

Academic Integrity Beyond Audit: A Multi-Regime Field Approach to Performance, Internalization and Agency

Author: Benjamin Rivera Perez

Independent Researcher; Hyperweb Healthtech OÜ, Tallinn, Estonia

Corresponding author: ben@hyperweb.ee

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2649-7149>

Abstract

Universities describe themselves as “learning organizations” that cultivate autonomy, ethical judgment and deep understanding [Senge, 1990]. Yet their integrity practices increasingly resemble those of audited institutions: dense regimes of rules, detectors, dashboards and sanctions [Power, 1997; Shore & Wright, 2015]. This article argues that the tension between these identities is not rhetorical but architectural—and that existing frameworks, while valuable, are insufficient to map what students and staff actually navigate.

Self-Determination Theory models how individuals internalize norms along a single motivational continuum [Deci & Ryan, 2000]. Audit-culture analyses describe what happens when formal verification becomes structurally dominant [Power, 1997; Strathern, 2000]. Neither framework is designed to model situations in which **multiple normative regimes coexist, collide and produce qualitative shifts in the very state of agency** of those who must live among them.

This article proposes an **integrity field** for academic evaluation: a conceptual architecture in which legal, bureaucratic, professional, metric, algorithmic and communal regimes jointly govern the same agent. Within this field, it develops two diagnostic tools—the **Performance–Internalization Contrast (PIC)** and the **Audit Dependency Profile (ADP)**—and introduces a taxonomy of **states of agency** that agents occupy and move between under different configurations of regimes and evaluation events.

The central question shifts from “how much cheating can we detect?” to a prior one: *when the cameras are turned off, how much of this still holds—and which regimes are actually shaping what remains?*

Keywords: academic integrity; audit culture; learning organizations; multi-regime governance; assessment; generative AI; surveillance; internalization; states of agency.

1. Introduction

A student sits in front of a screen. Proctoring software tracks her eye movements. A plagiarism detector will scan her submission. An AI detector will flag statistical anomalies in her prose. She is writing an essay on ethics.

The irony is not lost on her. She has learned not to mention it.

Formally, the university tells her that academic integrity is about honesty, responsibility and professional judgment. Informally, what she experiences is a dense apparatus of monitoring and suspicion. We teach students to think for themselves; we govern them as if they will not.

But the situation is more complex than a simple opposition between learning and audit. The student is not governed by one regime. She is governed by many—simultaneously:

- **Legal norms** constrain what counts as fraud, what privacy she retains, what intellectual property rules apply.
- **Bureaucratic rules** specify what the handbook permits, what the code of conduct prohibits, what procedures apply if she is accused.
- **Professional standards** from her discipline define what ethical practice looks like in her future career.
- **Metric regimes** make her GPA, her ranking, her progression contingent on auditable outputs.
- **Algorithmic systems** flag her prose, record her keystrokes, assign risk scores she may never see.
- **Communal norms**—what her peers actually do, what tutors tacitly tolerate, what “everyone knows”—often diverge from all of the above.

She must navigate these regimes at once. They do not speak with one voice. Sometimes they contradict. Often, compliance with one produces friction with another. And when high-stakes evaluation arrives—exam, defense, committee decision—the question is not simply “will I follow the rules?” but “which rules, for which audience, with what left of my own judgment?”

Current debates about academic integrity and generative AI tend to oscillate between two poles [Perkins, 2023; Cotton et al., 2023; Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025]. On one side are calls for stricter surveillance, more sophisticated detection and digital proctoring [Han et al., 2024]. On the other are appeals to redesign assessment, trust students and “teach integrity” [Cotton et al., 2023]. Both sides usually assume a single regime is at stake. Neither side offers a vocabulary for describing **which regimes are actually in play**, how they interact, or what happens to the agent caught between them.

This article proposes four conceptual moves to address that gap:

1. An **integrity field** that models multiple normative regimes governing the same agent simultaneously.

2. A refinement of **PIC (Performance–Internalization Contrast)** as a diagnostic lens that can be applied regime by regime.
3. The **Audit Dependency Profile (ADP)** as a qualitative heuristic describing how a local configuration of regimes relies on external audit.
4. A taxonomy of **states of agency**—deliberative engagement, strategic compliance, ritual performance, practical paralysis, exit—and an account of how evaluation events trigger transitions between them.

The central claim is simple: **without tools that recognize multiple regimes and their effects on agency, universities will continue to extend their audit infrastructures without noticing that they are designing architectures that produce compliance without conviction, performance without understanding, graduates who have learned to satisfy auditors rather than exercise judgment.**

AI is not the disease. It is the X-ray that makes existing fractures visible.

2. From Single Regimes to an Integrity Field

2.1 The limits of single-regime models

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a powerful account of how motivation ranges from controlled to autonomous forms, depending on whether social norms are experienced as external pressure, introjected obligation, identified value or fully integrated commitment [Deci & Ryan, 2000]. In educational settings, SDT highlights the importance of autonomy support, competence feedback and relatedness in fostering internalization of academic values.

SDT, however, operates with an implicit simplification: it typically assumes that the relevant norms are coherent and belong to a single regime. The central question becomes whether the student accepts, negotiates or resists those norms. The model is not designed to represent situations where incompatible regimes simultaneously claim authority over the same act.

Audit-society and audit-culture analyses offer a complementary critique. Power [1997] argues that contemporary organizations are increasingly organized around formal verification practices—accreditation, quality assurance, performance indicators, compliance mechanisms—that can become ends in themselves. Strathern [2000] and others show how indicators, once institutionalized, reshape professional cultures as people learn to perform “for the measure” rather than for the underlying purpose.

These analyses illuminate how formal evaluation regimes can generate ritualized compliance, gaming and displacement of substantive goals. Yet they also share a simplifying assumption: the audit regime is treated as structurally central or dominant. The question becomes how life looks in institutions where audit has taken over, not how audit interacts with other forms of normativity.

Both frameworks—SDT and audit culture—provide essential local cuts through the landscape of academic integrity. But neither provides a map of the whole field—nor a resolution of its constitutive tension.

2.2 The integrity field: multiple regimes, one agent

In real academic settings, students and staff are governed by **multiple normative regimes at once**. The following list is not exhaustive but indicates the structure of the field:

- **Legal regime:** laws on fraud, privacy, harassment, discrimination, intellectual property.
- **Bureaucratic regime:** institutional policies, codes of conduct, handbooks, procedures.
- **Professional regime:** disciplinary ethics, accreditation bodies, licensing rules.
- **Metric/audit regime:** rankings, performance indicators, quality assurance audits, external reviews.
- **Algorithmic regime:** platform rules, detection tools, automated proctoring, recommender systems.
- **Communal regime:** peer cultures, local norms, unwritten rules about what is “really” expected.

These regimes can complement or contradict each other. A practice may be tolerated by peer culture, discouraged by professional ethics and prohibited by institutional policy. An AI-assisted writing practice may comply with course instructions but violate a licensing agreement. An integrity policy may satisfy an external audit while undermining trust in the classroom.

The integrity field is the space defined by the co-presence of these regimes. Agents do not choose which field to inhabit; they are always already within it, subject to its forces.

2.3 The audit turn and massification

Over the past three decades, higher education has undergone what can reasonably be called an **audit turn** [Power, 1997; Shore & Wright, 2015]. Building on broader transformations documented in public-sector governance, quality assurance and performance management, universities have developed dense infrastructures of monitoring, reporting and external evaluation. Academic integrity has been swept into this movement.

Instead of asking whether teaching, supervision and assessment designs cultivate internalization, institutions increasingly treat integrity as something that must be **assured** by instruments: plagiarism-detection services, digital proctoring platforms, risk scores, case-management workflows and, more recently, generative-AI detectors [Han et al., 2024; Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025]. These instruments do not merely record integrity; they reshape it by defining what counts as a breach, how suspicion is produced and when cases are escalated [Shore & Wright, 2015; Strathern, 2000].

Massification is often invoked as a technical justification for architectures that rely almost entirely on binary multiple-choice formats and automated scoring. This choice is not neutral. It systematically favors behaviors that optimize performance under audit—selecting the keyed option, avoiding detectable anomalies—while leaving internalization largely untested.

Assessment research has long offered alternatives: ordered or proximity-based items [Briggs et al., 2006], multiple true–false formats [Albanese & Sabers, 1988; Brassil & Couch, 2019], confidence-based marking [Gardner-Medwin, 2006]. Historically, these formats were dismissed as too costly to author and mark at scale. With contemporary large language models, that constraint is increasingly obsolete. AI can now assist in generating, refining and calibrating such items [Karlsson & Lunander, 2025].

When institutions continue to default to binary ABCD formats under these conditions, massification is no longer a technical inevitability but an **architectural decision** that sustains high dependence on auditor-visible performance.

An architecture that only ever sees integrity in the glow of a dashboard should not be surprised if integrity exists there alone.

3. PIC: Performance–Internalization Contrast

3.1 Conceptual definition

The **Performance–Internalization Contrast (PIC)** is a diagnostic lens that distinguishes between two dimensions of integrity:

- **Performance:** the observable alignment of behavior with a given integrity norm.
- **Internalization:** the extent to which the agent endorses the underlying value of the norm.

High performance with high internalization corresponds to the ideal of integrity as both practice and conviction. High performance with low internalization corresponds to compliant behavior driven by fear, opportunism or habit. Low performance with high internalization can occur under conflicting pressures, lack of resources or poorly designed systems. Low performance with low internalization corresponds to overt disregard of the norm.

PIC is not a numerical variable but a contrast. It directs attention to the possibility that integrity policies can increase performance without increasing—and sometimes while lowering—internalization.

3.2 PIC in a multi-regime field

When multiple regimes govern the same act, PIC helps to disentangle where performance and internalization are located. Consider a student in a program with a strict AI-use policy:

- She may perform strict compliance with the institutional policy because sanctions are severe (high performance relative to the bureaucratic regime),
- while privately endorsing a professional norm of transparent AI-assisted writing (high internalization relative to the professional regime),
- and experiencing the metric regime (rankings, GPA) as pushing her toward instrumental strategies that undermine learning (low internalization and ambivalent performance relative to the metric regime).

PIC thus invites empirical work that looks not only at “whether” students comply but at **which regime** their compliance or resistance is addressed to.

3.3 Relation to existing theories

PIC intersects with, but does not collapse into, existing constructs:

- It aligns with SDT’s distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation but focuses on **architectures of evaluation**, not on individual trait measures. A more granular mapping onto SDT’s regulatory types—external, introjected, identified and integrated—remains a productive avenue for future operationalization, though the present performance-versus-internalization distinction captures the architectural contrast most relevant to institutional diagnosis.
- It resonates with audit-culture critiques that emphasize how measurement can displace substantive judgment, but adds a **regime-specific dimension**: the same agent may show different PIC profiles relative to different regimes.
- It can be combined with moral-development models but does not assume fixed stages. Instead, it treats internalization as something regimes can **enable or inhibit** through design.

PIC gives us a way to **name what is often invisible**: the gap between what an institution measures and what it actually cultivates.

4. ADP: Audit Dependency Profile

4.1 From index to profile

In earlier formulations, the Audit Dependency Index (ADI) was presented as if it were, or could soon become, a numerical measure. In its current stage of development, it is more accurate and methodologically sound to treat it as a **qualitative profiling heuristic** rather than a validated scalar index. For this reason, this article uses the term **Audit Dependency Profile (ADP)**.

An ADP describes how strongly a local configuration of regimes relies on externalized audit mechanisms to maintain integrity-relevant behavior. It does not produce a single numerical score but a structured description of how dependence on audit is distributed across regimes.

4.2 Dimensions of an Audit Dependency Profile

A minimal ADP can be described along four dimensions, each rated qualitatively (low/medium/high) based on policy analysis, document review and interviews:

1. **Legal-bureaucratic dependence:** To what extent does the system rely on formal rules, procedures and sanctions to secure integrity?
2. **Metric-audit dependence:** To what extent does the system rely on external audits, rankings, performance indicators and quality assurance mechanisms?
3. **Algorithmic dependence:** To what extent does the system rely on automated detection, proctoring and platform-level control?
4. **Communal-professional dependence:** To what extent does the system rely on peer norms, professional identities and communities of practice rather than formal audit?

An institution with high legal-bureaucratic, high metric-audit and high algorithmic dependence but low communal-professional dependence exemplifies a highly externalized integrity regime. Conversely, an institution with strong communal-professional norms and minimal metric-audit apparatus may rely more on internalized standards.

4.3 The counterfactual question

The core diagnostic move of ADP can still be expressed as a question:

What would happen to integrity here if the auditors stepped out of the room?

More precisely:

- What would happen to integrity outcomes if plagiarism detection were disabled for a semester?
- How would behavior change if AI-detection risk scores were no longer reported to staff?
- Would students' reasoning about integrity look different in settings where proctoring is impossible?

An educational system that must continuously surveil its students is implicitly declaring low confidence in its own teaching.

High integrity under permanent surveillance is not evidence of internalization. It is evidence of architected dependence.

5. States of Agency

5.1 From continuous motivation to discrete states

SDT models motivation as movement along a continuum from external regulation to intrinsic motivation. This is useful when a single regime dominates and the central

question is how deeply its norms are internalized. In a multi-regime integrity field, however, the key phenomenon is often not a gradual shift in motivational style but a **qualitative change in the agent's state of agency** under conflicting regimes.

Building on the integrity field and on PIC/ADP, we can distinguish five ideal-typical states of agency:

1. **Deliberative engagement:** The agent recognizes multiple regimes, reflects on their demands and acts in ways that seek coherence between personal standards and institutional requirements. PIC gaps are low; integrity is both performed and endorsed.
2. **Strategic compliance:** The agent complies selectively with regimes that control salient rewards and sanctions, while privately endorsing a different set of norms. PIC gaps are high; performance is driven by calculation rather than endorsement.
3. **Ritual performance:** The agent performs required behaviors as empty rituals, without expectation that they are substantively connected to integrity or learning. Audit dependence is high; the agent has stopped asking whether the norms make sense.
4. **Practical paralysis:** Conflicting regimes and high-stakes exposure lead to inaction or avoidance. The agent is unable to resolve what counts as “the right thing to do” under incompatible demands.
5. **Exit:** The agent withdraws from the integrity field—changing institutions, abandoning the course of study, disengaging from assessment, or in extreme cases, exiting academic life altogether.

These are not personality types. They are positions that agents can occupy at different times and in different contexts within the integrity field.

5.2 Evaluation events and transitions

High-stakes evaluation events—exams, defenses, committee decisions—are not just points where performance is measured. They reconfigure the integrity field by exposing the agent's performance to a collective gaze: peers, committees, external bodies.

In such moments, the dominant question for the agent shifts from “What do I value?” or “What is the rule?” to “How will this appear to those whose judgment matters?”

When the agent cannot construct a workable resolution from conflicting regime demands, transitions from deliberative engagement to strategic compliance, ritual performance, paralysis or exit become more likely.

The framework proposed here treats such transitions as features of the integrity field, not merely as traits of individuals. They are outcomes of how regimes are configured and which audiences are made salient by evaluation design.

6. Case Illustration: A High-ADP Integrity Regime

To show how the integrity field, PIC and ADP work in practice, this section presents a composite case drawn from contemporary university practices.

6.1 The integrity module and the detection stack

At the start of the academic year, all incoming students must complete an online “Academic Integrity and AI Literacy” module. The module combines short videos, interactive activities and multiple-choice quizzes. Students must achieve a passing score to unlock access to core assessments.

On the staff side, the institution has invested in:

- A plagiarism-detection system integrated with the learning management platform.
- A digital proctoring service for remote exams, recording webcam footage, keystrokes and screen activity.
- An AI-detection tool that produces risk scores for text submissions.
- A central dashboard where faculty and administrators can view similarity indices, proctoring flags and AI-risk scores by course, cohort and time.

Cases flagged by these systems are escalated through a standardized workflow. Annual reports summarize incident numbers and outcomes.

6.2 Reading the regime through the integrity field

Through the lens of the integrity field, multiple regimes are operating:

- **Bureaucratic:** The code of conduct, the module, the escalation procedures.
- **Metric/audit:** The dashboard, the annual reports, the KPIs on “integrity incidents.”
- **Algorithmic:** The detectors, the proctoring software, the risk scores.
- **Communal:** What students actually tell each other about how to navigate the system.
- **Professional:** Largely absent—integrity is not embedded in discipline-specific reasoning.

The ADP for this configuration:

Dimension	Level
Legal–bureaucratic dependence	High
Metric–audit dependence	High
Algorithmic dependence	High
Communal–professional dependence	Low

6.3 PIC analysis

Students quickly learn that what matters is not only producing good work but doing so in ways that do not trigger similarity or AI-risk thresholds. They develop local knowledge about how to paraphrase, vary prompts or adjust workflows to evade detection.

- **Performance relative to bureaucratic/algorithmic regimes:** High (low detection rates)
- **Internalization relative to those regimes:** Low to medium (compliance is strategic)
- **Performance relative to communal regime:** Variable (depends on peer group)
- **Internalization relative to professional regime:** Unknown (rarely tested)

The PIC gap is substantial: the institution observes integrity (low flags) while the underlying orientation may be strategic compliance rather than conviction.

6.4 States of agency in this regime

In this configuration, we would expect:

- Some students in **deliberative engagement** (those whose personal values align with institutional demands).
- Many in **strategic compliance** (navigating the system instrumentally).
- Some in **ritual performance** (going through the motions without belief).
- A few in **practical paralysis** (especially international students facing conflicting norms, or those with disabilities poorly served by proctoring).
- Occasional **exit** (students who find the surveillance intolerable).

The regime produces compliance. It is less clear that it produces integrity.

7. Implications and Research Agenda

7.1 Institutional implications

For institutions, the integrity field framework offers a way to reframe strategic questions. Instead of asking only:

- “Which detection tools should we subscribe to?”
- “What penalties should we impose for AI-assisted cheating?”

it invites questions such as:

- “Which regimes are actually governing our students, and how do they interact?”
- “What is the ADP of our current configuration?”
- “Where are the PIC gaps—high performance with low internalization?”
- “What states of agency are we producing?”

- “Can we redesign assessment so that communal–professional dependence increases while algorithmic dependence decreases?”

This reformulation does not eliminate the need for monitoring or sanctions. It does, however, make visible a choice that is often implicit: whether to invest predominantly in **ever more sophisticated auditors** or in architectures that **require less auditing to function**.

7.2 Agenda for empirical research

The framework generates specific research questions:

1. **Comparative configuration analysis:** How do different configurations of regimes correlate with distinct Audit Dependency Profiles? (Design: qualitative comparative analysis of institutional policies, coded into ADP descriptors.)
2. **States of agency under evaluation:** Under what conditions do high-audit configurations produce shifts from deliberative engagement to strategic compliance, ritual performance, paralysis or exit? (Design: longitudinal studies following cohorts through key evaluation events.)
3. **Operationalizing PIC across regimes:** Can qualitative case studies be systematically coded into PIC descriptors that distinguish performance and internalization across multiple regimes? (Design: interview-based studies where agents describe how they navigate conflicting demands.)
4. **Intervention studies:** What happens to ADP and PIC when institutions shift from detection-heavy to process-oriented assessment designs?

7.3 Limitations

Several limitations should be noted.

First, the integrity field, PIC and ADP are diagnostic tools, not panaceas. They do not specify the values institutions should internalize, nor do they resolve conflicts between competing norms.

Second, ADP is a qualitative heuristic, not a validated psychometric scale. Its value is in structuring comparison and generating hypotheses, not in producing precise measurements.

Third, the states-of-agency taxonomy is ideal-typical. Real agents may occupy hybrid or transitional positions.

Finally, the composite case is illustrative rather than representative. Many institutions already experiment with approaches that move toward lower audit dependence. The framework can help document and compare these efforts.

8. Conclusion

Academic integrity regimes are increasingly built as audit systems. Generative AI has accelerated this trend by making it easier to delegate work and harder to distinguish human from machine-generated outputs [Perkins, 2023; Cotton et al., 2023; Kofinas et al., 2025]. Universities have responded with new instruments of detection and control, often without revisiting the architectures of assessment and feedback that make such instruments necessary [Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025].

This article has proposed an **integrity field** framework—a conceptual architecture in which multiple normative regimes jointly govern the same agent. Within this field, **PIC** makes visible the gap between performed compliance and genuine endorsement. **ADP** profiles how strongly a configuration relies on external audit. The **states of agency** taxonomy names what happens to agents caught between regimes: deliberative engagement, strategic compliance, ritual performance, paralysis, exit.

Together, these tools shift the focus from catching more cheaters to asking a prior question: *what kind of integrity are we actually building here—and what kind of agents are we producing?*

There is a generation being formed now. They will learn that integrity means not getting caught—or they will learn that integrity names something that persists when no one is watching. They will develop capacities contingent on surveillance—or capacities that are their own. They will become performers skilled at satisfying auditors—or agents capable of judgment.

No framework can resolve this tension. But the integrity field names what is at stake, and it makes it harder to pretend that the choice is merely technical.

References

- Albanese, M. A., & Sabers, D. L. (1988). Multiple true-false items: A study of interitem correlations, scoring alternatives, and reliability estimates. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 25(2), 111–123.
- Bittle, K., & El-Gayar, O. (2025). Generative AI and academic integrity in higher education: A systematic review and research agenda. *Information*, 16(4), 296.
- Brassil, C. E., & Couch, B. A. (2019). Multiple-true-false questions reveal more thoroughly the complexity of student thinking than multiple-choice questions: A Bayesian item response model comparison. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 6(1), 1–16.
- Briggs, D. C., Alonzo, A. C., Schwab, C., & Wilson, M. (2006). Diagnostic assessment with ordered multiple-choice items. *Educational Assessment*, 11(1), 33–63.

- Cotton, D. R. E., Cotton, P. A., & Shipway, J. R. (2023). Chatting and cheating: Ensuring academic integrity in the era of ChatGPT. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 61(2), 228–239.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.
- Gardner-Medwin, A. R. (2006). Confidence-based marking: Towards deeper learning and better exams. In C. Bryan & K. Clegg (Eds.), *Innovative assessment in higher education* (pp. 141–149). Routledge.
- Han, S., Nikou, S., & Ayele, W. Y. (2024). Digital proctoring in higher education: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 38(1), 265–285.
- Karlsson, N., & Lunander, A. (2025). *A continuous scoring function for confidence-based marking* (Working Paper No. 11/2025). Örebro University.
- Kofinas, A. K., Tsay, C. H.-H., & Pike, D. (2025). The impact of generative AI on academic integrity of authentic assessments within a higher education context. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. Advance online publication.
- Perkins, M. (2023). Academic integrity considerations of AI large language models in the post-pandemic era: ChatGPT and beyond. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 20(2), Article 7.
- Power, M. (1997). *The audit society: Rituals of verification*. Oxford University Press.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Doubleday.
- Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2015). Audit culture revisited: Rankings, ratings, and the reassembling of society. *Current Anthropology*, 56(3), 421–444.
- Strathern, M. (2000). The tyranny of transparency. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26(3), 309–321.