Reflections on the First Year of Integrity Hour: An Online Community of Practice for Academic Integrity

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Abstract

Integrity Hour first convened in March 2020, in response to the rapid pivot to emergency remote teaching during COVID-19. After a year, this online community of practice (CoP) is still going strong. We collectively reflect on how the first year of Integrity Hour has informed our understanding of how to uphold and enact academic integrity and impacted how we work with students, support our colleagues, and make decisions.

Keywords: academic integrity, Canada, community of practice (CoP), higher education informal learning

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When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, resulting in the rapid pivot to remote emergency teaching, concerns about ethical assessment, contract cheating, unethical file-sharing, e-proctoring and other issues related to academic integrity surfaced soon after. Colleagues began emailing and having informal phone conversations. It occurred to me (Sarah) that it might be beneficial to create an opportunity for those working in academic integrity in Canada to share experiences, ideas, wisdom, and resources in a safe space and so, Integrity Hour was born. Our first meeting was held on March 30, 2020 when 12 colleagues from 7 other institutions, including colleges and universities from Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario. Since then, those interested in Integrity Hour have joined from across the country and we continue to meet regularly on Mondays for a participant-driven conversation. We held

conversations in an open dialogue format for the first six months or so, shifting to a circle process for the conversation in mid-November (see Pranis, 2005).

I had no idea when we started how long Integrity Hour would continue. I just knew that I was not alone when I was looking for advice and guidance. We evolved into an informal community of practice (CoP) where contributors learn with and from one another. Although I facilitate the conversation and serve as our Circle Keeper, the topics are generated by participants and everyone has the opportunity to share their thoughts on the question or problem posed. When colleagues from the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO) expressed an interest in hosting their own Integrity Hour, I developed a guide to help them, and anyone else interested in hosting their own virtual community conversations (see Eaton, 2020). I have since shared the guide with others at my home university and beyond, as virtual online communities continue to grow across higher education.

After a year, Integrity Hour is still going strong. In this collaborative reflection, participants of Integrity Hour share perspectives on what this informal virtual CoP has meant to them. Each contributor has shared their perspectives in the form of a micro-essay. I have gathered the reflections into this collective piece. Each individual's voice and style is preserved and we have only corrected minor editorial details. The differences among the contributions reflect the individual voices of each writer.

There is no perfect way to decide on authorship order for a piece such as this. I have put Beatriz Moya Figueroa's contribution up front, as she has worked alongside me for many months to keep notes of every meeting. The notes are distributed to those who join in for that week and Beatriz has become one of the stewards of the community. Otherwise, the contributions are ordered alphabetically by surname of the contributors.

Beatriz Moya, University of Calgary

I was invited to participate at Integrity Hour by Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton. As my Ph.D. supervisor, Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton explained that Integrity Hour was an informal online Community of Practice (CoP) integrated by Canadian Academic Integrity (AI) professionals who met weekly to discuss AI issues and challenges. I also learned how Covid-19 had allowed for new opportunities to use an online platform and blur geographical and institutional boundaries to benefit AI knowledge-sharing.

I felt motivated to participate in Integrity Hour for many reasons. First, I am a Chilean woman and a former educational developer. Now as a Ph.D. student in a Canadian university, I was eager to learn about the Canadian post-secondary education (PSE) context. Second, before I entered the Integrity Hour community, I became inspired to seek newness (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018). With this mindset, I quickly recognized Integrity Hour embodied a new virtual space that combined informal learning (Thomson, 2015), ethical relationality (Donald, 2009), and ideological divergence and convergence (Philip et al., 2018). From my perspective, Integrity Hour represented new possibilities for people passionate about an AI teaching and learning perspective. Third, I was beginning my AI journey, therefore, I valued the opportunity to learn

from experts and understand how AI is enacted, promoted, and embodied in the Canadian educational system.

I recognize that after seven months of participation, my motivation to be part of Integrity Hour has increased. As a former educational developer, I recognize that deep learning happens in each one of the meetings. Members' reflections and insights are constantly built from previous dialogues. Coming from a context where my involvement was entirely related to formal educational development programs, I could experience the different and equally relevant angle of informal learning. There is abundant literature pointing at how informal and significant conversations among trusted peers can impact teaching and learning perspectives (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009, 2015; Thomson, 2015; Verwood & Poole, 2016); Integrity Hour is a clear example of this.

Another motivation is that I see Integrity Hour as a vortex that attracts a myriad of diverse and tangible spaces, knowledge systems, and experiences. For instance, Integrity Hour members' interactions show how some AI-shared principles have culturally and socially situated interpretations. In my opinion, the qualities behind this vortex connect to the ethical relationality made visible by the Integrity Hour virtual circle, which ensures equitable participation and visibility. Ethical relationality invites understanding into how our experiences position ourselves in relation to others (Donald, 2009). For this reason, Integrity Hour is a safe space for everyone who participates.

Overall, I believe Integrity Hour has become a robust social infrastructure for AI knowledge-sharing and problem-solving; it has also been flexible enough to integrate a diversity of dynamics and redraw its boundaries. Inspired by Taylor et al. (2021), I close by posing that Integrity Hour might be turning into something more than a CoP. I see Integrity Hour always becoming, and only the future can tell us what Integrity Hour will be. For now, I am always amazed at how much I can learn from it.

Carina Butterworth, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)

My intention in attending the Integrity Hour was to collaborate with others in online instruction and authentic online assessment best practices, but it demonstrated to provide many other benefits as a post-secondary instructor. Discovering how other institutions handle academic integrity, learning new creative ways to assess students, developing an understanding of policy for academic integrity, and networking with other post-secondary education professionals from across the country were some of those benefits.

One discovery of importance was the number of institutions where online academic integrity was largely unexplored. In fact, traditional assessment methods of students continued to be common and were not flexible to be used online. I have facilitated an online course for many years where I was not permitted to change exam structures or course content. Not agreeing with the development and implementation of for-profit exam proctors, I knew the course needed modification. In conversations at Integrity Hour, I learned that others believed this structure was not optimal in assessing the students. I continued to advocate the discussion to

my supervisor, asserting my belief that project based learning is the best practice implementation for course design. This course is now being redeveloped to remove the exams and become project based. This excites me that my learning and forwarded feedback has been accepted.

Although many universities and colleges are educating teaching professionals, there was discussion regarding the continued heavy reliance on traditional ideas of preventing the student from cheating, rather than following the research of Eaton et al. (2017) regarding developing assessments discouraging academic misconduct (University of Alberta, 2021). There are some institutions with policies about proactive strategies for instructors, such as "Helping to reduce the opportunity for students to commit academic misconduct, through appropriate design and administration of evaluations and assessments" (SAIT, 2020, p. 3) but are difficult to enforce. The Integrity Hour participant discussions are the drivers for my institution and others towards these positive changes.

There was also discussion around text matching software. My institution uses a text matching software that instructors may use in their online submissions and I have implemented the use of it as a learning opportunity instead of using it for punitive action (Crossman et al., 2019; Whittle & Murdoch-Eaton, 2008). To do this, I inform the students about possible issues that they may encounter with the software, then allow them to resubmit as many times as they need for their own learning.

My key takeaways from Integrity Hour are that there is motivation in post-secondary institutions to find ways to prevent academic misconduct through assessment design, teaching moments, and implementation of unique techniques. The effective implementation of policy, educating professors and instructors, and a focus on student engagement in the learning process will create a reduction in academic integrity issues. The discussion has been highly beneficial in brainstorming and sharing new ideas, and has been helpful to me, my institution, and my students during this past year.

Donna Feledichuk, Portage College

I was invited by Sarah Elaine Eaton last fall to participate in the weekly Integrity Hour conversations after sending an inquiry about exam invigilation software. Frankly I did not know what to expect. Was this going to be a group discussing issues only pertaining to research intensive universities that were mostly not applicable to the context of my community college? Was there an expectation to attend each meeting having researched and spent time reviewing literature to be well versed to delve into deep philosophical discussions on weekly topics? To my delight, Integrity Hour has become one of the best hours of my work week. Sarah's facilitation of this time is excellent, she provides a collegial environment that promotes dialogue, allows everyone to speak, and is respectful of everyone's time. We provide our experience grounded in our context. Various sides of the debate are heard with respect. Regardless of the size of your institution or your expertise in the field of academic integrity all perspectives are welcome.

We often work in silos in post-secondary institutions. Siloed from our peers in other institutions and siloed at times from our colleagues at our own institutions. We frequently work in isolation, feeling our struggles and challenges are all our own. When we have the opportunity to come together as colleagues with similar concerns from different colleges and universities across the nation we see instead our challenges are often similar to others and solutions and lessons learned from our peers can be customized to work at our own institutions. An informal CoP has been developed.

I feel personally as a leader in my institution better prepared when questions arise in the area of academic integrity. At times issues brought to my attention have already been brought forward by a colleague at another institution in our weekly conversation and I am prepared to talk about viable solutions. I am also able to be proactive in implementing processes and procedures at my institution based on lessons learned from my colleagues. I have a sense of support; I know that if I meet a challenge in an area related to academic integrity I can brainstorm with a group of peers. I know that if I have a specific question I have individuals from various institutions I can call to have an in-depth conversation about how they have handled a similar scenario. The weekly conversations have expanded my knowledge base and allowed me to develop a network of colleagues across Canada.

Kathleen Leslie, Athabasca University

It is difficult to overstate the challenges that many have faced, professionally and personally, over the past year. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered much of our lives and even those of us in the relative comfort of academia have had disruptions to our research, teaching, and home lives that have changed the nature of our work.

For me, the pandemic hit when I was still getting acclimatized to my academic role. In September 2019, I began my tenure track position. In January 2020, I became our faculty's inaugural Academic Integrity Officer, a new position meant to help standardize the investigation of potential academic misconduct across programs in our faculty and provide academic integrity support to instructors and students. This role came with a small teaching release but most of my research, teaching, and service workload continued.

I was excited to take on this role since I was interested in academic integrity, though I quickly realized the learning curve would be steep. I began getting oriented to our policies and procedures with the help of colleagues and was introduced to Sarah Elaine Eaton after she presented at a faculty meeting in early 2020 (our last in-person event for the foreseeable future). I quickly followed Sarah on Twitter and joined the listserv of the Alberta Council on Academic Integrity (ACAI).

Then, the pandemic hit. While our faculty has always worked mostly remotely, there were still many challenges in supporting our clinical programs and our students working as front-line health care providers. Even with strong support from my colleagues and university administration, I struggled with balancing my tenure track workload, the academic integrity

caseload, and parenting my two school-aged children, one of whom is medically complex, who have been doing school from home since the pandemic began.

A beacon of light appeared when Sarah began Integrity Hour in March 2020. I have attended regularly since its inception. Integrity Hour is a safe and grounding space, where participants from across the country in various post-secondary roles can discuss current academic integrity topics and learn from each other's' perspectives. When I began as our faculty's Academic Integrity Officer, I thought my role would be punitive in nature, focused on policing and enforcing while doling out punishments to set wayward students on the straight and narrow path. Our weekly conversations at Integrity Hour have been in large part responsible for my shift in mindset towards the shared responsibility of faculty and institutions in supporting students to understand the value of acting with integrity in their scholarly pursuits.

Now a year into both the pandemic and my academic integrity role, I know that Integrity Hour has played a large part in nurturing my professional growth and development in this area. There is still much to learn and much work to be done as post-secondary education continues to evolve. CoP, such as Integrity Hour, offer a guiding light as we look to the future and hope for brighter days ahead.

Joel Murray, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

I am a relative newcomer to Integrity Hour: I was welcomed into this CoP in November, 2020, after I had sought advice on academic integrity matters from Tod Denham of Thompson Rivers University, whom I had met at the 2020 ACAI Conference and who first introduced me to Integrity Hour.

As a former Associate Dean, I became interested in academic integrity because I was responsible for investigating academic misconduct and administering the student academic integrity policy of my university. During my seven years in that position, I met with many students alleged to have committed academic integrity violations and thus became interested not only in the causes of academic misconduct but also in the results—on both the institution and the student.

When my two terms as Associate Dean ended, I was appointed to my current position, one portfolio of which is academic integrity. Integrity Hour has been meaningful to me in my new position for two reasons. One is that I've learned that there are dedicated, like-minded professionals throughout Canada whose focus is academic integrity. I find it both stimulating and comforting to be able to discuss and share issues with professionals who have comparable roles and are challenged by similar concerns at their institutions. I have learned from my colleagues across Canada that even as our institutions can be quite different in many aspects—governance is but one example—we all share a commitment to academic integrity and to doing what we believe is right for our institutions and our students.

The other reason that Integrity Hour is meaningful to me is that my participation affords me a certain amount of credibility within my institution. I can refer to a pan-Canadian perspective

on academic integrity—not just *my* perspective—when I speak to my colleagues at my university and when I make recommendations to senior executives on the direction that I believe my institution should take in furthering academic integrity. For example, I would like to move our institution toward taking a restorative approach to academic misconduct, so I can confidently report to my institution that certain participants with whom I meet regularly are proponents of this approach and have successfully used it in their institutions.

To conclude, Integrity Hour has become a much looked-forward-to part of my weekly routine. I eagerly await my Monday morning meeting with my Canadian colleagues so that we can discuss issues and concerns to which we can all relate and with which we can all help one another.

Claudius Soodeen, Red River College & University of Winnipeg

As an educator, faculty development consultant, and student, issues of integrity matter to me. Over the years, I began to see institutions as complicit in issues of academic integrity - integrity in the sense of truthfulness and wholeness (as in structural integrity). Educators, when modeling truthfulness and ensuring that their teaching and evaluation are authentic, unbiased, and of high quality, are contributing to the integrity of the academy. Yet, I found that the usual discourse about academic integrity focused mostly on student cheating and how to stop it and alleged that certain groups of students were more culturally disposed to cheating. These narratives were and are partial, misleading, and unhelpful. Furthermore, they drive ineffective institutional responses that do not accomplish what they purport to accomplish.

I had this discussion with Lisa Vogt, now the Academic Integrity Specialist at Red River College, over several years. One day she invited me to Integrity Hour – in fact, she could not help but talk highly about someone named Sarah Eaton! I attended and found people at other institutions who had similar views – and some who did not. The conversations were stimulating and eye-opening.

Being able to ask honest questions, hear various points of view and test my own ideas in a safe forum has been invaluable. My network has expanded, and I have been able to share the "wealth" with colleagues, notably Jane Lothian, a Criminal Justice Instructor at University of Winnipeg.

Jane Lothian, University of Winnipeg

I have been an Instructor at the University of Winnipeg for the past 24 years so the practice of contemplating and attempting to effectively address issues of academic integrity is not new to me. However, it wasn't until I was asked to attend the 2019 Academic Integrity Inter-Institutional Meeting (AIIIM) at Assiniboine College in Brandon, Manitoba, that I had the pleasure of meeting an entire community of experts from educational institutions across Manitoba with similar visions of academic integrity and a commitment to developing, facilitating, and implementing strategies and policies that support institutional integrity and student success.

This past winter (so nice to use the words past and winter in the same sentence), my colleague and friend Claudius Soodeen suggested that I participate in Integrity Hour. After my first Monday morning session I was hooked. Even though I am a 'newbie' to the study of academic integrity, I feel welcomed and supported by all. The discussions are always information packed and lively. Integrity Hour truly is a safe space—quite a remarkable accomplishment frankly. As I struggle to meet the obvious challenges of teaching and working in a pandemic world, Integrity Hour has provided me with a much-needed bit of joy every Monday morning as I login and see the faces in this great group. The knowledge I have acquired has been invaluable and the camaraderie and respect modelled in Integrity Hour is integral to enhancing my ability to advocate for a similar vision of Academic Integrity at the University of Winnipeg.

Bronwen Wheatley, University of Calgary

I was invited to join Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton's Integrity Hour in June 2020, and upon receipt of that email I felt as though I had been invited to leave the kids' table and join the adults. At my first Integrity Hour meeting, I found myself in the online presence of people who were at the top of their game. These attendees were accomplished in their fields of study, possessed of solid academic integrity principles, and working to bring the best of both to their students and their institutions. That first meeting, I took notes and tried to gauge whether or not my contributions would be of value; however, I soon discovered that my Integrity Hour colleagues welcomed comments from new members. In fact, they all take a keen interest in the wellbeing of students, educators, and staff, recognizing that academic misconduct has a profound effect on everyone it touches.

I have watched Integrity Hour grow past its initial conversational format to its current circle format, where topics are proposed and every Zoom attendee has the opportunity to speak to that topic. I have witnessed group members present diverse recommendations because of their viewpoints and practices. Questions I would never have dreamed of asking were asked and discussed, and topics I never knew existed were brought forth for discussion. I discovered these people all matched my intensity for offering courses that demonstrated academic integrity as a way of academic life, as something indivisible from the simplest low-stakes assignment to the highest-stakes research project or cumulative final exam.

I used to believe that academic integrity could be achieved by distributing multiple versions of exams and monitoring student responses for answers that depended exclusively on information from another exam version. I also believed careful invigilation could physically prevent students' copying from each other or consulting their notes or electronic devices during an exam. My approach has evolved to include early introduction of the importance of academic integrity and continual support throughout the semester. I realized that something as simple as demonstrating how to write a reference and explaining why I am citing a particular work at the beginning of a course can set the tone for the rest of the semester. I also now recognize that teaching assistants have a key role to play in demonstrating academic integrity, because they are frequently in settings with fewer students.

For me, Integrity Hour has become a miniature conference offered every Monday morning. I can electronically mingle with attendees from across the country and hear the latest news in this very intriguing field of study. I have learned about many practices that promote academic integrity, along with perspectives that can be helpful when working through potential academic misconduct cases. My key takeaway to date is the knowledge that if I do not step in to support my students, someone else will - someone who might not have students' best interests at heart. Ultimately, my students will choose their own influences as they work through their academic programs, but I hope to make a positive impact on how they define academic integrity for themselves. Integrity Hour provides me with the inspiration and energy to devote to making that positive impact on a weekly basis.

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