

Academic Integrity in the University

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For this issue of the *Journal of Educational Thought* Sarah Eaton, one of the top contemporary researchers in academic integrity, has agreed to not only identify and invite international scholars studying a variety of aspects of academic integrity to write for the issue, but also to join me as a guest editor for this issue. Such issues as plagiarism or self-plagiarism have been topical recently as regards scholarly publishing. Cheating on examinations or taking advantage of the internet to secure and pass off someone else's essay as one's own has also been a common worry in our own time. But as this issue shows many other aspects of academic integrity are worthy of scholarly consideration as well.

In the articles that follow a number of interesting aspects of academic integrity are approached. One unusual article is that of Robert Henry and Chelsea Gabel, two Me'tis scholars, writing on a photo-voice participatory research method that has many ethical challenges if done properly. Jennie Miron looks at thirty senior nursing students who piloted the Miron Academic Integrity Nursing Survey, which she developed. The phenomenon of contract cheating, (for example the paying of someone else to write one's exams or to write one's dissertation) which has become increasingly common world-wide is studied as a European Union phenomenon by four scholars from London and Coventry in England and two universities in Czechoslovakia in the city of Brno. Eaton herself contributes along with Jennifer Lock and Meadow Schroeder to an article discussing the design and implementation of an online academic integrity tutorial at the University of Calgary. As Eaton's guest editorial introduces these in some detail I will confine myself to merely mentioning a few aspects of academic integrity that are not so well studied at the moment but that appear to me to be worthy of further consideration in future research.

Most universities in this era are governed by both a Board of Governors and an academic Senate or its equivalent. Usually financial matters are the consideration of the board and all academic matters are decided by the Senate. There are usually a few faculty members and students on Boards of Governors and

Senates usually consist almost exclusively of faculty members and a small student representation.

So far as I know academic integrity is a topic that may well be discussed by Senates but characteristically academic integrity in relation to the Senate itself and its decisions is not something that has as yet been under serious research scrutiny. While a Board of Governors is concerned primarily with the financial side of a university's activities it can sometimes face questions of academic integrity as well.

Similarly other large but intermediate committees that function regularly in a university, such as a Graduate Studies Council may have to make judgments central to academic integrity. A scholarship committee that makes recommendations towards prestigious awards like the Rhodes Scholarships will also have to engage in judgments that involve academic integrity. And so may the everyday activities of an ordinary faculty member in the privacy of her or his own office working with individual students involve academic integrity too. Let us consider some examples of the kinds of things which Senates or Boards of Governors, Graduate Studies Councils and ordinary faculty members may face considerations daily that touch on the concerns of this journal issue.

An example of the kind of thing that a Board of Governors could have to face might be a case such that one of its own prominent members is apparently involved in a decision to accept money from a donor, say a large and prominent oil company, that established an energy related institute or research centre in perhaps a Faculty of Business. For example, suppose the Board Member involved also the President of the University and is also a paid member on the Board of the Oil Company itself. Let us suppose that the original intention is that the money donated by the oil company is to be exclusively controlled by the academic staff of the institute or research centre it has established and the donor oil company is to be hands off. Yet oddly the research centre engages in research that is to the benefit of the oil company that funded it and is not to the benefit of say energy companies that work on the assumption that Green Energy is central important for the future of the country or the world. If this were to come to the attention of the Board of Governors it might be involved in scrutiny of the decisions of the research institute and the wishes of the oil company donor on whose board the President of the University sat.

Similarly the Senate of a university might be involved in looking at academic decisions that require discussion and vote in the Senate that relate to the work of one faculty relative to another. For example, suppose that a decision has been made in the university library to cancel all journals from Oxford University Press, apparently on financial grounds, but to keep journals from say a private publishing organization such as Elsevier or Springer Nature. If the decision was made without surveying the needs of actual faculties and if discussion of those needs never occurred in the Senate of the university in question, this might amount to a serious breach of academic integrity. It would be a matter of even graver concern, for example, if the Oxford journals were cancelled because of a kick-back to the chief librarian of a university from the private publishers of academic journals.

A Council of Graduate Studies is often involved in matters of academic integrity and integrity and humanity sometimes come into conflict. For many years I sat on the Council of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto where the rule was that any faculty members supervising students could take any matter of academic integrity and principle up with the Council. Two examples of such considerations come to mind. The first was a case of a student whose research would necessarily, were it to be successful, go beyond the six year limit for doctoral research set by the council. In this instance the student's supervisor petitioned the Council on behalf of his student to have this limit waved in his case. The student's research involved the breeding cycles of the Arctic Char. Were this research to possess academic integrity it would necessarily involve three breeding cycles of this fish, and each cycle took four years. so the student's work would necessarily take twelve years of observation. The Council agreed and the six year limit was waived.

Another example involved the completed doctoral thesis of a student that existed initially in a single typescript copy. His supervisor had taken the manuscript with him from Toronto via Montreal on his way to a conference in Quebec city, changing trains in Montreal. He had read the thesis by the arrival in Montreal and thought it was a splendid achievement and worthy of the PhD degree. However he inadvertently left the copy aboard the Toronto to Montreal train and only discovered its loss upon arriving in Quebec City. He took the matter up with the Council of Graduate Studies and the Council agreed to grant the

student his PhD and only the Covers of his bound thesis would be put in the University Library.

An ordinary faculty member daily faces questions of academic integrity of a wide range of kinds that may involve their own judgments of their own work or their judgments of the work of colleagues or students. For example, if a faculty member is also an editor of a journal, should she or he publish a paper in the journal of which they are editor even if a double blind process of judgment has been followed? Or perhaps only if there is a guest editor or another editor involved in the journal issue in question? When should a faculty member teaching students in a class grant an extension for the submission of a paper to a student who requests one? If there is sickness involved to themselves or a family member? When they have been involved in a accident? If they have mental health circumstances? This certainly appear in part to be a question of academic integrity and questions of fairness to all the students in the class. But it is also a question of humanity. And certainly sometimes academic integrity and humanity come into conflict.

Indeed it could even be argued that often humanity must sometimes trump or precede questions of academic integrity as in the example decisions of the Graduate Studies Council of the University of Toronto mentioned above. In any event perhaps I have suggested a number of other areas in which deeper scrutiny of academic integrity might occur to the value of our further academic understanding.

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