

Creating a Collaborative Network to Promote Cultures of Academic Integrity in Manitoba's Post-secondary Institutions

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Abstract

In this article, we, as representatives from several post-secondary institutions across Manitoba and British Columbia, describe how sharing knowledge and experiences across institutions has informed and enhanced academic integrity initiatives at our respective institutions. We outline how participation in provincial, national, and international teaching and learning events as a collective has informed our work in academic integrity and led to the emergence of the Manitoba Academic Integrity Network (MAIN) in May 2019. We discuss the benefits of collaborating within a provincial network and next steps for expanding the reach of the network across institutions by engaging faculty, staff, and students.

Keywords: academic integrity, academic misconduct, Canada, higher education, network, organization

Background

Although academic integrity was an important topic of discussion in 1998 at the Canadian Conference on Student Judicial Affairs, the conversation was elevated when Canadians attending the 2013 International Conference of the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI; an organization based in the United States) formed the Canadian Regional Consortium (McKenzie, 2018). More recently, Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton, a Canadian academic integrity researcher, made a strong case for growing and strengthening the academic integrity agenda in Canada by forming local and national communities of practice, networks, and research collaborations (Eaton, 2019a, 2019b; Eaton & Edino, 2018). In partial response to Eaton's call for formalized networks, and after several years of formal and informal conversations with administrators, educators, and researchers at several post-secondary institutions in Manitoba, the Manitoba

Academic Integrity Network (MAIN) was officially launched. In this article, we describe this process and the emergence of MAIN.

The Building of a Provincial Network

University of Manitoba

Activities related to promoting academic integrity at the University of Manitoba originated within Student Advocacy, a Student Affairs unit. Student Advocacy provides confidential services to assist students in the resolution of complaints and grievances resulting from academic or discipline decisions, including those related to academic misconduct. In addition to the workshops that Student Advocacy staff facilitate (often with colleagues from academic support units), the unit launched the inaugural academic integrity week in 1997 to engage the community in discussions about academic integrity (Usick & Morris, 2006). One key activity was the fielding of Don McCabe's academic integrity survey in 2002 and 2012 (see McCabe, Butterfield, & Treviño, 2017). In 2004, Student Advocacy partnered with the University Teaching Services (renamed The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning) for their third annual teaching symposium that featured Don McCabe as the keynote speaker. The symposium provided opportunities for staff and faculty to discuss responses to academic misconduct through teaching and learning approaches, and present key findings from their original research (e.g., Usick & Thordarson, 2004). The University of Manitoba and its approach to academic integrity have also been featured in the media (e.g., *CBC's DocZone* documentary *Faking the Grade*; Merit Motion Pictures & CBC-TV, 2015). The University of Manitoba has been instrumental in promoting academic integrity at national and international levels by participating in dialogue and presenting at various conferences.

In response to the growing need for coordinated and systematic academic integrity efforts at the University of Manitoba, the Academic Integrity Advisory Committee (AIAC; formerly the Academic Integrity Working Group) established in 2013 to recommend direction to the University community on institution-wide academic integrity initiatives. With the adoption of a teaching and learning approach (Bertram Gallant & Drinan, 2008), two academic integrity-focused positions were also created within The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and Student Affairs. Dedicated academic integrity positions have facilitated the development of new resources, initiatives, and research (see Gervais, 2018; Gervais & Stoesz, 2019; Stoesz & Los, 2019; Stoesz & Yuditseva, 2019; Usick, Stoesz, & Gervais, 2016).

In early 2017, an idea to host a conference specifically for academic integrity educators was discussed amongst AIAC members. Within a month, the Academic Integrity Inter-Institutional Meeting (AIIM) 2017 was born and planning was underway. Individuals working in teaching and learning centres at publicly funded post-secondary institutions

across Manitoba were contacted to determine the level of interest in attending a meeting to discuss successes and challenges in promoting academic integrity and preventing academic misconduct at their respective institutions. The initial response to the idea was overwhelmingly positive and a date was set to host the event in late spring at The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba.

AIIM 2017 attracted 42 individuals, including teaching and learning centre directors, faculty specialists, educational developers, librarians, student advocates, instructors and faculty members, and graduate students from 9 publicly funded colleges and universities in Manitoba. The one-day event was organized into three sessions, each beginning with a lead presentation followed by cracker barrel format discussions. The session on *Institution-Wide Approaches to Academic Integrity* centered on building cultures of integrity grounded in responsibilities that organizations have as a whole and encouraging all individuals within an organization to lead by example. In the *Faculty Support for Academic Integrity* session, presenters shared their research and classroom (both face-to-face and online) experiences regarding academic misconduct and the resources that can be used to promote academic integrity in various teaching and learning environments. The day wrapped with discussions about *Student Support for Academic Integrity* and why students may find it difficult to avoid making decisions that lead to allegations of misconduct. A theme in the final session was the sharing of activities to help students learn to write and cite their sources with confidence. Engagement in discussion was meaningful and valuable for all attendees. As the event closed, attendees expressed a desire for AIIM to continue as an annual event, and representatives from Assiniboine Community College (ACC) in Brandon, Manitoba conveyed their interest in hosting AIIM 2018.

Assiniboine Community College

The importance of academic integrity was elevated at ACC with the cooperation of the Library and the Learning Curve, an academic support centre. Early supports for students on plagiarism and citing were contextualized within academic integrity throughout 2016, and were informed by faculty and student surveys, research, and the organization of other interested ACC staff. Participation in events such as AIIM and ICAI coincided with an educational campaign, revised academic integrity training for students, and supports for faculty beginning in 2017. The Library and Learning Curve were officially united in the wider Learning Commons department, which came to include other members of a multidisciplinary team that presented at provincial conferences and internal staff development events on academic integrity in 2018 and 2019. Recognizing that the institutional momentum for academic integrity at ACC was occurring in parallel to the provincial momentum, ACC was eager to host AIIM 2018. Outreach activities and advertising were directed towards participants from the first event, and provincial college and university staff with responsibilities related to

academic integrity and internal ACC employees known to have involvement or interest in academic integrity. A promotional video featuring staff, faculty, and the President of ACC was created and sent out as a welcome prior to the meeting. The end result was a sold-out event of 60 attendees with presenters from four of Manitoba's colleges and universities.

By October 2019, resources and events ranged from student-focused initiatives such as an academic integrity escape room and online modules for academic integrity, to assignment redesign workshops for faculty and a contract cheating website blocker project (a similar project is underway at the University of Manitoba and Red River College [RRC]). An Academic Integrity Advisory Committee was recruited in late 2019 to help inform the initiatives of the Learning Commons team. Ultimately, academic integrity has proven to be a successful platform for positive and proactive collaboration within the ACC learning community and on a provincial scale as a member of MAIN.

Booth University College

Booth University College (Booth UC), based on its “approach to learning anchored in academic excellence” (Booth University College, n.d.) and its commitment to high ethical standards, has focused on academic misconduct prevention. At the beginning of their studies, students are required to complete a 30-minute online plagiarism tutorial program and participate in a 30-minute in-class presentation facilitated by Booth UC's Academic Learning Centre. In addition, the Director of Library Services leads 30-minute in-class seminars about academic integrity in scientific research and the APA citation guidelines required by Booth University College. The Q&A sessions at the end of these brief seminars provide a great opportunity for many first-year students to become acquainted with the expectations regarding academic integrity in their curriculum. These learning opportunities are focused primarily on the theoretical background of academic integrity and the various academic misconduct categories.

Furthermore, the increasing number of online courses represent a brand-new challenge to the Booth UC faculty and administration. They are in the phase of developing new policies and guidelines regulating the special approach to academic integrity, exam supervision and course management required by the peculiar field of online teaching. Further understanding of the issues surrounding academic integrity and academic misconduct occurred when a Booth UC faculty member (Laszlo Markovics) attended AIIIM 2018 at ACC in Brandon. At the end of the conference, Booth UC volunteered to organize AIIIM 2019, which was held on May 29, 2019, with approximately 40 attendees from many publicly funded and some private institutions for higher education in Manitoba and one from British Columbia. After the welcome address from Booth UC President, Dr. Marjory Kerr, two sessions consisting of a lead presentation and three cracker barrel presentations were held, along with a professional development session. AIIIM 2019 closed with the announcement of MAIN and its first official board meeting,

resulting in formal commitment from five institutions in Manitoba to further develop this network.

Red River College

AIIM 2017 coincided with an internal project at RRC involving a quantitative and qualitative exploration of academic misconduct among international students. Attending AIIM 2017 established a connection between RRC and the research and teaching and learning practices at other Manitoba post-secondary institutions. In 2018, when findings from the project at RRC were presented at AIIM, it sparked interest in attendees from the University of Manitoba, who noted that there was a lack of research on post-incident outcomes for international students. Further research on this topic is now underway. Cross-institutional partnerships continued to strengthen when several academic staff from post-secondary institutions in Manitoba, including Lisa Vogt from RRC, attended the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity 2019 at the University of Calgary. When the idea to form MAIN emerged (as described below), staff from RRC were eager to be a part of it.

Working with other MAIN members, RRC began to explore the rate at which contract cheating and file sharing websites were being accessed on institutional networks (described in Seeland, Stoesz, and Vogt, submitted). RRC Information Technology Services and Deans had been digging into this information as well, and the questions posed through MAIN helped to unify the conversation at RRC. With other MAIN institutions sharing information, RRC could make institutional comparisons as well as connections to the latest research and recommendations. A strong case for blocking contract cheating websites was developed and senior leadership approved. The blocking of contract cheating websites on the college network began in early March 2020.

RRC was the designated host for AIIM 2020, with staff in Library Services and the Academic Success Center planning the event. In February 2020, the registration capacity of 60 seats had been filled and the call for proposals brought forward many interesting ideas. Although RRC does not have one central unit for delivering academic integrity education for students and staff, preparations for AIIM 2020 served as a catalyst for greater collaboration within RRC as various departments and services, including support staff, academic staff, and leadership, worked together to host the fourth provincial academic integrity event. Unfortunately, in mid-March, Manitoba public post-secondary institutions announced a move to online program delivery due to COVID-19 and AIIM 2020 was postponed indefinitely.

Manitoba Academic Integrity Network (MAIN)

MAIN was initially bounced around as an idea on the whiteboard of Brenda M. Stoesz' office in the early winter of 2019. MAIN seemed like the logical next step as academic integrity partnerships were developing at a rapid rate between the University of Manitoba, RRC, and ACC. The formation of MAIN was necessary to continue the momentum and encourage collaborations between all post-secondary institutions in Manitoba. In April 2019, several staff members from various post-secondary institutions in Manitoba attended the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity held at the University of Calgary (Eaton, 2019a). At one interactive session, Ridgley, Miron, and McKenzie (2019) described the formation of the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO) and encouraged audience members to gather together as provincial groups to discuss actions they could take to drive the academic integrity agenda forward in their provinces. Stoesz suggested the formation of MAIN and the Manitoba group agreed. This idea and the established annual provincial conference, AIIIM, was shared with the larger group. After the session, the group from British Columbia was interested in learning more about how we planned our provincial conference. Tod Dunham (Thompson Rivers University [TRU]) expressed an interest in attending AIIIM 2019 and was invited to be a provincial liaison to MAIN.

Thompson Rivers University

Promoting academic integrity has always been a high priority at TRU, and we were challenged with the idea to enhance collaboration with other institutions towards this goal in 2019. TRU sent five representatives to the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity, held at the University of Calgary in April 2019. It was at this event where we met several academic integrity enthusiasts from Manitoba and first heard about AIIIM 2019. We were excited to hear about this annual event in Manitoba and immediately wanted to attend to see what we could learn. Sending a representative to attend AIIIM 2019 at Booth UC in May 2019, and consequently the inaugural meeting of MAIN, was inspiring, and the representative arrived back in British Columbia with a renewed excitement towards getting something similar going in BC.

TRU hosted the first ever British Columbia Academic Integrity Day (BCAID) on October 18, 2019. BCAID was attended by over 70 representatives from across BC and as a result of this day, the British Columbia Academic Integrity Network (BCAIN) was formed. Our hope is that BCAID will become as successful an annual event that AIIIM is in Manitoba, and we are honoured and excited to be working with our colleagues in Manitoba as an out-of-province member of MAIN.

Conclusions

Sharing ideas, challenges, and successes at AIIIM and MAIN have enabled each of us to acquire further support at our individual institutions to develop resources and strengthen the academic integrity agenda in Manitoba. And there is more work to do. One of MAIN's next steps is to formally connect with other provincial networks, such as the AICO (Ridgley et al., 2019), the Alberta Council of Academic Integrity (ACAI; Eaton, 2019b), and BCAIN, to develop and participate in national initiatives to promote academic integrity in higher education across Canada. Gathering for national events, such as the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity (Eaton, 2019a), allow those involved in academic integrity work to share current knowledge gained through research and practice.

One must not forget the importance of involving students in the academic integrity conversation. Although students have been a focus of many investigations for decades, particularly in areas related to academic misconduct (Eaton & Edino, 2018), research on student involvement in initiatives to promote academic integrity in Canada is absent from the literature. Moreover, their involvement on campuses as drivers of change in the culture of academic integrity is largely unknown. This is unfortunate, as the post-secondary student voice and influence is important for the promotion of academic integrity; formal and informal day-to-day interactions between peers play a significant role in shaping the overall student experience (Peregrina-Kretz, Seifert, Arnold, & Burrow, 2018) and behaviours, including the push to do right or wrong (Pan & Stiles, 2019). Thus, a challenge for MAIN and other academic integrity networks across Canada will be to involve students in academic integrity projects and programs in meaningful ways to have a greater impact on the culture of integrity.

Lastly, an important challenge for MAIN is to acquire support from higher levels of leadership within institutions, and from provincial governments, to tackle significant issues related to academic integrity and academic misconduct. Examining serious issues, such as contract cheating — which is plaguing higher education around the world (Clarke & Lancaster, 2006; Lancaster, 2019) — and inspecting existing academic integrity policies (e.g., Stoesz, Eaton, Miron, & Thacker, 2019), should be priorities in Manitoba. Little is currently known about the extent of the contract cheating problem in our province and whether our policies sufficiently address this issue. We must acquire a deeper understanding of the factors that drive contract cheating and other forms of academic misconduct in order to develop effective policies and implement strategies to support academic integrity and prevent academic misconduct. Findings from high quality academic integrity research will provide educators, administrators, and government with the information needed for policy and program development and revision.

The future of academic integrity in post-secondary education in Manitoba and across Canada is bright as collaborations between institutions reenergize and motivate those involved in initiatives that foster cultures of integrity at individual institutions (Eaton, 2019b). Researchers suggest that when people within and across organizational boundaries who share common values come together to share knowledge, resources, and ideas, good things can happen (Caimo & Lomi, 2015; Hung, Durcikova, Lai, & Lin, 2011). This is certainly true for individuals working in the areas of academic integrity and higher education in Manitoba.

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