practical information of the type of help that is available. Notably, most students in this research have not seen these before.



Students find this poster somewhat unexpected, expressing shock at the mention of jail time and a \$110,000 fine. While such measures might be appropriate for a syndicated service provider, students feel that these actions are too severe when directed towards students. Most students

are unclear that this is intended for service providers rather than users, given the headline statement refers to ‘Do your own work’. When perceptions were corrected, some students question the credibility of this threat, noting that many providers are based overseas and there would be no practical way to police this.

“I’ve never seen this before. I think it changes my mind. There’s two years jail!” (Domestic, regional)



Most students prefer this messaging over the other, given it is inherently more supportive.

However, the reality is that this lacks credibility because the support is generally difficult to access.

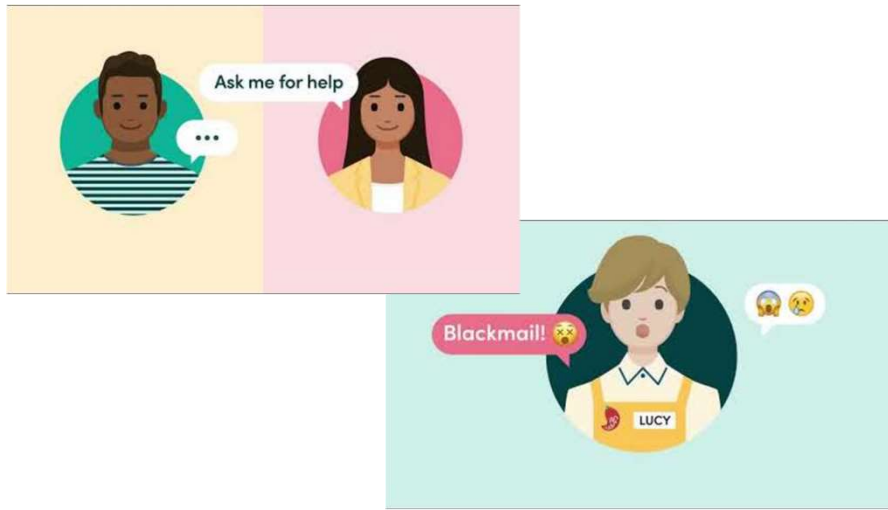


Notably, international students generally have a different

perception. For most students, there is no reason compelling enough to reach out to the Australian Government, even if it is to seek help or support. There is a sense that seeking assistance might lead to deportation rather than getting support.

“It’s creating anxiety. I would rather reach out to my university than to the Government. Why would I want to get noticed?” (International)

Students appear to have an interest in learning more about the consequences of breaching academic integrity



On the whole, students consider these videos effective in terms of providing perspectives that they have not considered before – the downsides of cheating and the possibilities of being:

- known as ‘the cheater’, if found out and faculty decides to share with the class or cohort.
- blackmailed by service providers.

“It conveys the point. It helps lot of people understand that there is another way out. But it didn't sound like, a real situation. It sounded a bit too set up.” (Domestic, regional)

However, further adjustments would assist understanding.

- Provide greater **clarity** on what the acceptable activities are to help students understand where the line is in terms of an academic integrity breach (especially around the use of AI).
- Ensure information shared is **easy to digest**. Students request concise summaries (much like the posters presented to them) with the option to access detailed information for those who prefer more comprehensive guidance.
- Add **practical information**. There is appetite to learn more of the consequences of breaching academic integrity (e.g. blackmail, being branded as ‘the cheater’). Students suggest including long-term impacts on their education outcomes and professional careers.
- **Improve visuals**, by way of featuring real people to make the message more relatable and engaging. The current use of cartoons and icons are considered dated and childlike.

Providing this information can help students better understand the importance of maintaining academic integrity and mitigate the potential risks of misconduct.



**Safety and
wellbeing**

Student safety and wellbeing supports well known but often associated with counselling services



By and large, students tend to automatically associate 'student safety and wellbeing' with mental health services and emotional wellbeing, as well as considering physical safety and security.

Positively, students are aware of the mental health services available at their institutions. A significant concern, however, is the long wait times to access these services – ranging from 3 weeks to 6 months. Some students report cancelling their appointments because they no longer feel they need them after such a long wait. That said, students recognise, and are comforted, that severe cases do get special considerations.

Despite frustration with long wait times, students trust and understand that the staff in these services are doing their best within the constraints of limited resources. Students who have accessed help through their institutions are grateful for the mental health services provided.



International students are particularly appreciative, commending the availability and quality of mental health services in Australian institutions. They note that such support is often not available in their home countries and consider mental health providers in Australia non-judgmental and supportive.

"I would say having a healthy balance, like healthy mental health and physical health. You need both. You can't have one or the other. You take your whole self to uni as you do any workplace." (Domestic, metro)

"I think just making sure that students are feel supported in their studies and that they're able to complete their studies in an environment, that not only feels safe physically, but also mentally. That nothing else is hindering them to complete their studies." (Domestic, regional)

"Physically safe, from bullying and violence. And then emotionally safe, like you're given special considerations for example, you've actually been given the adequate time to complete that sort of stuff. I know there's one called Student Life ... that have actual registered psychologists."
(Non-university)

"There's a few up there. You know, there's the generic ones like Lifeline. Kids helplines. There's 1800 respect." (Disability)

"I think with, universities, most university at least mine have a very strong, team today with student wellbeing and safety. Even with things like alcohol or anything like that, they're always ready to support." (International)



There is a sense of safety on campuses

Students generally feel safe on campus, even when having to stay late nights towards the end of a semester. Beyond just security measures, students also consider some of following aspects part of the responsibility of the safety and wellbeing team.



Lab safety. Responsible for ensuring the right processes are in place to ensure safety in labs.



Fire safety. Responsible for training students and faculty on evacuations, ensuring people know what to do in the event of a fire.



Visual impairment. Some students share that their institutions do not always immediately consider their needs (e.g. upgrading lecture theatres, marking pathways), but when prompted, institutions have taken action within a reasonable timeframe.



Physical safety at night. Employing security guards to monitor the campus at night.

Sexual harassment. Positively, there were no spontaneous mentions of sexual harassment on campus. Students generally do not observe such behaviours on campus.

Pro-Palestinian protests. There is very little mention of protests. Students impacted share that universities have communicated well about management of these activities on campus.

“When I do when I go on campus, do I feel safe? Yes. We have security guards, so I’m quite happy for that.”
(International)

“I do think that if someone had gone in the building, the lecture halls, and gone, ‘Oh, how is someone who maybe doesn’t have good eyesight going respond to this or can’t hear very well learn in here?’ I think that they would have been addressed so those with disability can keep up. Like, it’s not that they’re (the institution) purposefully doing something harmful.” (Disability)

“Safety, just making sure that everything that happens on your campuses is respectful that nobody’s being disrespected either verbally or sexually or in any of those manners and that there’s always someone who you can go to if you have any of those issues as well.” (Non-university)

“I don’t want get political, but my university’s never been cooperative about people protesting on campus, and they have emailed a lot about things concerning everyone’s health and safety and making sure everyone’s aware of what’s going on. They’ve been very vocal about that.” (Domestic, metro)

Students aware of activities that promote emotional and social wellbeing but often have no time to participate



"I'm enrolled in the Ngarara Willim centre at RMIT. And they post and offer a lot of free tutoring services, mental health (services) for free, lunch days and positive things like that. So I feel like that's not a problem for me." (First Nations)

"My uni has the same. We've got counselors, meditation classes. We've actually got student wellbeing events that the student committee run. So there's, like... playing pingpong at lunch and discuss your whatever issues you've got, just have a chat. They try and really foster a community environment. Whether people participate in those things or not, I'm not sure, but they do offer them." (Domestic, metro)

"I'm quite lucky that our university do actually support us in times where our attendance is not up to the mark. So if I miss 2 to 3 weeks consecutively, my program convener would call me directly, and not just email, but call me directly. And would check up on me to see if everything's alright. And the dean would send me an email." (International)

"Because of that strenuous nature of study, you kind of feel like you missing out on all other aspects of university life like the socialisation part, activities, relationships, clubs work as well. Definitely needing to make money, that's kind of a part of it." (Disability)

There is a perception that students generally feel a healthy sense of emotional and social wellbeing. Most students are aware of the initiatives and activities that are available on campus (and online, though to a smaller extent), where its main purpose is to help students foster a sense of belonging. These activities include:

- General social activities which can be fairly impromptu or regular events (e.g. barbecue nights).
- Formal clubs and associations, designed for like-minded people or students with similar interests to meet and connect.

Notably, students share that participating in these activities for the first time could be awkward, but they find it worthwhile.


The main barrier to joining is to find the time to do so, as most students are already balancing their studies with work and other commitments.





Barriers to accessing student safety and wellbeing services considered too high for some students


Students typically utilise services (often connecting it to student services) for assignment or exam extensions.


Student experiences vary. Some have positive feedback. Others, however, share barriers to access.


 The need to such help is often outside business hours, noting the difficulty in getting assistance at night and on weekends, especially when assignments are nearly due.

 Approachability and responsiveness of staff, especially lecturers, as their first port of call.

 The administrative process is considered burdensome, deterring students from using them.

 Requirement for doctor's certificate is sometimes difficult. Moreover, this out of pocket expense is too expensive for some students, especially if they are not bulk-billed.

 Requirement for police report can be overwhelming for some people.

 International students are particularly positive about support services which they have used when needing to travel back to their home country at short notice. They are also less likely to go to the police due their mistrust of Government.


"We have quite extensive one at (my university). But whether they are practical is another argument. Just because you are in need of support, will you get that support in a timely fashion? Probably not. But it is there." (Domestic, regional)

"It's just impossible to get an appointment. A lot of the time a hurdle is that you have to go and see a psychologist, but anyone who's ever had to book in for that just realises that it's months to wait. And I'll be finished uni before I can get back onto an EAP." (Domestic, metro)

"All I got was an email saying 'give me a police report or I can't approve it'. I was actually disgusted at the response." (First Nations)

"I had to go back overseas, a family issue happening, and I had my exam. So they gave me a new time for the exam and let me have that trip to India." (International)

"As a student from India, we are a bit scared to go to a police station. We're always sort of, staying away, keeping our boundaries from them." (International)

 Regional students note that it is particularly challenging to obtain a doctor's certificate.



The stated definition aligns well with student's expectations of wellbeing and safety

Student wellbeing and safety

Tertiary education institutions are required to take an active responsibility for fostering an environment of wellbeing and safety for its students. They should have an overarching framework of guiding policies and effective processes to meet this need. There should be sufficient corporate commitment to promoting wellbeing and safety with enough resources to support related activities.

How an educational institution supports student wellbeing and safety

- *Conducting effective risk assessments and implementing preventative controls for the risks identified.*
- *Providing advice about actions to take, staff to contact and support services that are accessible to students.*
- *Conducting evidence-based sexual violence, drug and alcohol abuse prevention education programs.*
- *Providing support for affected students where needed.*
- *Having systems and processes to respond to incidents and prevent recurrence.*

Within the definition, the word 'Corporate' captures the most attention. Some students find it difficult to intuitively connect the concept of an education provider with typical corporate requirements. Upon further deliberation, students recognise the necessity of this connection, understanding that without corporate-like structures, commitments may not be effectively upheld.

When prompted with the types of support education institutions have in place for its students (per listed), most students consider these to be minimum deliverables. Some students relate these to 'Student Life', a service at their institution that helps students adjust to university life and cope with the new experiences. They see these services as essential for maintaining a structured and supportive environment for students. Most are generally aware that their institutions deliver such services.

"I'm glad that there is evidence based sexual violence drug and alcohol abuse prevention education programs. That's really a thing to have, especially now. I feel like sometimes it may have been left out for mental health, but I feel like that can be a really big toll for young millennials." (First Nations)



Communications

Students unaware of TEQSA with a minority having seen ‘Cheating is never the right answer’



Students are generally unaware of TEQSA, but find the slogan ‘Cheating is never the right answer’ somewhat familiar. It comes as no surprise to students that there is a government organisation ensuring the quality and standards of higher education in Australia. In fact, they expect such an organisation to be operating effectively in the background.

If it is indeed the intention of TEQSA to communicate directly with students, the agency will need to increase its visibility. Currently, students are not aware of the agency and while they have no aversion to it, they expect such communications to come directly from their respective institutions.



It is worth noting that international students’ interest is further piqued at the fact that TEQSA is a government agency. As noted earlier, they have particular challenges associated with their international student status, underpinned by an inherent mistrust of the government. As such, their response to TEQSA is somewhat more guarded.

“This line ‘cheating is never the right answer’, it is displayed all the over universities online material every single time.”
(International)

“For most students, money is kind of like the biggest kicker, right? If you have enough financial support, usually all these other things fall in place. If they don’t have so much pressure to work, if they’re struggling to pay rent. Usually if you have money and your parents are like ‘Study, don’t worry, everything else is taken care of’, then those people study and usually follow the rules. But then, hey, like you can’t really make money magically appear, so I don’t know how the universe is going to handle that.” (Disability)

Early and continuous communication on these topics is critical to prepare students adequately



Students emphasise the importance of early and continuous communication on each topic discussed – academic integrity and use of artificial intelligence, including consequences of breaches academic conduct, and safety and wellbeing services.

Students are aware that the decision to breach academic integrity or neglect their safety and wellbeing is influenced by a myriad of factors, but there is an overall appreciation that most students choose to do so due to financial constraints. This requires them to dilute their focus on academic pursuits and extracurricular activities associated with tertiary education with jobs.

Notably, students highlight that it is critical to ensure all students are aware of safety and wellbeing services before they enter a time of crisis. Early and clear communication of when and where these services can be accessed is essential, making it intuitive for students to find help as soon as they identify the need.

While they acknowledge that their institutions already make efforts in this regard, they urge for the continuation and enhancement of these practices.

“You need to keep sending these emails frequently just so that we know that they're there and we're aware of the resources even if it's not related to studies. If you're in a bad relationship, unhealthy relationship, how you can reach out to uni and how information stays between the person you talk to and the student. So, make us aware from early on about the resources we have.” (International)

“There might be some students in class that are really struggling and needing some support, but they're not willing to have the conversation and make that known. So to you, they're not an affected student. But they are being affected by it. So it's sort of important to target it to people who aren't just being your stock standard presenting with mental health problems because they've forgotten about, and they're going to keep silently suffering. And once they're starting to show signs, it might be too late. They might be literally going downhill, so that's important to nip it in the bud before it starts to tumble.” (Disability)



A variety of communications channels is required to effectively capture student attention

Students share the manner in which they typically consume information.



University emails/newsletters. Though effective, use with caution as students often overlook these due to the high volume they receive.



University platforms. Utilise screensavers on university computers, on the intranet or student portals to display information.



Digital/physical noticeboards. Place information on noticeboards around campus for visibility.



Info sessions. Organise info sessions and provide food, as they tend to attract more students.



Social media. Share videos and updates on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook groups and official university social media to engage students where they are most active.

Notably, some students offer that they have been known to share interesting and relevant content with their peers so it may be prudent to make it compelling for them to share.

“All the computer labs – the screensavers have the counseling numbers on them. I mean, you kind of get a little bit desensitized to the numbers because you just you might look at them and it doesn't register after a while, but it's kind of just unconsciously in the back of your head that you know that those services are there.” (Domestic, regional)

“When I see a post that's by my uni, and it's up on a reel, I will always share it with my friends. I will always engage. I will always recommend, and I will always post on my story because it's very fun for you.” (International)

“For me, I read all my emails. I have a clean inbox. I go through everything, and I read the like, the title of their e-mail. And if it, like, corresponds to something related to me, I'll open it, that's where I'm expecting information to come from.” (Domestic, metro)

“I think that's the kind of thing that I would want written down so that I can go back and access it easily without having to watch a whole video to see specifically, to find the answers that I'm looking for. I'm very much a CTRL-F person. If I can CTRL-F a page, find what I want. That's the best move for me. So, on a website, all written down.” (Disability)

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