



AIS Newsletter: Issue 2018-Q1

Teaching Academic Integrity by Starting with Why

By DeForest McDuff

Editor's note. Welcome to the first issue of the AIS Newsletter! Our aim is to alert you to topics and ideas that we explore while working with students on the Academic Integrity Seminar (www.IntegritySeminar.org). In the current issue below, we explore teaching the “Why” of academic integrity -- that is, an approach to student engagement by focusing on *why* trust and integrity matter to our institutions and to our students' lives. Future topics include: “Promoting Academic Integrity Using the Scientific Method” and “Using the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) to Challenge Contract Cheating.” The information we share with you will continue to be shaped by a defining AIS characteristic: we have direct, personal, and responsive contact with students. We read what they write; we listen to their perspectives; and we provide personalized guidance (always shared with you) drawn from recognized research in applied ethics, behavioral economics, and human development.

In the article below, we explore teaching the “Why” of academic integrity (i.e., why is academic integrity important and relevant?). Rather than an exclusive focus on the “What” (i.e., what constitutes plagiarism?) or the “How” (i.e., how can students avoid plagiarism?), examining why academic integrity is important helps students appreciate that the habits of integrity they develop now can enhance their personal and social development for a lifetime. We also encourage students to apply the template of “asking why” in multiple settings -- in the classroom, but also in choices they may soon be making in their own careers beyond schooling.

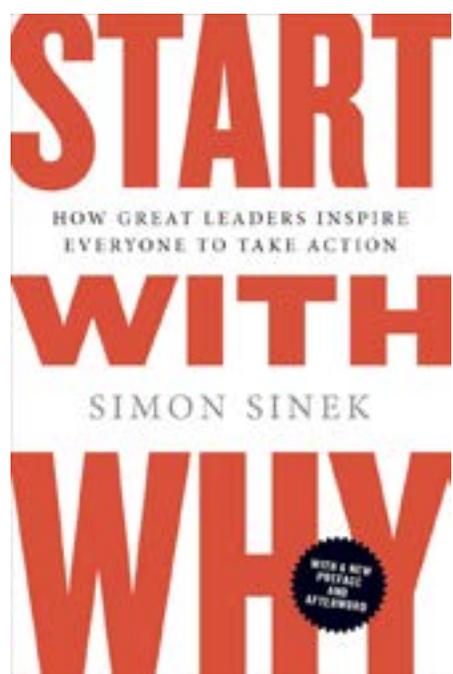
We value your thoughts and feedback on the newsletter. Please send all questions and inquiries to contact@integrityseminar.org.

Teaching Academic Integrity by Starting with Why



“Starting with why” is a powerful approach to learning and motivation. One of our guiding principles in teaching students in the Academic Integrity Seminar (www.IntegritySeminar.org) is to encourage students to think about the “why” of trust and integrity. That is, teaching the motivations and reasons behind values of trust and integrity and their importance for academic institutions, but also in their careers and personal relationships.

In this regard, we resonate with the Start with Why movement created by Simon Sinek (see: StartWithWhy.com). His notion of starting with why in business is consistent with our approach to teaching the importance and relevance of academic integrity. Simon explains this notion in his Ted Talk, [How Great Leaders Inspire Action](#):



“Every single person, every single organization on the planet, knows **what** they do, 100 percent. Some know **how** they do it, whether you call it your differentiated value proposition or your proprietary process or your USP. **But very, very few people or organizations know why they do what they do.**”

“By “why,” I mean: What’s your purpose? What’s your cause? What’s your belief? Why does your organization exist? Why do you get out of bed in the morning? And why should anyone care? As a result, the way we think, we act, the way we communicate is from the outside in, it’s obvious. We go from the clearest thing to the fuzziest thing. **But the inspired leaders and the inspired**

organizations — regardless of their size, regardless of their industry — all think, act and communicate from the inside out.”

Sinek advances the idea of [The Golden Circle](#), which puts the Why (why we do what we do) at the center of our motivation, followed by the How (how do we implement strategies to match our why), and ultimately the What (the tangible proof of our why):

AIS’s approach to teaching academic integrity resonates with Sinek’s model of human motivation:

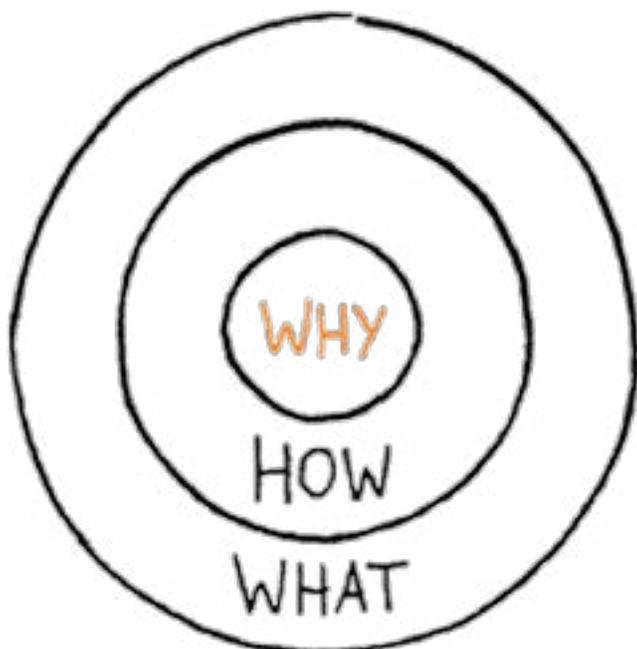
Teaching the What of academic integrity involves defining what plagiarism is, what to do when citing to other authors, what citation formats are available, and what is the delineation between your words and the words of other authors. While helpful, teaching the what alone does not help students navigate through gray areas (e.g.,

Student Comment on Why

“As a STEM major, the film [At The Heart of the Matter] was very touching. It helped pull all of the themes together from the various questions I’ve answered. What I picked up from this, is that it doesn’t matter if we do something if we don’t know why we’re doing it. ***If we don’t know why we’re doing it, we won’t have any direction on where to go in the future! That is what the humanities teach us - the why.*** Thanks for sharing the video, and I look forward to hearing your responses to my seminar answers.”

- Student comment after taking the Academic Integrity Seminar

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Simon Sinek's The Golden Circle

while at the same time generating and highlighting original thought. While also helpful, teaching the how alone does not make students care about being honest or help them understand why it matters.

Teaching the Why of academic integrity involves deeper learning and consideration of why trust and integrity are important to students' lives and to the broader society. Here are some examples of teaching the why:

- Why academic dishonesty represents a breach of trust with the faculty
- Who succeeds in the business world: individuals with or without integrity
- Why certain actions build trust versus erode trust
- How trust and integrity impacts social relationships
- Why living a life of integrity is critical to human thriving and well-being

In Sinek's world, companies are successful when they can articulate why they do what they do; the how and the what follow after the why is defined. In our world of teaching academic integrity, effective instruction begins with connecting students with why trust and integrity are important. By inspiring and connecting students with the why behind academic integrity, we teach them to value and nurture it in their own lives and the lives of others around them. With this in mind, students are self-motivated to effectively communicate and cite others (the "how") and avoid plagiarism (the "what").

"should I add a citation here or not?", "is this my idea or someone else's?") and accurately approach new challenges of honest academic work.

Teaching the How

of academic integrity involves approaches to managing the research process that categorize cites and support, separating them from original content. In other words, how can students go about academic work using methods that encourage accurate research and reporting,

Student Comment on Why

"Thank you for the insightful feedback; you have provided many additional sources in which I can further my understanding of human nature and thus, integrity. I expected this seminar to be more of a punishment for the mistake I made, but **as I completed the assignments I came to see it as an opportunity for reflection. I left with a better understanding for why I made the decision to plagiarize, and, although it was a disservice to me, this mistake does not define me.** Again, thank you for a thought-provoking seminar, I got much more from it than I thought I would. I am happy that you found my responses satisfactory- I look forward to exploring the sources you provided!"

- Student comment after taking the Academic Integrity Seminar

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Human Psychology

The power of why shows up in many contexts. Consider this insight on human psychology and motivation from Tony Robbins' 2006 Ted Talk, [Why We Do What We Do](#):

"I'm not here to motivate you, you don't need that, obviously. Often that's what people think I do, and it's the furthest thing from it. What happens, though, is people say to me, "I don't need any motivation." But that's not what I do. ***I'm the "why" guy. I want to know *why* you do what you do. What is your motive for action? What is it that drives you in your life today?*** Not 10 years ago. Are you running the same pattern? ***Because I believe that the invisible force of internal drive, activated, is the most important thing. I'm here because I believe emotion is the force of life.***"



Scientific evidence on human psychology supports the Golden Circle. Back to Sinek's [Ted Talk](#):



"None of what I'm telling you is my opinion. It's all grounded in the tenets of biology. ...If you look at a cross-section of the human brain, from the top down, the human brain is actually broken into three major components that correlate perfectly with the golden circle. Our newest brain, our Homo sapien brain, our neocortex, corresponds with the "what" level. The neocortex is responsible for all of our rational and analytical thought and language. The middle two sections make up our limbic brains, and our limbic brains are responsible for all of our feelings, like trust and loyalty".

In other words, when we communicate from the outside in, yes, people can understand vast amounts of complicated

information like features and benefits and facts and figures. It just doesn't drive behavior. ***When we can communicate from the inside out [by starting with why], we're talking directly to the part of the brain that controls behavior.***

Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt explains this same concept with his famous "elephant metaphor" in [The Happiness Hypothesis](#):

"Modern theories about rational choice and information processing don't adequately explain weakness of the will. The older metaphors about controlling animals work beautifully. The image that I came up with for myself, as I marveled at my weakness, was that I was a rider on the back of an elephant. I'm holding the reins in my hands, and by pulling one way or the other I can tell the elephant to turn, to stop, or to go. I can direct things, but only when the elephant doesn't have desires of his own. When the elephant really wants to do something, I'm no match for him".

- Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, at 4.

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Understanding and appreciating the why of academic integrity harnesses our **emotional capacity** (i.e., our elephant), our drive and motivation, to make decisions based on trust and integrity. We can rationalize all day long, but until we teach students to internalize the lessons and teach their inner elephants to hold integrity as a core value, student learning and behavioral change will be limited.

Practical Lessons

As a practical matter, teaching the **Why** means designing lessons that touch human emotion and encourage students to recognize the impact of trust and integrity on others. For example, teaching these kind of concepts:

- Why professors are upset and often offended when students copy the work of others
- Why businesses and organizations hire employees based on trust and integrity
- How a breach of trust can ruin a career or an organization
- How “getting ahead” by cutting corners is harmful and self-defeating in the long run
- Why human evolution has hardwired our brains for trust and cooperation

Consider these example exercises, which focus on the **What** of cheating:

- “Review your university honor code and provide a summary of the proper format for citing academic sources.”
- “Review the following examples and identify which are properly attributed to the author and which are not.”
- “Compare and contrast cheating in computer science -- i.e., copying code -- and in English literature -- i.e., copying text.”

Contrast the above with these example exercises, which focus on the **Why** of cheating:

- “Describe a time when someone you trusted violated that trust. How did it make you feel? What was the impact on your relationship and trust going forward?”
- “Pretend you own a small business and are deciding between two candidates that are the same in all respects, but one has a failure due to cheating on his/her transcript. Will that make a difference to you as a business owner? Why / why not? What if you were hiring that person to run the cash register?”

Student Comment on Why

“Having worked in the investment banking industry for almost 10 years, I really enjoyed reading all the articles and materials that highlights business ethics and morale as our industry has been undergoing quite a lot of criticism and skepticism post financial crisis since 2009. Even though I am not working in the revenue generating functions, ***I would still be able to understand and witness the practices of ‘end justifying the means’ and ‘focusing on why than how’***. Therefore all of the materials in the seminar are really intuitive and echoing the values that I have been trying to develop (and avoid) both personally and professionally”.

- Student comment after taking the Academic Integrity Seminar

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- “There has been tremendous media coverage lately about whether or not politicians - both Republicans and Democrats - meddled with the integrity of the U.S. election. Why do you think people care so much about that topic? Why is it important to uphold the integrity of our elections?”
- “Imagine that you’re working on a team project in your first job out of college. When presenting to the client, you find out that your colleague has copied and pasted pages of writing that were not his/her own. How would you react? How do you think the client would react?”

The former exercises will have near-term use for the student, but the latter will lead to deeper learning and lesson retention. Ethical development is a teaching opportunity -- a time of heightened awareness and sensitivity for the student who has been caught and reprimanded. Including an element of the bigger picture -- why does this matter? -- will make the lessons more meaningful and memorable.

Conclusion

Effective teaching of academic integrity involves more than simply showing students what constitutes an act of plagiarism. Students are not robots in need of the right algorithms. Instead, they are living, breathing, emotional individuals who need lessons on why academic integrity is important. It is only through this deeper understanding and emotional connection that students can carry the lessons and applications with for the rest of their lives. This approach has been effective in working with more than 10,000 students on the Academic Integrity Seminar over the last ten years, and one that we expect to continue to emphasize going forward.

Author Bio



DeForest McDuff

DeForest McDuff is a co-founder and partner of the Academic Integrity Seminar (www.IntegritySeminar.org), a company dedicated to improving academic integrity and student ethical development at colleges and universities nationwide. He has coordinated the seminar at dozens of schools across the country and has tutored thousands of students on issues of academic integrity. He holds a Ph.D. in economics from Princeton University, where he won the Towbes Teaching Prize for outstanding undergraduate teaching. DeForest currently lives in Boston with his wife and four children. DeForest can be reached at deforest@integrityseminar.org.