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Building a Regional Academic Integrity Network: Profiling the Growth and Action of the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario

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Abstract

Since 2008, the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO) has provided a forum for academic integrity practitioners and representatives from post-secondary institutions in Ontario to share information, and to facilitate the establishment and promotion of academic integrity best practices. This article is a summary of a presentation given at the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity, which was organized and held at the University of Calgary in April 2019. The creation, operation and role of the Council, and how it serves to connect post-secondary institutions in Ontario on academic integrity-related matters is described. This will include the benefits that such an association brings between institutions, and some of the accomplishments to date, like the establishment and ongoing work of a contract cheating sub-committee. The most recent achievement of mobilizing academic integrity practitioners at a national level is also described.

Keywords: Canada, Ontario, Academic integrity, networks, mobilization, regional development, Academic Integrity Council of Ontario, Council of Universities, Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents, collaboration

Establishment of the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO)

In Ontario, all 22 publicly funded universities are part of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). The COU "provides a forum for Ontario's universities to collaborate and advocate in support of their shared mission to the benefit and prosperity of students, communities and the province of Ontario" (COU, n.d.). A number of groups exist under the various divisions of the COU such as: academics, institutional planning, administration and finance, registrars, secretaries, and research. The academic division of the COU is overseen by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV). AICO is one of a number of OCAV affiliates that reports directly to OCAV.

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Affiliate groups of COU "may be established by the Council or created on the initiative of others. Normally an affiliate would have some executive power delegated to it, explicitly or implicitly, by the Council. Affiliates are responsible to the Council with respect to those of their interests and functions that fall within the scope of the activities of the Council" (COU, n.d.).

AICO originated in 2008 when a number of academics and staff interested in academic integrity from Southern Ontario universities informally formed the Academic Integrity Ontario Group (AIOG). Members from these original institutions identified others who were working in academic integrity and contacted them by email, with an invitation to meet as a larger group. These meetings emphasized information sharing and knowledge transfer amongst practitioners across institutions. The initial mandate of this group was "to facilitate the establishment and promotion of academic integrity best practices in Ontario post- secondary education" (AICO, 2011). In fall 2009, AIOG formally adopted the name the AICO. A proposal was submitted to COU in 2011 petitioning for an affiliate status. In 2013, AICO's constitution and bylaws were ratified by COU, and AICO was granted its affiliate status (Appendix A).

Operation and Management of AICO

Although AICO is an affiliate of COU, there are no dedicated financial or human resources to support this group. This being said, organizational members can join AICO at no cost. The operation of AICO, therefore, relies solely on the time and effort of volunteers and their associated institutions.

AICO is currently managed by an Executive Committee consisting of a Chair, Secretary/Outreach Coordinator and College Liaison. The Chair is the official representative of the Council and leads the Executive. The Chair is responsible for preparing the annual report on the activities of AICO that is submitted to OCAV, securing potential host organizations for the AICO meetings, and assisting with the planning of the meetings. The Secretary/Outreach Coordinator serves as the liaison with the representative from the COU. They work closely with the Chair and College Liaison to promote and enhance participation in the membership of AICO, as well as plan and host bi-annual meetings. Similarly, the College Liaison works to enhance college participation and engages in AICO meeting preparation.

It is important to note that these positions are a departure from the constitution and have evolved based on the needs of AICO membership. In 2014, AICO members discussed the positions outlined in the constitution and determined that they did not fit with the needs and activities of the Council. For example, the position of Chair rotated to whomever was

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the lead in the host organization for the next AICO meeting. This format was based on holding an annual meeting, however AICO members identified a preference to hold semi-annual meetings. Therefore, the practice of holding semi-annual meetings with the rotation of a Chair based on the meeting location proved impractical.

In keeping with the constitution, "one representative from each university in Ontario shall be designated as the voting member for that institution; in consultation with the academic integrity practitioners employed by the institution, the Council representative shall be determined by the institution's OCAV representative" (AICO, n.d.). Although, there is a voting process in place, the Council rarely uses the formal process that involves the voting member of each institution. This is typically only invoked when determining changes in positions on the Executive Committee (i.e., voting in new committee members or extending the term of a member). The majority of other business and activities undertaken by AICO is based on the consensus of the membership.

The inclusion of a position dedicated to colleges was a departure from the original membership of the Council. In 2013-14, the members decided that it was important to collaborate and work closely with our colleagues across higher education. Hence, colleges were invited to participate in the AICO meetings and to become members of AICO. Given that colleges are not included in the formal constitution, college members are non-voting members. Apart from voting status, colleges have full participation in AICO activities and work.

Currently, AICO meetings are organized bi-annually and rotate between academic institutions. In addition to these regular meetings, AICO stays in touch with its membership through a moderated email listserv, which has been graciously maintained by Queen's University for over 8 years. This listserv has over 124 subscribers from both colleges and Universities. The AICO executive has also created a website (academicintegritycouncilofontario.wordpress.com) and maintains a Twitter account (@AICOIntegrity)

Function & Growth of AICO

The objectives for AICO are: to provide a forum for representatives from Ontario higher education institutions to promote academic integrity principles, support and encourage collaboration and an exchange of ideas and resources, conduct and share research on academic integrity matters, and encourage and offer professional development amongst members.

Earlier priorities for AICO included: adopting a governance document that outlined the

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various roles of council members and their terms of service, building connections with colleagues from provincial colleges, promoting cultures of integrity at post-secondary institutions through educational outreach and increased academic integrity awareness, and establishing guidelines for best practices in promoting academic integrity. More recently, AICO has focused on a targeted membership drive, formalizing new member onboarding procedures, and building education and prevention initiatives to combat contract cheating across Ontario.

In 2011, the newly formed AICO had 22 members from across 14 universities (including Royal Military College) and one college (Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College). By 2015, there were 51 individuals from 15 universities and 10 individuals from 10 colleges who were members of AICO. Currently, there are 58 individuals from universities and 37 individuals from colleges. 17 (out of 22) publicly funded universities and 14 (out of 24) publicly funded colleges are represented in AICO.

Early attendance at AICO meetings consisted of a small but dedicated group of individuals. Semi-annual meetings regularly rotated amongst universities in the earlier days and are now hosted by both universities and colleges. Attendance at AICO meetings has grown immensely over the past few years with a record attendance of over 100 people at the most recent meeting hosted at Mohawk College on November 8, 2019.

AICO has increased its involvement in international activities such as promoting and participating in the annual International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating on October 16th. This day coincides with Global Ethics Day (n.d.). Additionally, AICO members regularly participate and present at the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) and the Plagiarism Across Europe and Beyond annual conferences. Members of AICO were instrumental in creating the Canadian Consortium, which runs in tandem to the ICAI annual conference, and provides Canadian post-secondary participants, with an interest in academic integrity, to meet and discuss what is current and important on a national level.

The most current efforts of AICO members include work related to eradicating contract cheating. According to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), "contract cheating happens when a third party completes work for a student who then submits it to an education provider as their own, where such input is not permitted" (QAA, 2017, p. 2). Contract cheating has become a rising concern across higher education institutions around the world. In 2018, AICO members responded to this increasing problem by developing a contract cheating sub- committee which focuses on ways to tackle this issue in Ontario post-secondary organizations. Members from six different academic institutions created this group and developed an action plan that aims to rally higher education institutions to work against contract cheating. Furthermore, the sub-committee members are exploring

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legislation that would be directed at predatory, for- profit contract cheating agencies, to outlaw their marketing efforts to students on college and university campuses.

Benefits of a Provincial Group

Since AICO's formation 12 years ago, there have been a number of benefits across institutions. First and foremost are the invaluable connections that have been built between colleagues interested and working in the field of academic integrity. Knowledge sharing and knowledge translation have created strong relationships that have benefit members of different higher education organizations, including students, faculty, staff, and leaders. These reciprocal relationships have enabled institutions to work collaboratively on larger issues and approach matters related to academic integrity holistically, as well as network with knowledgeable experts, practitioners, and researchers focused in the field of academic integrity. Foundational to AICO's ongoing work and efforts are the awareness of the importance of robust policy, the need for ongoing research, and the continued collegial work across and within post-secondary organizations. One example of such work is the aforementioned contract cheating sub-committee. This sub-committee provided a unified voice and helped organize and strengthen efforts by bringing together stakeholders and experts with a common interest and purpose related to the curtailing of contract cheating. This may not have happened without an official organizational approach through AICO.

The formalized nature of AICO also allows the organization and its members to support other important efforts that include ongoing support and mentorship to isolated practitioners, and initiatives that aim to raise awareness of the topic and strategies to support the maintenance and promotion of academic integrity with those in senior management roles in higher education. Anecdotally, we know that individuals working on efforts related to academic integrity have received funding and protected work time to pursue these efforts because of the support, advice, and recognition of AICO as an affiliate organization to OCAV.

AICO members also recognize the merit in sharing academic integrity resources, like effective tools, best practices, strategies, updated policies and procedures, and proposed collaborative research ideas or current completed research. An example of such sharing occurred in 2018, when a promotional tool that was developed at Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning was disseminated and used broadly as a template to raise awareness about the International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating (which coincides with Global Ethics Day).

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Mobilizing AI practitioners across Canada

Perhaps some of the most exciting work has occurred most recently with AICO's influence on mobilizing other academic integrity practitioners on a pan-Canadian level. Through the first ever Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity held in Calgary, Alberta, in April 2019, AICO members presented information about the organization to colleagues across the country with a shared interest and passion for academic integrity.

Part of the presentation invited participants to group together colleagues from their geographic area and begin discussion on common ideas, desires, and strategies to create similar networking organizations. Presenters divided the room into groupings of people from the following regions: Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. These groups were then asked to discuss a number of questions (Appendix B). Each group recorded their responses on flip chart paper so that the larger group could participate in a review of different ideas and approaches. This work allowed protected time and a collaboration of efforts to begin to understand how each province or region might create a networking organization, like AICO, in their geographical area. It also allowed them an opportunity to consider potential barriers and problem solve some of these potential obstacles so that they could be situated to succeed with their efforts as they moved forward. Participants eagerly engaged in conversation and were enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with other like-minded experts in the field. Flip chart notes were then retrieved by the presenters and transcribed by one of the presenters (AM), and circulated to the workshop participants. Subsequently, this transcribed information, and the rich discussion led by the presenters resulted in the new networks in Alberta and British Columbia and renewed initiatives in the province of Manitoba.

While individual efforts by committed and interested people are always important with any initiative, the merits of an organized collective cannot be disputed. The work of academic integrity remains an essential effort that will strengthen the mission of post-secondary institutions. The prolific growth of academic integrity organizations across Canada will hopefully continue, particularly, expansion into the Maritime Provinces on the east coast of Canada. In addition, these groups will be brought into the fold of pre-existing agencies such as ICAI Canada, and its parent group, ICAI.

Future AICO Initiatives

Heading into 2020, AICO plans to start a new subcommittee on educational resources, continue to recruit and expand membership, build AICO's professional development offerings, further grow the AICO website, and increase collaboration with similar networks in other provinces.

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AICO also plans to move ahead with the implementation of the action plan developed by the contract cheating sub-committee. In November 2019, three members of the sub-committee gave a presentation on contract cheating to the Provosts and Academic Vice-Presidents of OCAV. There was rich discussion and sharing amongst the group. There seemed to be support to move forward with initiatives against contract cheating, particularly exploring legislation to ban the advertising of contract cheating services. The success of this initial presentation resulted in an invitation to replicate the presentation and encourage additional conversation with the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies, a sub-group of OCAV.

In addition to raising awareness of contract cheating with OCAV, the members were able to highlight the work of AICO and reinforce the importance of academic integrity, especially regarding how it connects to the undergraduate and graduate degree level expectations that OCAV developed. We are hopeful that these presentations will encourage more participation in AICO and increase our membership.

Conclusion

AICO is one example of a grass-roots initiative that evolved into a productive and influential group, focused on the promotion of academic integrity efforts across the post-secondary sector of Ontario. It is important to continue and build on the narrative related to academic integrity and continue to shine a light on initiatives that will help to establish, maintain, and strengthen this important work.

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Appendix A

ACADEMIC-INTEGRITY COUNCIL OF ONTARIO

Constitution and Bylaws of the Academic-Integrity Council of Ontario Article I: Name

The name of the organization shall be the Academic-Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO), hereafter referred to in this document as "the Council".

Article II: Affiliations

The Council is affiliated with the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), which is itself affiliated with the Council of Ontario Universities (COU).

Article III: Mandate and Objectives

The mandate of the Council shall be to facilitate the establishment and promotion of academic integrity best practices in Ontario universities by providing a forum to share information among academic-integrity practitioners, i.e. persons responsible for the administration of academic integrity policy and/or responsible for academic-integrity promotion/education on their campuses, from all universities in Ontario.

The Council shall:

a) promote academic-integrity principles and best practices throughout Ontario universities;

b) represent and advocate for, on behalf of universities, academic integrity in Ontario postsecondary education to other educational institutions and external organizations;

c) provide advice on academic-integrity matters to Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents (OCAV), the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), other educational

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institutions, and external organizations;

d) conduct research focused on academic-integrity matters, and develop publications to help introduce and/or improve best practice related to academic integrity;

e) build partnerships with other educational systems and institutions, government and other relevant organizations for the benefit of members and the province;

f) support and encourage collaboration and exchange of information and ideas among university faculty, staff, and students;

g) encourage and stimulate professional development and excellence among its members; and

h) encourage interaction and collaboration with other national and international academic integrity organizations in any mutually agreed endeavours to fulfill the respective objectives of the organizations.

Article IV: Membership

Membership shall be open to all academic-integrity practitioners (defined in Article III) who support the aims and objectives of the Council, and whose Executive Heads are members of the Council of Ontario Universities.

There shall be two membership categories:

a) Voting - One representative from each university in Ontario shall be designated as the voting member for that institution; in consultation with the academic-integrity practitioners employed by the institution, the Council representative shall be determined by the institution's OCAV representative.

b) Non-Voting - All other members shall be non-voting members with full participatory privileges.

Matters requiring votes pertain to the activities of AICO in the collective in fulfillment of its mandate and objectives as specified in Article III. AICO does not direct or enforce activities within any university nor do decisions by AICO bind universities to a specific action.

Article V: Powers

The Council shall have the power to establish its own bylaws and to appoint committees or task forces in order to fulfill its aims and objectives.

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Article VI: Bylaws

Bylaws may be adopted, amended, suspended or rescinded by a simple majority of voting Council members.

Article VII: Constitutional Amendments

This constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority of the voting members present at any meeting, provided that written notice of the proposed change or substance thereof be sent to the entire membership not less than five working days prior to the date of the meeting and provided that at least two-thirds of all voting members are in attendance or alternatively that quorum is declared and two-thirds of all eligible voting members have votes counted either at the meeting or prior to it via electronic means.

Article VIII: Dissolution of the Council

The Council may be dissolved by a two-thirds majority of voting members present at any meeting, provided that written notice of the proposed dissolution be sent to the entire membership not less than five working days prior to the date of the meeting and provided either that at least two-thirds of the voting members are in attendance or alternatively that quorum is declared and two-thirds of all voting members have votes counted either at the meeting or prior to it via electronic means.

Article IX: Relation to Council of Ontario Universities

The Council shall report on its activities annually, or upon request, to the Council of Ontario Universities through OCAV, with respect to those interests and functions that fall within the Council's mandate.

BY-LAWS

Bylaw 1: Officers

The officers of the Council shall be:

a) the Chair, who shall host the forthcoming scheduled meeting of the Council and is responsible for the following duties: · preparing, organizing, and hosting the next Council meeting; · consulting with members in the preparation of the meeting agendas; · distributing the agenda at least five working days in advance of meetings; and · maintaining minutes of meetings and distributing the approved minutes to the entire membership.

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b) an immediate Past-Chair, who hosted the last scheduled meeting of the Council and who shall serve as an advisor to the Chair in order to provide continuity between meetings of the Council, and

c) a Chair-Elect, who shall host the Council meeting following the meeting hosted by the Chair and is responsible for the following duties:

   o organizing communications with the Officers and the membership as required;

   o performing necessary secretarial and communications duties internally;

   o fulfilling the Chair's duties should the Chair be unable to do so.

d) Additionally, any positions (*ex officio*) appointed or elected for specific tasks or projects as designated by Council shall be created as needed according to normal voting procedures.

Bylaw 2: Committees

a) Executive Committee

There shall be an Executive Committee to be composed of the Chair, immediate Past-Chair, and the Chair-Elect.

The Executive Committee shall be the first point of contact with respect to any external organizations; it will represent the Council and its views in any liaisons with the COU, OCAV, or any other external organizations.

The Council in session or the Executive Committee may appoint other ex-officio Executive Committee members as may be deemed necessary to effectively carry out the objectives of the Council. The voting rights of such ex-officio members shall be determined at that time.

b) Other Committees

The Council in session or the Executive Committee may establish or dissolve standing or ad-hoc committees as may be deemed necessary to effectively carry out the objectives of the Council.

Bylaw 3: Term of Office

The term of office for the Chair, immediate Past-Chair, and Chair-Elect shall be determined by the frequency of regular Council meetings.

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The term of office for any other appointed or elected positions as designated by Council or the Executive Committee shall be determined at that time.

Bylaw 4: Meetings

There shall be at least one regular Council meeting each year, the time and place of which shall be established by the Council in session.

Ad-hoc council meetings may be called by the Chair, Executive Committee, or Council at any time. To call an ad-hoc meeting, written notice of the proposed meeting shall be sent to the entire membership not less than five working days prior to the date of the meeting.

The meetings of any committee shall be set as needed.

Bylaw 5: Definition of Quorum

For meetings of the Council, quorum is defined as 50% of all eligible voting members of Council plus one.

For meetings of all committees, quorum is established as 50% of the members on the committee.

Bylaw 6: Voting

Decisions at Council Meetings

All voting members may vote in person at a Council meeting.

A voting member who cannot attend the meeting may submit his/her vote electronically before the meeting. Such a vote shall be sent confidentially to the listserv administrator, who will ensure that the vote is counted during the formal Council vote. Alternatively, a voting member may delegate his/her voting rights to another member from his/her institution (Bylaw 7).

Decisions Outside of Council Meetings

For matters that must be decided outside of a Council meeting, any member of the Council may propose a motion to the Chair. The proposed motion shall be reviewed by the Executive Committee for appropriateness; if approved by the Executive Committee, the Chair shall send the proposed motion to the entire membership, after which the voting members of Council shall have 10 working days in which to vote electronically. All votes shall be sent confidentially to the listserv administrator, who will report the final result to

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the Council. In this case, a simple majority of votes cast shall be considered equivalent to a simple majority of voting Council members present, provided quorum is achieved.

Bylaw 7: Delegation of Voting Rights

Any voting member of the Council who is unable to attend a meeting may delegate his or her voting rights to another member from his or her institution.

Bylaw 8: Bylaw Amendments

By-laws may be amended at any time, according to the following:

Amendments at Council Meetings

Any Council member who wishes to propose a motion to adopt, amend, suspend, or rescind a bylaw at the next Council meeting shall do so by sending the proposed motion to the Chair not less than 10 working days prior to the date of the meeting. The Chair shall send a written notice of motion to the entire membership not less than five working days prior to the date of the meeting. To adopt, amend, suspend or rescind a bylaw, the majority of all voting members must be in attendance at the meeting or alternatively a quorum must be declared at the meeting and the majority of all eligible voting members have votes counted either at the meeting or prior to it via electronic means.

Amendments Outside of Council Meetings

If an amendment concerning a bylaw must be made outside of a Council meeting, the Chair shall send the proposed motion, as approved by the Executive Committee, to the entire membership, after which the voting members of Council will have 10 working days in which to vote electronically.

All votes shall be sent confidentially to the listserv administrator, who will report the final result to the Council. In this case, a simple majority of votes cast shall be considered equivalent to a simple majority of voting Council members present, provided quorum is achieved.

Bylaw 9: Listserv

The Council shall maintain an electronic mailing listserv for the benefit of the members and to serve the Council's aims and objectives. The listserv shall be housed with a current institutional member and a listserv administrator from that institution shall be appointed by the Council with the administrator's agreement. The listserv administrator shall also maintain a current list of Council members and update the membership as necessary.

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Should the institution housing the listserv no longer be able or willing to serve in this capacity, a motion to appoint another institutional member to house and maintain the listserv shall be brought before the Council by the listserv administrator.

This institution housing and maintaining the listserv shall also serve as the central repository for all Council Minutes.

Original constitution drafted, 12 October 2011 Approved and enacted by OCAV, 12 October 2011

Revision approved by the COU Executive Committee, 8 March 2013 Ratified by the Council of Ontario Universities, 31 October 2013

Appendix B

Questions posed to participants of the Building a Regional Academic Integrity Network: Profiling the Growth and Action of the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario workshop presented at the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity in April 2019.

- o What body oversees universities & colleges in your province or region?

- o What committees or councils do they have?

- o Where could AI fit into any of these or perhaps develop a new committee or council like AICO?

- o Discuss the opportunities and obstacles/challenges to organizing and collaborating with other institutions in your own province or region?

- o How could you overcome the challenges?

- o How and with whom could you start developing a group today?

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