

Academic Integrity and the Pandemic

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“Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make [hu]man a more clever devil.”

— C. S. Lewis

As I am writing this short piece, not only the province of Alberta, but the entire world is barreling toward an ever more precarious situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. It is rather disheartening to see the degree to which, at least in this part of the world, mis- and dis-information, ruthless power politics, as well as a lack of trust in science have and continue to exacerbate the situation. The crisis of values that many parts of the world are experiencing, paired with the health crisis, seem to have created the perfect storm. How is the current self-understanding of postsecondary institutions related to the post-truth climate of “alternative facts”, and what role does or might academic integrity play in rectifying this distrust of learning, facts, and truth? A direct impact of COVID-19 for me has been that these two questions have gained in urgency and become increasingly concrete over the past ten months. Another impact has been an invigorated passion for my work in academic integrity, as well as the renewed appreciation for and connection with my colleagues.

It is well-documented by now that the unexpected and rushed move of courses to an online environment that were designed to be delivered face-to-face resulted in a spike of academic misconduct cases globally. Although it is perhaps not surprising, it is discouraging. However, the determination, generosity, and collegiality that all those involved in responding to these cases at my institution have shown has been remarkable. From members of the Student’s Association of MacEwan University and faculty members volunteering to participate in restorative resolutions, to faculty adjudicators and the Student Conduct Officer working long hours in dealing with the large number of cases, all rose to meet the challenge of the moment.

Then there is the work with the Library, E-Learning Office, and Teaching and Learning Centre in developing workshops, webinars, and resource materials all aimed at assisting faculty members and students in transitioning to remote instruction with integrity. Committees looking at how to address contract cheating, and whether to implement text matching and e-proctoring software. All these interactions not only drew attention to the importance of academic integrity on campus, but they also strengthened the sense of community that is so important to integrity and flourishing.

The most significant impact in this regard, however, has been the shaping of a true Canadian community of practice through the weekly *Integrity Hour*, hosted by Sarah Elaine Eaton from the University of Calgary. Every Monday morning, a group made up of faculty and staff working in academic integrity has met virtually to discuss challenges and developments, as well as to generously share resources and expertise. I'm convinced that the circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to shaping this community, which is also a community of values.

So, as tumultuous and tragic as these past months have been, they have also been productive and have provided us with an opportunity to assess whether how we've been doing things is necessarily the only or best way to do things. The pandemic has been a reminder of the privilege those of us working at postsecondary institutions have to promote and foster integrity in our students and of the responsibility we have to tie education to values that go beyond "employability." The fundamental values of academic integrity, as defined by the International Center for Academic Integrity (2014), namely *honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage*, are a good starting point to pursue Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."

References

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