Academic integrity across the Canadian Landscape

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Abstract

In the early 1990s, educators concerned about academic integrity (AI) in the United States began to collaborate on issues in this area and later established the Center for Academic Integrity, now known as the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI). In recent years, ICAI Canada, an offshoot of the ICAI, was created to nurture AI best practices across the nation. This article details the development of the Canadian branch of the ICAI and examines what AI looks like across Canada. In summary, future directions at these levels are examined as well as ways to further promote AI in Canada.

Keywords: Academic integrity, higher education, Canadian, International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), best practices, quality assurance

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Background

Every educational institution in Canada, and across the world, experiences issues with academic integrity (AI). Students, instructors, staff and administration need to be familiar with the academic expectations, but they are often not as informed as they should be (Blum, 2009; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe, 2005; Morris & Carroll, 2015; Newton, 2015; Ransome & Newton, 2017). Academic integrity tends to only be in the spotlight in the media when issues of misconduct arise such as a public figure being exposed for plagiarizing a speech, report or thesis, or when a large cluster of students at a school are caught cheating on an exam. However, as soon as the media attention fades, so does the focus on academic integrity. It is imperative that educators continue to work to keep academic integrity and the values of integrity (honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage), set out by the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI, 2014, p. 16) at the forefront of education.

Unified work in this area began over 25 years ago when the Center for Academic Integrity, now known as the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), was established by concerned educators (ICAI, n.d.a). The ICAI has been holding an annual conference since 1993, and this event has become the preeminent forum for knowledge sharing and networking for practitioners in AI. The ICAI was founded in the United States and the majority of its membership are American institutions; however, it has members from over

37 countries around the world, including participation from Canadian institutions (ICAI, n.d.b).

National activity in academic integrity

Academic integrity was initially raised within academic circles at the Canadian Conference on Student Judicial Affairs (CCSJA) that started in 1998, hosted by the University of Alberta (Eerkes, 2010, p. 106). This conference was inspired by the Association of Student Judicial Affairs (ASJA) conference in the United States, which is now called the Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA) (B. Usick, personal communication, August 31, 2018). The Canadian Conference on Student Judicial Affairs was held almost every year thereafter "despite having no formal structure or resources" (Eerkes, 2010, p. 106). In 2007, CCSJA joined Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS), and became a division of this group, called CAISJA (Canadian Academic Integrity and Student Judicial Affairs (Eerkes, 2010, p. 106). The group's name changed again, when the term judicial was replaced with conduct, to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity (SCAI). (B. Usick, personal communication, August 31, 2018). As other developments in AI in Canada grew, specifically the Canadian Regional Consortium (ICAI, n.d.c), SCAI eventually removed academic integrity from its portfolio to focus primarily on non-academic misconduct. (B. Usick, personal communication, August 31, 2018).

Many Canadians regularly attend the annual International Center for Academic Integrity Conference as it is the leading event in AI. In 2013, Canadian attendees decided to form a national group to provide a Canadian forum on academic integrity. Hence in 2014, the Canadian Consortium, also referred to as ICAI Canada, officially became a branch of the larger ICAI organization. Three Canadian colleagues from Brock University, Simon Fraser University, and the University of Waterloo co-founded the Consortium. The intent of the Consortium is to bring together colleagues in academic integrity to share knowledge and best practices from across Canada. The co-founders organized and ran the first full day meeting of the Consortium in 2014, which was attended by 23 people representing 15 colleges and universities from across Canada.

The Consortium has met every year since, with the exception of 2017 when the ICAI did not have a conference. ICAI Canada has a strong following of members who are active in AI initiatives in institutions across Canada. The Consortium continues to bring together Canadians to work on AI issues by hosting a full-day event in advance of every ICAI conference. The next ICAI Canada meeting will take place in March 2019.

Provincial and territorial activity in academic integrity

Activity in AI across Canada is variable by province. Very few provinces have established forums or networks that focus on academic integrity.

In Western Canada, over the past few years, Simon Fraser University, the University of Alberta, and University of Manitoba have been the most active with AI initiatives. Post secdondary educational institutions in Manitoba began to rotate hosting an event called the Academic Integrity Inter-Institutional Meeting (AIIIM) (University of Manitoba, 2017). University of Manitoba hosted the inaugural meeting in 2017, Assiniboine College hosted in 2018 and plans are underway for 2019 (B. Usick, personal communication, August 31, 2018).

In addition, in the Province of Alberta, MacEwan University and the University of Alberta hosted an Academic Integrity Symposium in 2014 (MacEwan University, 2018). More recently, a day-long AI Colloquium was held at Trinity Western University in Langlely, B.C. which was attended by six colleges, as well as the University of the Fraser Valley, Kwantlen University, University of Victoria and Simon Fraser University (Trinity Western University, 2018). There is discussion about creating an annual event for post secodondary educational institutions in B.C. to get together and discuss AI.

In Central Canada, under the Council of Ontario Universities, there is a group called the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO) (n.d.). AICO has been active since 2008 and holds bi-annual meetings for academic integrity practitioners. It was originally formed to bring together the 21 universities in Ontario; however, the Council has broadened its mandate to include colleges. Given that all post-secondary institutions face the same issues in AI, it was logical and strategic for both colleges and universities to work together in this area. AICO recently formed a sub-committee to address contract cheating which is a growing concern in higher education.

In Quebec and Eastern Canada, engagement in AI has been more difficult to assess. It seems that institutions in these regions are working on AI to various degrees, but mostly at an institutional level and not in a coordinated form.

Future directions

At a national level, ICAI Canada aims to better engage and increase its membership with practitioners from universities and colleges, particularly in areas that have a number of higher educational institutions in one geographical area such as the Maritimes and the West coast.

The Consortium regularly surveys its members and the bulk of members indicated that the group should lobby for important AI issues. The group agreed that better student preparedness, which would include educating incoming students about the basics of academic integrity, was a priority. A small working group was formed to write a white paper on this subject.

Formal provincial groups, outside of AICO in Ontario, seem to be few in number. Hopefully, other organizations similar to the Council of Ontario Universities, will see the benefit of such a Council and coordinate something similar within their own Province or Territory. Universities Canada could also be a conduit for rallying the development of provincial AI networks.

Synergies

Academic integrity is the foundation of academia and educational institutions – without it we have little credibility or substance. Therefore, engraining AI and the values of integrity into education is imperative and involves everyone in higher education.

To bolster AI, its inherent connection to quality assurance should be synergized. Universities Canada (n.d.a) describes how Canadian universities maintain quality assurance, and despite the fact that each university has autonomy, they must still subscribe to a national level of general standards. The Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework is outlined in the Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada (Council of Ministers of Education, 2007). These standards were created and adopted by all the Ministers across Canada that were responsible for post-secondary education in 2007. The ministerial statement is peppered with references to integrity, and academic integrity is embedded in the Professional Capacity/Autonomy section of the degree level standards to which each university must adhere.

"Qualities and transferable skills necessary for further study, employment, community involvement, and other activities requiring (i) the exercise of initiative, personal responsibility and accountability in both personal and group contexts, (ii) working effectively with others, and (iii) behaviour consistent with academic integrity." (Council of Ministers of Education, 2007, p. 7).

Accordingly, each Province has a governing body that oversees quality assurance and the degree level standards. Universities Canada has a webpage that lists the Provincial agencies and provides a brief explanation of each (Universities Canada, n.d.b).

Because academic integrity is ingrained in the degree level standards for every university in Canada, quality assurance and academic integrity are bound to each other. Emphasis on academic integrity could be raised by ensuring that program reviews explicitly address AI. For example, some universities require programs under review to comment, in their written self-study, on what initiatives they are taking to maintain and/or improve academic integrity. This reinforces the importance of AI, putting the spotlight on it in a positive sense, and encourages programs to actively engage in academic integrity.

Enhancing work in this area and promoting explicit attention to academic integrity in all academic program reviews at universities across Canada would help solidify students,

instructors, staff and administration's understanding of AI and its place as the foundation for academia.

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