ACIFA's Position on Academic Integrity

Introduction and Background

Academic integrity is one of the pillars on which our postsecondary system rests. Indeed, colleges and institutes in Alberta are mandated to promote a culture of academic integrity for quality assurance and to uphold their reputations as institutions of higher education. A culture of academic integrity is grounded in the principles identified by The International Centre for Academic Integrity's (ICAI) Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity, which are *honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage* (2021). A culture of academic integrity is essential because it promotes honesty and rigour within disciplines of study, engenders trust in institutions and ensures students are graduating with credentials that are valued by employers, and backed by an institution's reputation. Academic integrity must be upheld in Alberta's postsecondary institutions for the system to function and to ensure student, faculty, and societal needs are met. Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic integrity violations are a threat to the ongoing functioning and sustainability of Alberta's colleges and institutes.

Faculty's Role in Promoting Academic Integrity

Faculty, as employees of their respective institutions, are required to abide by all policies and procedures concerning academic integrity. And while the specifics of these policies and procedures differ across institutions, they nonetheless all carry with them the requirement to report academic integrity violations. Faculty also feel duty-bound to report academic integrity violations (Openo & Robinson, 2021) and to uphold the values set out by the ICAI. A common refrain from faculty when asked about their decisions to report academic integrity is to

safeguard the integrity of their institution, their discipline, their own reputation as a professional, and to ensure the overall ethical imperative to uphold a culture of learning that is free from ethical violations. As well, faculty feel a deep-seated responsibility to ensure students are not graduating lacking the necessary competencies in their chosen vocations, and are thus safeguarding members of the public from the potential threat of nursing, social work, or engineering graduates acting incompetently at work. This deeply held commitment to ethics, to learning, and to a culture of integrity is honorable and a core belief that leads faculty to report even when they are disincentivized to do so. And as frontline workers with students, "Faculty play a crucial role in creating environments that expound and uphold the values of academic integrity" (Hamilton & Wolsky, 2022). Yet, research consistently shows that academic integrity violations often go unreported by faculty and are known to be underreported (Eaton, 2021). Across Eaton's many research studies and publications, she makes clear that faculty are pulled by institutional policies and procedures on academic integrity and misconduct into quasi-juridical contexts that are often unfamiliar, uncomfortable, at times in conflict with the pedagogical practices that faculty espouse, and ultimately labour-intensive. And this accounts in large part for the data on underreported and unreported academic integrity violations, even in the face of increasing cases of academic integrity violations and with the oft-cited estimates of just how many postsecondary students are engaging in academic misconduct and how often. The problem only gets bigger as more academic integrity violations occur, whether they be forms of plagiarism or cheating.

Academic Integrity and Workload

Upholding a culture of academic integrity goes beyond a mere sense of duty. Faculty are employees with employment contracts. And the work of fostering a culture of academic integrity is time- and resource-intensive. Faculty are not compensated for the extra work that they do on top of their teaching responsibilities, neither is the additional work "clearly identified within employment contracts" and this undermines the goal and instead "contribut[es] to a culture of indifference" (Hamilton & Wolsky, 2022, p. 475). Academic integrity is therefore, critically, a workload issue. Formal processes and procedures for documenting, investigating, and reporting are burdensome and faculty are therefore disincentivized to report. The burden places an additional toll on sessional faculty who are not paid for the extra hours worked and who may fear retribution or the repercussions of student complaints, negative student evaluations, or perceived threats from administration. Crossman (2021) rightly notes "Sessionals in particular are often assigned large classes with heavy marking loads. A fairer redistribution of workloads and more equitable remuneration are crucial to addressing academic misconduct" (p. 226). Eaton et al. (2023) in summarizing prior research on the many disincentives to reporting that exist for faculty highlight the "disconnect between policy and practice" (p. 43) that stems from the complicating factors that contribute to heavy workloads and burnout: increasing class sizes, additional research, administrative, and supervisory duties, working with diverse student populations, and simply wanting to avoid the difficult and sometimes high-conflict conversations with students about academic integrity violations. Even when faculty are committed to upholding academic integrity at their respective institutions, there are many barriers and bureaucratic hoops to jump through

that understandably lead to faculty wanting to avoid the additional labour of reporting. Eaton et al.'s (2023) study on faculty experiences with academic integrity violations sums up the many challenges that faculty currently face in their professional roles, noting "the academic integrity landscape has changed considerably" (p. 53) since landmark studies on the subject in Canada were published in 2006: "one remarkable change over the last 15 years is that 40% of faculty in the current study reported time constraints as a barrier to dealing with suspected cases of misconduct, double the rate from previous research" (p. 53).

Protecting the institution's reputation, upholding their professional duty, ensuring students who did the work honestly and with integrity do not themselves feel cheated are all responsibilities faculty, and the institution, take on. Faculty wear many hats and are often overburdened with workload that goes beyond their primary teaching responsibilities, with many faculty workloads subject to *other duties as assigned*. Many faculty come from industry to teach in their specific disciplines and may receive little orientation to the professional practice of teaching and can feel even less confident and supported in identifying plagiarism and cheating, let alone documenting, reporting, and finally arguing for a sanction at an academic misconduct hearing. It is clear that faculty are expected to be not only experts in their discipline but also experts in teaching and learning practices, and on top of these, experts in academic integrity but with little formal training or support in academic integrity, an academic and professional discipline unto itself.

The following sections examine the different ways in which upholding the values of academic integrity demands more from faculty in terms of real and perceived labour, the barriers to addressing these workload challenges, considerations for improved equity and

procedural fairness, and finally makes recommendations to reconcile the need to foster a culture of academic integrity within the scope of fair and equitable employment that all faculty are entitled to.

Emotional Labour and Burnout

The emotional labour associated with academic integrity violations is significant. In their research on how it feels for faculty to report academic integrity violations, Openo and Robinson (2021) call attention to the range of difficult emotions faculty grapple with when dealing with academic integrity violations: frustration, resentment, anxiety, fear, anger, and despair are common. Eaton et al. (2023) follow up this list of emotions, emphasizing the increased "frustration and despair" (p. 55) that faculty felt when faced with increased instances of academic misconduct during COVID-19 and emergency remote learning. There are of course some positive emotions as well, specifically related to teaching moments when faculty report helping their students recognize and learn how to honestly and ethically do their work, but these positive emotions are overshadowed by the many negative ones listed. Openo and Robinson (2021) also note the corresponding challenges some faculty have experienced of students harassing them, either via multiple emails and online communication, or at their offices and in classrooms. When a case of cheating or plagiarism takes on a new element of non-academic misconduct involving harassment, faculty can easily feel overwhelmed and very isolated without the necessary support of administration. Faculty also commonly reported experiencing negative feelings associated with identifying themselves as being "good teachers" and feeling as though they had failed in their role as educators in preventing plagiarism and cheating. These feelings can all contribute to burnout. While Openo and Robinson (2021) acknowledge when it comes to reporting

violations that faculty do feel the "time and emotional labour was worth the effort because it upheld their values, defended honest students, and protected the future of the profession and their programs" (p. 37), the emotional labour does take a heavy toll.

Additionally, institutional policies and practices that place faculty in the role of investigator and prosecution having to provide evidence, write academic misconduct reports, and even speak at quasi-judicial hearings foster an adversarial relationship with students. Faculty-student relations are therefore compromised when faculty are asked to investigate, police, and prosecute academic integrity violations. Students then are less inclined to seek help from their instructors. Faculty report how difficult it is to maintain a supportive and positive relationship with students whom they have had to write up and sanction for academic integrity violations. Eaton (2021) echoes this challenge, writing "it is problematic if we trade our identity as an educator for that of an enforcer, discarding all the aspirational elements of teaching and learning that brought us to the profession in the first place" (p. 172). For faculty who strongly identify as "good teachers," this other identity as the plagiarism and cheating police is anathema to their purpose as educators. And these identities can be seen as irreconcilable in the teaching and learning space, once again contributing to burnout.

Institutional Policies and Practices

Institutional policies can be at odds with the aim of promoting academic integrity while resisting faculty workload creep: a policy of timetabling all exams for a course with multiple sections at the same time versus an online, un-proctored exam can mean heightened exam security and less chance for cheating, but it places an immense burden on faculty to proctor in-person exams. Similarly, an institutional policy requiring e-proctoring for exams may lessen the burden of in-person proctoring but it raises troubling questions concerning equity for racialized students. Moreover, a workload policy stipulating a regular instructional workload of 10-12 classes per year may leave little time for faculty to engage in professional development regarding academic integrity. Similarly, as Bretag et al.'s (2019) research supports, students are more likely to engage in unethical academic behaviours when they are "dissatis[fied] with the teaching and learning environment" (p. 1847), compelling faculty to feel the need to improve their professional practices, deliver engaging teaching, and promote quality learning for fear of student dissatisfaction contributing to academic integrity violations. What results is a vicious loop wherein faculty face increased instructor responsibilities which can lead to weaker curriculum and assessment design. Weak assessment design results in students struggling to understand assignment expectations, how to succeed, or even what questions to ask their instructor, so they feel increased anxiety and pressure to succeed. This increased anxiety and pressure drives some students to engage in academic misconduct, feeling like they have no other choice but to cheat to succeed, and the resulting increased cases of academic misconduct increase instructor responsibilities.

Curriculum and Assessment Practices

Best practices in curriculum design and assessment practices recommend that faculty change their assessments regularly and avoid re-using the same exam questions, essay prompts, case studies, etc. There has also been an increased focus on authentic assessment as a proactive approach to assignments and exams that are purported to be more cheat-proof and to discourage other forms of academic integrity violations. No assessment is immune to academic integrity concerns. And the necessity to continually update curriculum, assessments, and test banks, coupled with applying authentic assessment principles, does place an additional workload burden on faculty, again contributing to the vicious loop noted above.

Text-matching Software and Other Technology Solutions

Text-matching software, like Turnitin and SafeAssign, can help mitigate some of the work involved with identifying instances of plagiarism and cheating. However, these software programs still require faculty to review the assignment, discuss the allegation with the student, and do the work of documenting and reporting a violation. This is a technology solution that can be used in conjunction with other practices to support faculty and foster a culture of academic integrity, but it does not lessen the workload burden once a violation has been identified and must be reported. Important to note, however, is that the widespread adoption of text-matching software by Canadian postsecondaries stalled following the landmark legal case of Rosenfeld v. McGill University in 2004. In this case, Rosenfeld, an undergraduate student at McGill, refused to submit his assignments to Turnitin as mandated by a course policy and instead submitted paper

copies. The student received a failing grade in the course as a result of not submitting the assignments to Turnitin. The student argued the policy requiring students to submit all assignments to Turnitin was a copyright infringement. The Court found in favour of the student, confirming that students should not be obliged by their institution or an instructor to have their assignments submitted to Turnitin (Strawczynski, 2004). Faced with the risk of similar litigation, Canadian postsecondaries understandably may not view text-matching software as an academic integrity solution that's worth the legal risk. Institutions should therefore consider the implications of adopting text-matching software and the conditions under which the software will be used with student assessments.

No technology solution offers a silver bullet, but some tech solutions can help streamline the administrative and procedural work of academic integrity and lessen the workload burden. Technology solutions not simply focused on detecting academic integrity violations can be implemented, including scheduling software that facilitates student-faculty meetings or case management software that at least can allow for more efficient procedures with respect to evidence-gathering and reporting, coordinating investigations, and tracking sanctions. Any technology solution comes with some important caveats that institutions must be aware of and ensure the technology itself isn't exacerbating existing workload issues or creating new liabilities and frustrations for faculty, students, and the institution overall.

Academic File-Sharing (AFS) and Copyright

Academic File Sharing sites, in which students can upload completed assignments, quiz questions, exams, and other curricular materials and receive

credits or pay to download materials have proliferated in recent years, and these sharing behaviours are both part of established social norms online but also constitute copyright violations (Seeland, Eaton, & Stoesz, 2022). When a faculty member identifies copyrighted material on an academic file-sharing site (such as curriculum materials bearing the college logo, for instance), that faculty member can submit a takedown notice using the website's online form. Take-down notices, however, are tedious, labour-intensive, and must be submitted for each individually specified document or resource that is the subject of the copyright violation. Further, it's incumbent on staff and faculty at institutions to police the content, identify copyrighted materials, and submit take-down notices. As these file-sharing sites hold upwards of tens of thousands of materials from any one institution, it's simply not feasible and would be a full-time job to do the ongoing work of policing copyright in this manner. Seeland et al. (2022) recommend faculty do not take on this monumental task and instead leverage the skills of copyright and compliance offices at their respective institutions.

Contract Cheating

Contract cheating is a term that covers outsourcing behaviours whereby students engage a friend, family member, or an online service to complete work for credit on their behalf, paid or unpaid, and this type of cheating is on the rise. Clare (2022), referring to data from Curtis and Clare collected in 2017, estimated the percentage of students who engaged in contract cheating at least once prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to be only 3.5%. In contrast, based on data pulled from Chegg usage in 2020, a popular academic file-sharing and contract cheating site, Lancaster and Cotarlan in 2021 found a 196% increase by students in STEM fields. The pandemic significantly exacerbated existing academic integrity issues in higher education. In their study

of contract cheating in Australian post-secondary institutions done prior to the pandemic, Bretag et al. (2019) found that three factors were associated with students engaging in contract cheating: "dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment, a perception that there are 'lots of opportunities to cheat', and speaking a Language Other than English (LOTE) at home" (p. 1846). In Ferguson et al.'s (2022) study of contract cheating behaviours among students at Bow Valley College in Alberta, their findings align to those of Bretag et al.'s with an additional focus on the significant role that stress plays and the different stressors that influence students' decisions to engage in contract cheating. Clare (2022) also emphasizes the influence of pandemic-related stress on students' decisions to engage more in contract cheating behaviours, noting these stresses have led "students to act in a situationally influenced way" (p. 156). Added to these situational factors, Clare (2022) also reminds faculty to remember the other concomitant factors that have contributed to this exponential increase in contract cheating over the past three years: students' perceptions that the benefits of contract cheating outweigh the risk, their perception that the likelihood of getting caught is low (and this perception is reinforced by online essay mills offering cheat-proof assignments that won't be flagged by text-matching software programs), and the ever-present opportunity these contract cheating sites present to the "repeat cheaters and the cheat-curious" (p. 156), marketing specifically to students via social media sites, using students as brand ambassadors, and recruiting students via their institution's LMS. It's no wonder given the online cheating juggernaut presented by these sites that faculty feel overwhelmed and powerless to stop the increasing trend of contract cheating.

On top of the challenges presented by contract cheating, faculty must also help students navigate the predatory nature of commercial contract cheating sites that exploit and blackmail students in similar fashion to the exploitative and predatory actions seen in organized crime. Grue, Eaton, and Boisvert (2021) detail the parallels between organized crime and the commercial contract cheating industry, highlighting that contract cheating sites "are willing to blackmail and harass students" to extort money from them under the threat of reporting them to their institutions for cheating. Faculty therefore feel the weight of this additional responsibility of safeguarding students from the dangerous and predatory actions of these unscrupulous sites.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence tools represent the latest potential threat to academic integrity. Advances in artificial intelligence and large language models that are free and openly available for anyone to use online present a new opportunity for students to cheat. Why would a student write an essay when an AI can do it, reasonably well, for free? Faculty and institutions must now grapple with this latest advancement and decide how to update curriculum and academic integrity policies accordingly. Simply prohibiting the use of artificial intelligence tools is unhelpful. While there are many opportunities to use artificial intelligence tools for learning in unique and engaging ways, faculty are again burdened with the additional labour of understanding how best to accomplish this in their respective disciplines and in pedagogically sound ways.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Data on academic integrity violations show that students from racialized minorities face more allegations of academic misconduct and receive more severe sanctions for violations. Students are therefore overrepresented both in academic

misconduct cases and in the academic integrity data (Eaton, 2021, p. 159). When students are enrolled in classes and faculty are employed by the institution, they are given little, if any, formal training on academic integrity and what their role and responsibility is in fostering it. It is simply assumed that students and faculty know what is meant by academic integrity, understand the responsibilities vis-à-vis their roles in the institution, and adhere to the directives set out in policies governing academic integrity. Students are routinely advised to read the code of conduct and cite their sources, and then this directive is subsequently used as a point of accountability, a checkbox, in the case management of academic integrity cases whereby students are told that they are responsible for knowing and abiding by the code of conduct and the academic integrity guidelines contained therein. Course outlines and syllabi also typically contain policy language concerning academic integrity and these documents then function as contracts that students must adhere to or face sanctions. Eaton (2021) highlights the problem of this policy-based approach to fostering a holistic culture of academic integrity:

> often no one tells incoming students—regardless of whether they are domestic or international—what the rules are. Students are expected to understand the values of academic integrity and how to enact them from the moment they step onto campus. The expectation that students should already know the academic expectations and institutional policies relating to academic integrity is a broader example of a systemic injustice, not only toward particular groups of students, but all students. (p. 158)

Eaton (2020) also strongly recommends faculty avoid the stereotypically racialized traps of trying to address academic integrity issues from a cultural perspective, based on problematic assumptions

that students from a particular country or region may engage more in academic misconduct. Rather than looking at academic integrity violations as stemming from a deficit in specific cultural knowledge, Eaton advises that faculty and administration consider academic integrity as a holistic practice of enculturation to the academic practices of the institution specifically (and to higher education more generally) and in this way can seek to "addre[ss] systemic inequities" (p. 153) that crop up from inappropriately framing cheating and plagiarism as a problem based on culture. Openo and Robinson (2021) advocate similar caution when it comes to reporting academic integrity violations, stating this reporting "should be done cautiously, with care, humanity and a sensitivity that cultural differences need to be explored prior to punitive action" (p. 37). And there are serious liabilities of institutions *not* recognizing how academic integrity intersects with the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. However, the labour required to address these intersections falls too often to already marginalized faculty, and the institution gets to tout the benefits of its EDI practices, meanwhile faculty are responsible for making it happen, and marginalized groups within faculty bear the brunt of this work.

Decolonization and Indigenization

It is also important to recognize that our understanding of academic integrity and citing sources is grounded in western and colonial practices of what constitutes expert knowledge and what is deemed acceptable as a citation practice or as a means of recognizing authority in research. Eaton notes the "urgent need" (p. 160) to decolonize discussions and practices because "considerations about decolonization and Indigenization have been all but absent from the academic integrity discourse, even though Indigenous work on academic integrity is starting to develop" (p. 160). Faculty and administration should heed this urgent call. Maracle's (2020) work, "Seven Grandfathers in Academic Integrity," centers Indigenous teachings, the Seven Grandfathers of *respect*, *wisdom*, *love*, *bravery*, *humility*, *honesty*, and *truth*, within an academic integrity context. This holistic approach mirrors the ICAI's six principles, listed above. Gladue (2020) takes this same holistic approach in *Indigenous Academic Integrity* and calls on all of us at our institutions to be "responsible… learners and to support the ongoing knowledge of the community" (p. 7). Finally, in seeking to counter the "highly commercialized model of education that markets and promotes the pursuit of wealth, profit-making, and efficiencies" (p. 107), Poitras-Pratt and Gladue (2021) offer ê-kwêskît, a Cree term in the sense of *to regain honour*. To honour our responsibilities as teachers and learners, to ourselves, to our relations, and to the community, Poitras-Pratt and Gladue (2021) argue that Indigenized approaches can re-define academic integrity in ways that "question the consumerist models which currently veil expectations of integrity in our institutions" (p. 115), and as Cunningham Hall (2022) asserts, seek to remove the "barriers to developing a relationship with knowledge" (p. iii). It must be stated, though, that the work of decolonizing and Indigenizing is important and necessary but should not fall exclusively to Indigenous faculty to undertake. It is instead the responsibility of all members of the learning community to commit and to act.

Recommendations

Faculty, as employees, bear a heavy workload burden when it comes to upholding the values of academic integrity. Faculty are deeply committed to these values, but such a commitment should not come with a corresponding cost of additional unremunerated hours, emotional labour, and burnout. And with technological change, the opportunities for students and faculty to find themselves mired in academic integrity issues will only continue to increase. To mitigate the workload concerns outlined above, ACIFA recommends the following:

- Institutions should take a multi-stakeholder approach to initiate substantive and meaningful change to policies and procedures governing academic integrity, and that meaningful change acknowledges the burden on all faculty, regardless of employment status, and lessens workload.
- Institutions must also ensure that policies align to practice and do not inadvertently contribute to excessive workload for faculty.
- Updated procedures should reflect the special nature of faculty-student relationships and preserve a learning community in which students and faculty are not placed in adversarial roles.
- Institutions should ensure faculty have adequate administrative support and resources to address academic integrity violations.
- Faculty, regardless of employment status or experience level, should have access to professional development opportunities

specific to the unique challenges of identifying, investigating, and reporting academic integrity violations.

- Institutions should have centralized offices with faculty and staff trained in student judicial affairs to support faculty in identifying, investigating, reporting, and seeking appropriate resolutions to academic integrity violations, and the work of these offices must go beyond simple case management.

- Faculty and students should have access to ombudspeople, including dedicated investigators, to steward investigations and the process of evidence-gathering in a fair and objective manner that adheres to the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.

- Institutions must have clear provisions in place for continuity of academic misconduct case management to respect employment dates in fixed-term contracts and in cases of faculty taking leave, vacation, and other time away from work. Faculty on fixed-term contracts especially should not be expected to continue working on a misconduct case file after their employment contract has concluded.

- Centers for teaching and learning should provide supports and resources to faculty who are seeking to update and redesign curricular materials, particularly in

response to identified academic integrity concerns.

- Institutions should ensure onboarding practices provide faculty with a full and deep understanding of academic integrity and the resources and supports available to foster a culture of academic integrity.

- Institutions should consult with Indigenous houses of learning on decolonizing and Indigenizing academic integrity discourses and practices but do so in a way that centers Indigenous perspectives while the labour associated with this is undertaken institution-wide.

- Institutions should engage compliance and copyright officers to support efforts to safeguard copyrighted materials from academic file-sharing sites

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