

Academic Integrity and the Pandemic

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In Foucauldian philosophy, the discourse of a social phenomenon or event, or how it comes to be known, contributes to its understanding (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Knowing the background histories can help us understand the nature of the situation related to academic integrity during the pandemic of 2020. Although the spread of disease caused the pandemic, it influenced several non-medical sectors worldwide, including post-secondary education. Here, I will provide a synoptical background into the work of the Academic Integrity Office at Mohawk College, followed by steps taken to help to promote academic integrity values and practices.

Mohawk College's main campuses are in Hamilton, Ontario, and are "situated on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabeg nations" (Mohawk College Land Acknowledgement). Mohawk College serves over 33,000 students, including 4,825 international students (Mohawk College Institutional Information, n.d.). When COVID-19 was officially declared in Canada and Ontario declared a state of emergency, it imposed a work from home mandate. The universities and colleges shut down their campuses while moving to teaching and learning online on short notice.

The Academic Integrity Office at Mohawk College started its work in September 2019, and we were in the process of undertaking multiple initiatives before the lockdown happened. We were in the process of publishing the academic integrity website under the library website, and a community of practice had been formed and met in January 2020 in hopes of meeting every other month. A few successful workshops were delivered for the faculty and staff, and we had several events for the students that received very positive feedback. The academic integrity officer had gone to several classes to educate students on academic integrity, and the college's academic integrity policy and framework were in development.

In the following sections, I explain three categories of challenges that we faced during the pandemic and how we attempted to solve them. These challenges are a few of the many that we faced as a result of the 2020 pandemic. However, I focus on these three major ones as they serve as the roots of other challenges.

Limited personal contact

The services that were offered in-person were stopped immediately and later resumed in a

limited capacity. For the first few months into the pandemic, the Library, Learning Support Centre, and Student Advising services moved to online support. Shutting down campuses caused limited access to academic integrity resources for the students and staff. For example, the academic integrity outreach programs were limited to sharing information online, mainly in email communications and publishing the website, online class visits, on-demand virtual support, and online meetings.

Increased demand for online education and online proctoring

The pandemic lockdown occurred in the second half of March 2020, while classes were getting close to final exams. One of the priorities for the Academic Integrity Office was finalizing the edits to the website in collaboration with the library technicians and staff and publishing the website so it would be available to students and staff. The efforts were maximized as everything was done remotely and added to the need for extra time and effective virtual communication. The website was published and provided information to students and faculty.

One of the initiatives at the Academic Integrity Office at Mohawk College was sharing information about e-proctoring and modifying assessments to increase academic integrity. Workshops for faculty were held to familiarize them with the techniques to promote academic integrity in virtual assessments and to hear their concerns and future needs. One of the requested areas for supporting faculty and staff to promote academic integrity was to help them design online courses in such a way as to promote academic integrity. Various resources were consulted, and the gist of findings was shared with the faculty via online communication with department chairs (i.e., associate deans at Mohawk College). Next, the information was shared on the website and the link was sent to the academic integrity community of practice. To enhance the instructors' intake of the material, I developed some workshops for faculty on designing online assessments that promoted academic integrity.

Another area of concern were file-sharing websites that posted assignments online, often without the instructors' permission. More instructors contacted the Academic Integrity Office about this issue than in the past, which may have been due to increased awareness of this issue as instructors moved their courses online and/or an increase in the volume of assignments that were uploaded to file-sharing websites. In collaboration with other institutions, the Academic Integrity Office established a takedown request protocol to ask these file-sharing websites to remove instructors' content from their platforms. This practice increased the office's workload, and some resources had to be allocated to follow up with such websites.

Use of technology

One of the observed trends during the pandemic was the substitution of in-class practices with virtual ones, which increased faculty workload and was not necessarily successful. We used the SAMR model to tackle the issue. In SAMR Model, S stands for substitution, A stands for

augmentation, *M* stands for modification, and *R* stands for redefinition (Puentedura, 2009; 2010). We observed that some of the challenges that faculty were facing might have been caused by trying to substitute in-person educational practices using virtual platforms, when modification (for example) may have been more appropriate. To clarify the point, I use some examples. For some courses before the pandemic, instructors required students to write an essay for their final in-person exam. The allocated time was between 90 to 120 minutes. Applying the same examination method using an online platform would be an example of substitution. In this case, the instructor would ask students to be online, use a virtual conference call platform (e.g., Zoom), and turn on their cameras. Then, the instructor would send the exam topic to the students and students would type their essays and submit it to their instructor within 90 to 120 minutes. However, if the instructor decided to break down the exam into three or four take home assignments, each bearing a certain percentage of the final exam; this would be an example of modification. The observation pointed the need for further education and training for the faculty members to teach online.

The actual practice of "so what" and "how" was the next challenge. For tackling those challenges, I applied my knowledge of education, combining principles of adult education with the experience and knowledge of integrating technology into education. This was followed by collaborations with the librarians and the college's Centre for Teaching and Learning. Group workshops and individual training sessions were held for faculty to learn about integrating technology into education appropriately and applying it to their courses. Having expertise in the education field and the scholarship of teaching and learning saved the day and provided much-needed and timely assistance.

To summarize, the pandemic of 2020 created an amalgamation of unprecedented situations, causing shifting priorities and issues to be tackled daily. The three categories of challenges—limited personal contact, increased demand for online education and online proctoring, and technology use—were some of the problematic areas. At the provincial level, we faced cancelling of conferences and events in some cases, and in other cases, moving events to online platforms such as using Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

On a final bright point, the pandemic showed the importance of expertise in education as a discipline and its contributions to every academic field when instruction does not go as planned. Investments (e.g., funding) in the scholarship of teaching and learning offered invaluable support through centres for teaching and learning. Many institutions often prioritize using people within specific fields such as engineering for performing educational development tasks. For example, appointing someone with computer sciences background to help with the implementation of LMSs is not far from practice. Yet, the science of education and psychology of learning and instruction, if combined with educational technology experience and/or expertise, does benefit the post-secondary teaching practices in online education. Maybe in the future, we can learn from the

lessons and increase investments into these areas to support post-secondary education and specifically support academic integrity in our institutions.

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