Academic Integrity in Selected Western Canadian Colleges and Polytechnics: A Policy Analysis

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Abstract

Canadian colleges and polytechnics have been neglected in research on academic integrity, with some exceptions. Therefore, we examined academic integrity policy documents (N = 36) from 16 publicly-funded colleges and polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba, Canada, replicating a qualitative research design used in previous research. Data were analyzed through the lens of five core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy. ***Access*** to policy was straightforward using the search engine present on institutional websites. In terms of ***approach***, the three most frequently identified principles were natural justice/procedural fairness/timeliness, punitive, and ethics/integrity values/standards. The student was identified as the locus of ***responsibility*** for upholding academic integrity as a matter of student conduct, with faculty and administrators responsible for investigating and addressing misconduct after cases come to light. Within the documents, ***detail*** was extensive with plagiarism, cheating, breaches of exam integrity, collusion, falsification, fabrication, and intentional misrepresentation describing misconduct most commonly. Most documents described ***supports*** in the form of procedural steps for reporting academic misconduct, with minimal mention of proactive or remedial education. We also examined whether equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, decolonization, and Indigenization (EDIA-DI) were considered within these documents and found little attention was paid to these values. We call for colleges and polytechnics to update approaches to policy design that include a focus on EDIA-DI, connect academic integrity and professional ethics to educate students on institutional expectations and conduct more research to inform the development of strategies that nurture cultures of academic integrity.

Keywords: academic dishonesty policy, contract cheating, natural justice, student rights and responsibilities, violations

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Academic integrity refers to the adherence and alignment with ethical and professional principles, standards, and practices and a consistent system of values (honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage; International Center for Academic Integrity [ICAI], 2021) that guides decision-making and action in education, research, and scholarship (ICAI, 2021; Tauginienė et al., 2018). Academic integrity remains a priority in higher education. Researchers in Europe and Asia (Foltýnek & Glendinning, 2015; Glendinning, 2013; Glendinning et al., 2021; Nushi & Firoozkohi, 2017; Razı et al., 2022), Oceania

(Bretag et al., 2011a, b; Grigg, 2010; Möller, 2022), and Africa (Butale & Motswagosele, 2019; Orim & Awala-Ale, 2023) have contributed quite extensively to the existing body of knowledge related to academic integrity policies. One limitation of these international studies is that they focused on the review of policies in university contexts. In contrast, there is a dearth of research on academic integrity policy in the 2-year college sector (Bretag & Harper, 2020) and specifically in Canada, although studies where academic integrity policy is central do exist (see Hamilton & Wolsky, 2022; Marcus & Beck, 2011; Shane et al., 2018).

Studies reporting the prevalence of academic misconduct within the college and polytechnic sector in Canada are limited, which may be a result of a practical and applied research agenda in these types of Canadian postsecondary institutions (see Polytechnics Canada, n.d.). Ferguson et al. (2023) showed, however, that 13.9% of student survey respondents at Bow Valley College, Alberta, reported engagement in commercial contract cheating— a rate similar to estimates described in studies conducted in Australia (e.g., Curtis et al., 2022) and in systematic reviews (Newton, 2018). Openo and Robinson (2021) of Medicine Hat College, Alberta, found that reporting academic integrity violations took an enormous emotional toll on faculty, again suggesting that the misconduct in colleges is a problem that has significant implications. In 2023, the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association (ACIFA) urged faculty to commit to upholding academic integrity but also advocated for the revision or creation of policies that are fair, consistent, and do not place faculty in adversarial roles with students or create excessive faculty workload (Schneider, 2023).

With these and other previous publications in mind, the goal of this study was to examine the academic integrity policies of colleges and polytechnics located in the two western Canadian provinces of Alberta and Manitoba. We examined academic integrity policy through the lens of the five core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy (i.e., access, detail, responsibility, approach, and support; Bretag et al., 2011a) using an established method (see Miron et al., 2021; Stoesz & Eaton, 2022; Stoesz et al., 2019). Previous applications of this method have paid close attention to contract cheating, a problematic form of intentional academic misconduct where academic work is outsourced to a third party and submitted as one's own (Clarke & Lancaster, 2006). In this study, we searched for references to contract cheating in college academic integrity policies. In addition, we looked for indicators (i.e., terms) attending to EDIA-DI that were incorporated within and supported by academic integrity policies. The values of academic integrity and EDIA-DI overlap (e.g., equity and fairness). Therefore, we searched for instances where academic integrity policy outlines mechanisms for acknowledging and eliminating bias in the promotion of academic integrity as well as the prevention, detection, and decision-making processes involved with academic misconduct.

Literature Review

Examining the academic integrity policies of Canadian colleges and polytechnics is essential as this sector has a unique history, set of goals, and structure amongst other higher education institutions in Canada and junior colleges common in the United States (US). Many Canadian colleges were established or enhanced following World War II to provide training opportunities for returning veterans to obtain specific technical and vocational knowledge and skills (Jones, 2014). The college model in English-speaking Canada also developed differently across provinces. In Manitoba, for example, the college and university systems were designed separately and without pathways for students to cross between institution types. In contrast, Alberta's college and university systems were connected directly, which allows students to transfer credits to and from colleges and universities (Jones, 2014). College programs in Canada include two-year diplomas, along with options for shorter certificate programs, whereas larger colleges and polytechnics have begun to offer a selection of four-year degree programs. Many Canadian colleges have removed "community" from their institutional names and no longer identify with that descriptor. Additionally, some Canadian colleges (but generally not universities) have taken on the polytechnic identity to grow research-focused units that serve industry needs directly (Polytechnics Canada, n.d.). Through professional advisory councils and work-integrated learning, Canadian colleges and polytechnics continue to build on the workplace-oriented educational model—thus, the values of workplaces and the values of educational institutions, grounded in integrity, are closely intertwined in this higher education sector.

Policy is one mechanism with which to educate all members of the college and polytechnic

community about academic integrity and other expectations. Academic integrity policies are commonplace in publicly-funded Canadian post-secondary institutions, having evolved from earlier forms of governance documents, such as rules and regulations for student conduct (Eaton & Christensen Hughes, 2022; Eerkes, 2010). Over the years, academic integrity policies have advanced at many higher education institutions as they have been urged to promote cultures of integrity rather than cultures of fear and compliance resulting from the negative, punitive, and reactive approaches to addressing academic misconduct (Bertram Gallant, 2008). An evolution towards more proactive and educative approaches to addressing violations of academic integrity is marked by an increasing recognition that postsecondary students often require learning, emotional, and other supports that were not offered in the past. As such, specialists are increasingly being hired in Canadian colleges and polytechnics to offer these supports and formalize the work of academic integrity (Vogt & Eaton, 2022).

Although academic integrity research from Canadian colleges and polytechnics is generally limited, the studies that have been published suggest that the promotion of academic integrity and the prevention of academic misconduct are important to students, faculty, and administrators in this sector. For example, Genereux and McLeod (1995) assessed the beliefs and behaviours of students at Mount Royal College (Mount Royal University as of 2009) in Alberta, where instructor vigilance and exam fairness were rated as the most influential circumstances that prompted cheating behaviours. Ferguson et al. (2023) examined the prevalence of contract cheating at Bow Valley College in Alberta to inform policy development and student supports. The authors found that 13.9% of student respondents indicated that they had engaged in commercial contract cheating (see also Curtis et al., 2022; Newton, 2018). Sanni-Anibire et al. (2021) found that international students (42% of the sample were enrolled in colleges in Manitoba, Canada) were unsure of the definitions of certain types of academic misconduct and how to respond when their peers were engaging in inappropriate academic behaviours. In addition, the authors learned that nearly half of the participants in the study were unsure of whether procedures for dealing with violations of academic integrity were fair and impartial.

Openo and Robinson (2021) of Medicine Hat College, Alberta, focused on gathering information from faculty about the emotional labour of reporting academic integrity violations and noted that college faculty felt relief when a simple and straightforward reporting form was implemented. The importance of fairness and consistency in relation to faculty workload was also documented in a position paper published by the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association (ACIFA). ACIFA highlighted the commitment of faculty to upholding academic integrity and advocated for policies that do not place faculty in adversarial roles with students or create excessive faculty workload (Schneider, 2023). The study findings described above provide evidence to show that academic misconduct (including contract cheating) is an issue that students, faculty, and administrators in Canadian colleges and polytechnics acknowledge and that there is a need for improved academic integrity policy that better supports all their members.

A support that has been developed and implemented at many colleges and universities in Canada and elsewhere is the academic integrity tutorial, which can be effective in educating students about academic expectations (Stoesz & Yudintseva, 2018; Stoesz & Los, 2019). Miron et al. (2021) surveyed publicly funded Canadian higher education institutions, including 41 universities and 33 colleges, where English was the primary language of instruction. The authors learned that the implementation of tutorials to promote academic integrity was inconsistent, and fewer colleges than universities had developed tutorials to educate their students. This finding may be related to the philosophy, structure, and content of academic integrity policies, which often provide much less information about the responsibility of the educational institution to provide educational support to students than one might expect within an exemplary academic integrity policy. For example, in a review of academic integrity policies of colleges in Ontario, Canada, Stoesz et al. (2019) reported that no specific supports for students were detailed in 20 of the 28 documents examined, and none of the documents were considered to be exemplary.

Theoretical Framework

The exemplary academic integrity policy project by Bretag et al. (2011a, 2011b) provided the framework for our review of academic integrity policies from colleges and polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba, Canada. Bretag et al.'s analysis of Australian university academic integrity policies identified five core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy: access, approach, responsibility, detail, and support,

highlighting policy as one aspect of creating a culture of academic integrity (see Figure 1). *Access* refers to whether documents are easy to access, read, and understand by all members of the educational community. *Approach* refers to the presence of messages woven through the documents that declare the importance of academic integrity within the educational institution and acceptable and unacceptable scholarly activities. *Responsibility* pertains to the belief that all members of an educational community must uphold the values of academic integrity. *Detail* refers to whether the policies and procedures are well-developed and clearly defines the violations of academic integrity and examples to illustrate the terminology clearly. *Support* refers to the presence of statements outlining available resources to educate students about academic integrity and misconduct and assist educators in promoting academic integrity and identifying/reporting suspected cases of academic misconduct.

Figure 1

Five Core Elements of Exemplary Academic Integrity Policy (Bretag et al., 2011b. Used with permission.)

The Academic Integrity Policy Toolkit that accompanies the five core elements provides accessible guidance to higher education institutions to analyze and update academic integrity policies, including templates and exemplars (Exemplary Academic Integrity Project, n.d.). As academic misconduct is often the focus of these policies and conflated with the term academic integrity (Bretag et al., 2011a; Miron et al., 2021; Stoesz et al., 2019; Stoesz & Eaton, 2022), the five core elements and toolkit guide those involved in policy revision and developing and implementing resources to promote academic integrity. This approach is a more balanced, appropriate, and ethical way to support students in their postsecondary studies. More than a decade has passed since the publication of this project, providing sufficient time to assess whether the core elements are reflected in Canadian higher education policy.

The Present Study

The general structure of the present study follows the theoretical and methodological framework constructed by Eaton (2019). The methods have been consistent across all phases of Eaton's larger project, beginning with locating publicly available academic integrity policies, then analyzing the referenced stakeholders, level of detail, misconduct categories, and policy principles to mirror the core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy (see Miron et al., 2021; Stoesz & Eaton, 2022; Stoesz et al., 2019). All phases also paid attention to whether contract cheating was referenced either directly (by using the term) or indirectly (by describing the behaviour). Although contract cheating is a longstanding problem in education that spans decades and even centuries, it was not until 2006 that the term was defined by computer scientists Clarke and Lancaster as the outsourcing of text- and non-text-based academic work (Clark & Lancaster, 2006). Detecting engagement in contract cheating can be complicated and difficult (Dawson, 2020) and requires that students and educators are supported by both administrators and policy (Stoesz et al., 2019). Research has also shown that contract cheating cannot be eliminated with assessment design (e.g., Bretag et al., 2020; Dawson, 2020; Ellis et al., 2019). Due to these factors, contract cheating remains a focus in this phase of the larger project.

A new aspect of our policy review work was to identify language in the policy documents that supports the ongoing work of equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, decolonization, and indigenization (EDIA-DI) in higher education. Canadian colleges and polytechnics are often characterized by staff, students, faculty, and leaders from diverse academic, professional, cultural, and language backgrounds. The diversity in the composition of the higher education community necessitates policies and procedures to guide community members toward common goals and practices, with a shared understanding of the expectations of the community as a whole.

Method

Study Setting and Context

The present research is one phase of a larger project to examine the academic integrity policies of publicly-funded Canadian post-secondary institutions (see Eaton, 2019) and includes examining whether contract cheating was included in the policy to build upon previous research (see Miron et al., 2021; Stoesz & Eaton, 2022; Stoesz et al., 2019). According to the *Directory of Educational Institutions* of the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, Canada has 142 publicly-funded universities and 210 publicly-funded colleges as of 2023. As such, the national policy analysis was divided into phases, with each focusing on a different region and institution type (i.e., universities or colleges). To ensure equitable representation and help build research capacity related to academic integrity, each phase of the project has been led by the principal investigator (Eaton) and one co-investigator (Stoesz) and has included additional collaborators representative of their respective regions and sectors (in the case of this study Vogt and Seeland). Ensuring equitable geographical and sector representation is rooted in a "nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 1998) philosophy, and aligns with current priorities for academic integrity focused on advocacy, social justice, and equity as an axiological basis for the work (Eaton, 2022; Parnther, 2023).

Selection of Colleges and Polytechnics

We delimited our research to academic integrity policy documents from publicly-funded colleges and polytechnics found in the regions where the research team resides—namely the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Manitoba, where the official language of instruction is English. We referred to the listing of postsecondary institutions on the education department websites of both provincial governments to correctly identify institutions in Alberta (n = 13; Government of Alberta, n.d.) and Manitoba (n = 3; Government of Manitoba, n.d.). As two research team members are affiliated with colleges and polytechnics, and all are located within Alberta and Manitoba, the documents were of greater significance to the work of academic integrity within these jurisdictions. Using these criteria, we retrieved and analysed 36 academic integrity policy documents (see Table 1).

Table 1
List of Institutions and Academic Integrity Policy Documents Reviewed (N = 36).

Province College/Polytechnic	Document Name
Alberta	
Bow Valley College	Academic Honesty Plain Language Summary
	Academic Integrity Policy
Grande Prairie Regional College	Student Misconduct: Academic and Non-academic
	Student Rights and Responsibilities
Keyano College	Keyano College-Academic Integrity-Policy Procedure Supporting Documents

Province	
College/Polytechnic	Document Name
Lakeland College	Academic Integrity Student Procedures 5.12
	Student Rights and Responsibilities: Student Procedure 5.73
Lethbridge College	Academic Integrity Guide
	Student Rights and Code of Conduct Policy
Medicine Hat College	Academic Calendar
NAIT - Northern Alberta Institute of Technology	NAIT Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy
	NAIT Academic Integrity Procedure
NorQuest College	Academic Misconduct Procedure
	Academic Misconduct Report Form
Northern Lakes College	Student Conduct Procedure
Olds College	Academic Integrity Policy
	Academic Integrity Procedure
Portage College	Guidelines, Policies & Agreements: Academic Policies
	Academic Dishonesty (Plagiarism & Exam/Assignment Integrity)
	Student Misconduct/Discipline
	Academic Dishonesty (Plagiarism & Exam/Assignment Integrity): Appendix A - Draft Letters - Templates
	Student Misconduct/Discipline: Appendix A - Second Warning
	Student Misconduct/Discipline: Appendix B - Notification of Probation
Red Deer College	Student Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct (Policy)
	RDC Student Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct Guidebook (listed with policy)

Province	College/Polytechnic	Document Name
	SAIT - Southern Alberta Institute of Technology	AC.3.4 SAIT Student Code of Conduct - Policy
		AC.3.4.1 SAIT Student Code of Conduct - Procedure
		AC.3.4.2 SAIT Student Rights and Responsibilities
		AC.3.4.3 SAIT Student Academic Conduct
		AC.3.4.3 SAIT Schedule A - Examples of Student Academic Misconduct
		AC.3.4.3 SAIT Schedule B - First Offence Procedures and Appeal Procedures
		AC.3.4.3 SAIT Schedule C - Second Offence and Third Offence Procedures and Appeal Procedures
		AC.3.4.3 SAIT Schedule D - Academic Misconduct Hearing Processes and Principles
Manitoba		
	Assiniboine Community College	ACC Student Honesty and Integrity
	Manitoba Institute of Trades of Technology	Academic Integrity Policy – MITT Staff, Instructors, and Students
	Red River College	S.4 Academic Integrity

Selection of Documents

We selected documents that were named and/or described as policies, procedures, and guidelines (see Table **1**). A copy of our data set is publicly available on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/n9k-wt/). All members of the research team conducted searches on the websites of each selected institution by entering "academic integrity policy" into the search bar of each college or polytechnic's website. We contacted one college to obtain the full-text version of the policy and procedure documents as their website hosted less detailed versions. Document retrieval occurred between September 15 and October 9, 2021. Word and PDF versions of the policies, procedures, and guidelines were saved to a folder accessible by all research team members. Inspection of these Word and PDF versions of the documents revealed that some contained multiple policies, procedures, and guidelines, which were subsequently divided and saved as separate files for the analysis phase of the study. In total, 36 documents were included in this academic integrity policy review. Similar procedures have been used in previous work (e.g., Bretag, Mahmud, East, et al., 2011a; Miron et al., 2021; Stoesz et al., 2019; Stoesz & Eaton, 2022).

After the collection of documents and during the analysis period, three colleges transitioned to a polytechnic identity (Grande Prairie Regional College became Northwestern Polytech, Red Deer College became Red Deer Polytech, and Red River College became RRC Polytech), highlighting the increasing demand in this region for educational programming that is closely linked to industry needs (Komesch & Watts-Rynard, 2021; Robinson & Komesch, 2018). For the purposes of this study, we have retained the names of the institutions as they were at the time of data collection.

Data Extraction and Analysis

As described above, Bretag, Mahmud, Wallace, et al. (2011b) outlined access, approach, responsibility, detail, and support as the five core elements of academic integrity policy. As in other policy reviews, we

used these elements as the foundation for our data extraction procedures and narrative or textual analytical approach. We coded information related to document type, revision dates, and review cycles within the element of *access* (see Grigg, 2010). Titles and the intended target audience were coded as part of the *approach* element. Next, we examined each document for evidence of policy principles, as per Bretag et al. (2011a, 2011b). For the *detail* element, we explored each document for definitions of academic misconduct and whether and how certain unpermitted scholarly behaviours were sub-categorized. We paid particular attention to whether the term "contract cheating could be located in the academic integrity documents (see also Miron et al., 2021; Stoesz et al., 2019; Stoesz & Eaton, 2022). When the term contract cheating was not identified, we coded whether the description of the behaviour (e.g., outsourcing academic work) was subsumed under another subcategory of academic misconduct. Next, we examined whether the *support* element could be found within each document. We coded student, faculty, and other stakeholder (e.g., administrators) support by the categories of procedural (support limited by the set of steps of processes that were required), proactive or remedial education (support in the form of direction to resources to promote academic integrity and prevent academic misconduct), or combinations of procedural, proactive education, and/or remedial education.

Finally, we looked for evidence that policy developers had considered equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, decolonization, and Indigenization (EDIA-DI) within academic integrity and academic misconduct policies, procedures, and guidelines. We searched for indications of restorative and natural justice principles in the language used in the policies. To determine which principles of EDIA-DI were incorporated in the documents, we referred to the Key Terms of *Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigenization* document published by the Human Rights and Equity Office at Queen's University (n.d.), which is based on the Ontario Human Rights Commission, *Appendix 1: Glossary of Human Rights Terms,* and is recommended as a resource for teaching human rights in schools. These resources are also known amongst postsecondary administrators and staff applying these terms in practice. Searching the policy documents for these terms provided a starting point to identify policy language in support of EDIA-DI perspectives.

Working in teams of two, each research team member independently extracted data for each element from half the documents, such that the data for each document was extracted twice. Interrater agreement (percent agreement) was then calculated for all sub-elements coded, which ranged from 58.5% (i.e., audience) to 94.4% (i.e., details, specifically misconduct categories). Pairs of raters met to discuss coding disagreements and reach consensus about the coding of a particular sub-element.

Results

The results are presented according to the five core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy: access, approach, responsibility, detail, and support (Bretag et al., 2011b). In addition, we performed an additional layer of analysis focused on EDIA-DI.

Access

Locating the documents on the institutions' websites was straightforward, and each document could be saved and/or printed (i.e., Word or PDF files). We coded eight documents as policies, 11 as procedures, five as policy and procedure combined, and 12 as other, which included a summary (n = 1), guidebooks (n = 2), an academic calendar (n = 1), templates (i.e., notification letters, reports, n = 4), and schedules (n = 4). Twenty-five academic integrity documents provided the original approval and/or effective dates (*Range*: November 16, 1983 – February 1, 2021). Seventeen documents reported the latest revision dates and/or revision effective dates (*Range*: January 1, 2010 – July 1, 2021). Twenty-nine documents reported the date for the next cyclic review (*Range*: January 1, 2015 –December 1, 2024). Overall, findings indicated that accessing academic integrity policy documents at colleges and polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba is a straightforward process, as the majority of documents were publicly accessible and easy to find using search boxes on institutional websites.

Approach

The titles of the academic integrity policy documents communicate a particular tone. In single concept titles (n = 24), concepts such as academic integrity (n = 12), academic misconduct (n = 3), rights and re-

sponsibilities (*n* = 3), academic conduct (*n* = 3), conduct (*n* = 1), and performance and behaviour (*n* = 2) were conveyed. In multiple concept titles (*n* = 12), academic integrity (*n* = 5), academic misconduct (*n* = 9), non-academic misconduct (*n* = 1), conduct (*n* = 2), rights (*n* = 1), plagiarism (*n* = 2), discipline (*n* = 2), warnings/notifications (*n* = 2), appeals (*n* = 2), and level of offences (*n* = 2) were conveyed.

Evidence of the principles providing the foundation for the contents of the academic integrity document could not be identified in three documents. For the remaining 33 documents, 30 principles could be identified within the text of the documents, with 1 to 14 principles identified within each document. In Table 2, we list these principles but have grouped those that are similar together within a single line. The three most frequently identified principles were natural justice/procedural fairness/timeliness, punitive, and ethics/integrity values/standards. Less frequent principles include staff and instructors as role models, fair assessment, and restorative justice.

Table 2

Principles Identified in the Academic Integrity Policy Documents of Publicly-Funded Colleges and Polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba

Policy principles	Frequency	%
Natural justice/procedural fairness/timeliness	25	69.4
Punitive	25	69.4
Ethics/integrity values/standards	22	61.1
Student rights and responsibilities/standards of conduct	13	56.1
Progressive discipline	15	41.7
Educative	12	33.3
Well-being/safety	9	25.0
Balance of probabilities/burden of proof/presumption of innocence	8	22.2
Confidentiality	6	16.7
Transparency	5	13.9
Alternative dispute resolution/restorative justice	4	11.1
Principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion	4	11.1
Shared responsibilities (e.g., institutional, instructor, student and instructor)	4	11.1
Fair assessment	3	8.3
Promotion of ethical scholarship	2	5.6
Right to appeal	2	5.6
Staff and instructors are role models	2	5.6
Case-by-case evaluation of incidents	1	2.8

Note. Percent was calculated using the denominator of the total number of documents reviewed (*N* = 36). The frequency and percentage do not sum to 36 and 100%, respectively, as more than one principle was found in 31 documents.

Responsibility

The target audience(s) for the documents included students (*n* = 12), administrators (*n* = 1), students and faculty (*n* = 1), students and administrators (*n* = 3), and all college members (*n* = 19). The documents contained categories and examples of violations of academic integrity that students should not engage in or the procedures that instructors and administrators need to follow when cases of academic misconduct arise. The results suggest that students are the locus of responsibility for upholding academic integrity as a matter of student conduct. Less responsibility is placed on faculty or administration in the policy documents.

Detail

Of the 36 documents that we reviewed, 25 listed and described one or more categories of academic misconduct. Only two documents (one from Keyano College, Fort MacMurray, Alberta, and the other from Lakeland College, Lloydminster, Alberta) listed and described contract cheating. For both of these colleges, their academic integrity policies were updated in 2020, after the publication of Stoesz et al. (2019) that described the integrity policies of Ontario colleges. This does not mean that outsourcing behaviour was not described in the policy documents of the other colleges and polytechnics. In 16 documents, outsourcing behaviours were subsumed under one or more other categories of academic misconduct, including general academic misconduct ($n = 1$), plagiarism ($n = 12$), cheating ($n = 4$), exam integrity ($n = 1$), and collusion, unauthorized collaboration, false or misleading representation ($n = 1$). Eleven documents did not contain terms or descriptions of academic misconduct categories as these were often supporting documents to the primary policy and procedures documents. Overall, contract cheating was generally not explicitly named as a category of academic misconduct, with plagiarism, cheating, breaches of exam integrity, collusion, falsification, fabrication, and intentional misrepresentation being common classifications of misconduct behaviours, indicating a delay in updating terminology in academic integrity policy in colleges and polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba.

Support

The support elements include information about how staff, faculty, and administrators are supported in implementing the policy. Our examination of the 36 policy documents of colleges and polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba revealed that "support" for students, instructors, and administrators was evident in 24, 23, and 24 documents, respectively. Support in the remaining documents was not evident or unclear.

Next, we classified the type of support evident as procedural (providing steps to follow if the behaviour is reported as academic misconduct), proactive education (mention of tutorials, workshops, and other learning resources), remedial education (opportunities for students to learn from their errors), or a combination of two or three of these support categories. A large majority of documents described procedural support for students ($n = 13$), instructors ($n = 20$), and administrators ($n = 24$). Few documents described students with proactive and educational ($n = 1$), remedial and educational ($n = 1$), procedural and proactive educational ($n = 4$), procedural and remedial ($n = 2$), proactive and remedial educational ($n = 1$), or all three forms ($n = 2$) of support. An example of procedural and proactive support can be seen in this quote: "Co-creation of the learning environments. For students: taking shared responsibility for their learning experience. For instructors: helping students avoid academic misconduct while empowering them to share their original thoughts and ideas" (Olds College, p. 1). Administrators were only provided with procedural support ($n = 24$). The results suggest that support is often limited to procedures and that proactive and remedial education is not considered as part of policy.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Decolonization, and Indigenization

Eighteen (50%) documents (from 12 of 16 institutions) included the listed EDIA-DI terms. The most common terms were accessibility ($n = 7$), accommodation ($n = 9$), discrimination ($n = 8$), harassment ($n = 8$), sexual harassment ($n = 7$), and workplace violence ($n = 8$). For example, one institution was clear that an appropriate response to a case of misconduct must include "deciding if there is a need to accommodate or provide support to affected parties" (Grande Prairie Regional College, p. 5), whereas another stressed the importance of students' "right to a learning environment that respects freedom of expression and the advancement of human rights, and that is free from discrimination, harassment, intimidation, violence, sexual misconduct, vulgarity, and disruptive behaviour" (Lethbridge College, p. 3). Our analysis suggests that institutional discussion of EDIA-DI has limited integration in academic integrity policies.

Discussion

The findings presented here are similar to those in the Ontario colleges phase of the larger project (see Stoesz et al., 2019). In both investigations, colleges and polytechnics in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario demonstrated reasonable access to policy through institutional websites, but policies included few references to support options for students and faculty. Colleges in Ontario showed a stronger focus on integri-

ty values compared with the colleges and polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba, but the responsibilities outlined fell similarly with students over staff in both studies. Although philosophies about academic integrity often mirror the fundamental values of honesty, fairness, trust, respect, responsibility, and courage (see International Center for Academic Integrity, 2021), the corresponding policies frequently focus on unacceptable academic behaviours by students (e.g., plagiarism) and their consequences rather than on values (Miron et al., 2021; Stoesz et al., 2019; Stoesz & Eaton, 2022). Thus, 'academic integrity' is often conflated with academic misconduct, framing academic integrity as a student problem requiring rule compliance (Eaton, 2021) rather than a responsibility that all members of the higher educational institution must work towards ensuring. Contract cheating received little explicit mention in the Ontario research, and none of the examined policies could be considered exemplary academic integrity policies as defined by Bretag et al. (2011b). In a similar fashion, the Alberta and Manitoba analysis uncovered some of the elements of exemplary academic integrity policy, but our close analysis of each policy document showed that none met all the benchmarks of Bretag et al.'s five core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy (Bretag et al., 2011a; 2011b). This aligns with the findings of academic integrity policy analyses conducted in Canada (see Miron et al., 2021; Stoesz and Eaton, 2022; Stoesz et al., 2019).

The additional consideration of EDIA-DI uncovered limited mention of related principles in the academic integrity policies of the colleges and polytechnics in the western region of Canada. EDIA-DI principles align with the fundamental values of academic integrity, and threading these principles throughout academic integrity policy documents presents an opportunity for enhancement and cohesion in values education. As colleges and polytechnics continue to recruit international students and students in other equity-seeking groups, and as these students are more often reported for academic integrity violations (Bretag et al., 2018; Davis, 2022), it is essential that academic integrity policy acknowledge and attempt to prevent bias in investigating cases and applying consequences. The inclusion of equity in the core elements guides institutional stakeholders in considering EDIA-DI as part of policy creation and implementation. Additionally, as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012), Canadian post-secondary institutions are responsible for integrating Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into educational environments. Explicitly naming decolonization and Indigenization in academic integrity policy would support education for reconciliation by guiding community members toward equitable decision-making processes.

Colleges and polytechnics in Canada include small local institutions that serve the surrounding communities' needs and large regional institutions that draw students to a wide range of programming in urban centres. The broad range of institutional sizes and models means that equal comparisons of policy between institutions are not always possible. The smaller institutions represented in this study may have greater agility with fewer layers of approval required to integrate change, but they are also less resourced which can make progress slow. We observed that some policies in this study were past the slated date for renewal, indicating a reduced capacity to keep up with intended policy renewal deadlines. As noted by Stoesz et al. (2019), Canadian higher education lacks a coherent strategy in educational policy which creates challenges to promoting academic integrity. Each college and polytechnic is responsible to its board of governors and provincial funders; however, academic integrity policy does not fall under the jurisdiction of either, nor are there quality assurance agencies involved in holding institutions accountable. This puts decision-making for academic integrity squarely in the realm of college and polytechnic leaders.

Significance

Our study resulted in two new original contributions to the body of knowledge about academic integrity policy. Firstly, we provide added and updated depth and breadth to the limited evidence base about academic integrity policies in colleges and polytechnics. Secondly, as policymakers turn their attention towards integrating concepts of EDIA-DI within institutional policies, this research documents one of the first studies to examine elements of EDIA-DI in academic integrity policy and calls for continued improvement.

Updated Framework for Core Elements of Exemplary Academic Integrity Policy

Our analysis of the policy documents from colleges and polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba showed a lack of attention paid to academic integrity from an equity perspective. We propose that a modernization of Bretag et al.'s (2011b) Core Elements of Exemplary Academic Integrity is needed to include a focus on EDIA-DI for ongoing policy revision and reform (see Figure 2). For the purposes of simplicity in a graphical representation of an updated framework, we have used the term "equity" with a broad and inclusive intentionality to include EDIA-DI. This updated framework may have utility to take generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into account as academic integrity policies are being revised, though a deeper discussion of that particular aspect of academic integrity policy revision is outside of the scope of this study.

Figure 2

Six Core Elements of Exemplary Academic Integrity Policy

Limitations

Analyzing policy documents provides insight into approaches and priorities but does not uncover the application of policy on a daily basis, resulting in limited information. Additionally, we are aware that colleges and polytechnics within the study group offer differing systems of policy application, including centralized offices for academic and non-academic misconduct as well as department-driven models where the instructor and chair make decisions. The documents that we analyzed reflected the model in place and allowed for different foci depending on the context. We noted that a number of policies were past the revision date, demonstrating a lag in cyclical policy review and update. Since the policy documents were collected and data were extracted and analyzed, at least two institutions (e.g., Red River College, now Red River College Polytechnic and Assiniboine Community College, now Assiniboine College) have updated their academic integrity policies in the style of exemplary academic integrity policy and with contract cheating included explicitly. Project members Vogt and Seeland influenced policy development at the highest institutional level with in-depth knowledge of exemplary academic integrity policy and insight into the process of policy analysis, demonstrating how policy and practice can be improved in the college and polytechnic sector by dedicating time and resources to academic research.

We reiterate that we only included publicly-funded institutions, leaving religious colleges, private career colleges and for-profit colleges as a classification of post-secondary institutions where more research is needed. We also did not include the academic integrity policy documents from colleges or polytechnics located within the other two western Canadian provinces (Saskatchewan and British Columbia), which leaves a gap for future academic integrity research in the Canadian college and polytechnic sector. Final-

ly, we limited our study to institutions where English was the language of instruction although Canada is a bilingual country. This decision was based on the language proficiency levels of the overall team. We recognize the need for more research on post-secondary institutions where English is not the language of instruction.

Finally, we acknowledge that policy documents do not represent the breadth of support available to staff, students, and administrators, as institutional support programs are not always formally documented in policy. However, as academic integrity conversations shift from punitive to supportive and proactive, naming elements of support within the policy and procedures indicates the institution's intentions for a supportive culture of academic integrity. A future study could examine the evidence of support on institutional websites (i.e., activities and resources beyond policies and procedures); however, from our experience, academic integrity resources are not always publicly visible and may be behind the institution's login wall.

Future Research Opportunities

Despite using a single tool to explore EDIA-DI, the present study ignites the conversation about EDIA-DI in academic integrity policy. Future analysis, however, must go deeper into the exploration of the intersection between academic integrity and EDIA-DI by considering the voices and perspectives of scholars in both fields, and of students, educators, and administrators whose learning and teaching straddle the two. Many Canadian higher education institutions place EDIA-DI at the centre of their missions by "prioritizing and funding a wide range of activities that help to enhance equity agendas" (see Tamtik & Guenter, 2019, p. 51). International students, visible minorities, and marginalized groups, however, are often over-represented in reports of student misconduct (Beasley, 2016; Bretag, 2019; Davis, 2022; Sacks, 2008), pointing to the potential that policy may propagate long-standing colonial norms that exclude students who do not have the same cultural training or social capital to conform. Moreover, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission explicitly calls on higher education to participate in decolonization efforts. Although Canadian researchers have begun to examine the impact of academic integrity norms on the experiences of Indigenous community members (see Cunningham Hall, 2022; Gladue, 2020; Lindstrom, 2022; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022), more investigation is needed to support the decolonization of academic integrity.

Colleges and polytechnics offer applied vocational education that is closely linked to industry and specific employment functions. As we stated in our literature review, academic research and publication about this sector lags in comparison to the university sector. With academic integrity-focused support roles on the rise in Canadian colleges and polytechnics, we call on educators and academic support professionals to contribute to academic integrity-focused research, including the scholarship of teaching and learning. In particular, college and polytechnic instructors have expertise in linking academic integrity to workplace skills (Garza Mitchell & Parnther, 2018), and documenting these educational approaches would be valuable in improving academic integrity initiatives across higher education. College and polytechnic teaching staff often have limited time, support, and training to pursue research projects (Edmunds, 2017), but from our experience, engaging in research can have a direct impact on growing the institutional culture of academic integrity.

As we concluded our analysis, attention shifted towards the broad availability of GenAI capable of producing unique output based on user command. Future research projects could examine whether existing academic integrity policies are able to communicate expectations about the acceptable and unacceptable use of GenAI tools. Both students and faculty require guidance in approaching these new capabilities, as there is a strong potential for misunderstanding. Consistent standards and supportive decision-making processes will aid higher education communities in facing the technological shift. The research team also discussed whether a manual examination of academic integrity policies would occur again, given the possibility that artificial intelligence could analyze documents much faster than a team of human coders.

Recommendations for Policy

Higher education institutions updating academic integrity policies should look to the exemplary academic integrity policy project and corresponding Academic Integrity Policy Toolkit for support in

addressing the original five elements: access, approach, responsibility, detail, and support. Through this study, the research team found each element shows room for growth in the institutions in this region, with contract cheating still not addressed at most colleges and polytechnics. Ferguson et al. (2023) uncovered a self-reported rate of contract cheating behaviour at 13.9% at an Alberta college that is included in this study, showing that colleges and polytechnics cannot hold to outdated assumptions that contract cheating does not occur in this sector or region. Colleges and polytechnics must name and respond to the problem head-on in academic integrity policy.

Canadian post-secondary institutions place high importance on EDIA-DI, and this focus must also be applied to academic integrity policies and related documents. Students from diverse backgrounds and varying academic histories are admitted into college and polytechnic learning environments as novices. It is not inclusive to believe that all students will arrive with the same understanding of institutional expectations and the advanced skills required to meet these expectations. Policies that readily exclude students based on a lack of common understanding fail to deliver on EDIA-DI goals. To make improvements, each college and polytechnic must analyze the demographics of their student body and engage in qualitative inquiry to understand the lived experiences of marginalized communities with academic integrity (see Davis, 2022; Parnther, 2022).

In the future, post-secondary institutions will need to determine how to approach output generated by artificial intelligence, whether their current policies can accommodate these situations or if new policies need to be created. As students rapidly adapt to GenAI, policymakers must act quickly to ensure that the core elements of academic integrity are upheld through clear details and support.

Conclusion

As one phase of a larger project examining academic integrity policies of publicly-funded Canadian post-secondary institutions, this phase of the research represents the first analysis of EDIA-DI principles in academic integrity policy. The results of our analysis of academic integrity policies in colleges and polytechnics in Alberta and Manitoba demonstrate room for further development in the original core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy (Bretag et al., 2011b) and that EDIA-DI principles must be integrated intentionally into post-secondary policy updates. Canadian institutions of higher education have a responsibility to promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, and look to the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to decolonize and Indigenize education. Additionally, educative approaches and clear discussions regarding the problematic behaviour of contract cheating need amplifying in colleges and polytechnics in Canada. Our experience promoting academic integrity in colleges and polytechnics has shown that these institutions have the advantage of aligning academic integrity with professional expectations, as many programs prepare students for work in specific industries (Garza Mitchell & Parnther, 2018). Academic integrity is a foundational element for ethical decision-making in and beyond the classroom, therefor the practical and applied nature of college and polytechnic education can be enhanced by more focused attention on academic integrity infused as an institutional expectation across policies and procedures.

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