

Reflections on the 2019 Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity

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Abstract

In this editorial I offer my reflections on the 2019 Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity, as a co-chair of the event hosted at the University of Calgary, April 18-19, 2019. I consider the origin of the event and consider key learnings. I conclude with a reflection about the impact of the symposium and where we go from here.

Keywords: academic integrity, Canada, Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity

Background

The idea for the 2019 Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity was almost accidental. It did not start out as a symposium at all. In 2017, I applied for a University of Calgary seed grant. My proposal was unsuccessful. Feedback from the reviewers included comments such as, “Academic integrity is an administrative issue, not a research topic”, and “There is insufficient evidence to show that academic misconduct is as much of an issue in Canada as it is in other countries. If the researcher really believes it to be a topic worthy of research in Canada, then the first step is to conduct and publish a literature review on the topic.”

I took the reviewers’ notes seriously. Together with a graduate student, I undertook the most comprehensive literature review on research on academic misconduct ever conducted in Canada. It was published in the *International Journal of Educational Integrity*, edited by Tracey Bretag (Eaton & Edino, 2018).

Through our analysis of the literature, it became apparent to me that the research that had been conducted on academic integrity in Canada was sporadic and there was no established community of researchers in this country. Nor was there much evidence of sustained large-scale projects with researchers from multiple institutions collaborating on projects, or graduate students who went on to careers in which they further developed the work they had undertaken in their graduate programs.

I reached out to Tracey Bretag for her advice on how she thought we could begin to build a strong community of scholarship around academic integrity in Canada. After our initial Skype conversation, I inquired with colleagues at the University of Calgary about what would be involved in bringing an international scholar on academic integrity to the

university. This led to an offer of financial support from the Taylor Institute of Teaching and Learning to support a visit from Bretag to our campus.

It became apparent to me that if we were to have a scholar of Tracey Bretag's calibre visit the University of Calgary, it only seemed ethical to offer others the opportunity to benefit from her expertise as well. One thing led to another and the idea for the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity emerged. I reached out to Jennifer Lock and Meadow Schroeder, two colleagues at the University of Calgary with whom I had collaborated on a small internal grant to develop an academic integrity tutorial for students in our online and blended programs. I asked them to chair the symposium with me and they agreed.

Then, I circled back to the literature review published in 2018. I endeavoured to reach out to every author whose work we had reviewed for that article. I was able to reach almost all of them. I informed them about the symposium and invited them to consider attending. We also reached out to members of the academic integrity community in Canada to invite them. Our vision for the symposium was three-fold: (1) to give Canadian scholars, policy makers, educational professionals and advocates an opportunity to gather and share knowledge, as the first steps to building a sustainable community upon which to build future research; (2) to provide those who had undertaken research in this area an opportunity to showcase their work in a gathering of like-minded peers; and (3) to offer Canadians a chance to learn from Tracey Bretag, whose expertise working in Australian and global contexts could benefit us.

As it turned out, we were fortunate to have two prestigious international scholars join us. Thomas Lancaster made the trek from the United Kingdom to share his expertise on how social media enables contract cheating (Lancaster, 2019). In addition, James Blackburn also came over from the UK to share his research on educators' views of contract cheating (Blackburn, 2019), and colleagues from the United States shared insights about how technology can be used to recognize various forms of plagiarism (Singleton & Ricksen, 2019).

We were thrilled to be able to showcase research conducted or led by graduate students (Crook, 2019; Fernández Conde & Rothschuh, 2019; Hersey, 2019; Larijani & Rancourt, 2019; Thacker, Eaton, Stoesz, & Miron, 2019). It is imperative that graduate students have an opportunity not only to present their work, but to network with others in their field who can mentor them as they advance in their professional careers. I was eager to see graduate students being supported in this way.

I have highlighted some key aspects of the symposium in this editorial. We are pleased to share this special issue with you, with contributions from some of the symposium

presenters. An archive of abstracts from all the sessions is available online (Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity, 2019).

Challenges and Opportunities with Funding

A brief note about funding and sponsor acknowledgement is in order. Although the funding offered by the Taylor Institute of Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary was enough to bring Dr. Bretag to campus, it was insufficient to run an entire symposium. So, on behalf of the three co-chairs, I applied for a Vice President Research Conference Grant at the University of Calgary. Once again our grant application was unsuccessful. Not to be deterred, we actively pursued, and were successful in obtaining additional funding from a variety of internal sources, as well as corporate sponsors including Turnitin, D2L and Oxford University Press/Epigeum. Without this internal and external support, the Symposium would not have been possible.

Understanding Impact

The Symposium was held April 17-18, 2019. It was not the first symposium ever offered in Canada on academic integrity. Provincial meetings in Ontario and Manitoba had been bringing together practitioners and professionals on a regular basis, over a number of years (McKenzie, 2018). In 2014, there was a provincial symposium held in Alberta, co-hosted by MacEwan University and the University of Alberta (McKenzie, 2018). In 2018, a similar symposium was held in British Columbia (McKenzie, 2018).

But this was the first *national* symposium hosted in Canada. The event brought together 150 participants from British Columbia to New Brunswick, including scholars, higher educational professionals, university administrators and senior institutional executives. The participant evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, but the feedback that I remember most came from Dr. Ross MacKay, Acting Associate Vice-President, Academic at Vancouver Island University who commented to me that he thought it was “a landmark event in Canadian higher education” (R. MacKay, personal communication, April 18, 2019).

As I reflect on the symposium, a key piece of evidence relating to impact resulted from a workshop given by colleagues in Ontario about how to build and sustain a regional academic integrity network (Ridgely, Miron, & McKenzie, 2019). The Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO) had offered a workshop a few months earlier at the 2019 International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) annual conference in New Orleans. Our AICO colleagues revised the workshop they had presented in New Orleans and offered it again at the Symposium. Refinements on the New Orleans session included grouping workshop participants by province so connections could be made and discussions about creating provincial networks could take place. I recall working with the Alberta group. I felt

simultaneously energized about connecting with colleagues from my province to talk about the possibilities, and also a little awkward and ashamed that I had not previously met some of them. I expect that I am not alone when I say that having the opportunity to connect with others involved in this work was a major takeaway from the Symposium.

Just over a month after the Symposium, colleagues in Manitoba held their annual Academic Integrity Inter-Institutional Meeting (AIIIM), and announced the advancement of the group as a provincial network, the Manitoba Academic Integrity Network (MAIN). On August 16, 2019, Albertans gathered at the University of Calgary for the inaugural meeting of the Alberta Council on Academic Integrity (ACAI), with participants from nine postsecondary institutions in attendance. On October 18, colleagues at Thompson Rivers University hosted the British Columbia Academic Integrity Day (BC-AID), which combined professional development with the inaugural meeting of a provincial group there. The workshop offered by representatives of AICO at the Symposium effectively catalyzed concrete action from three other provinces to formalize or launch their own provincial networks. That one workshop had a domino effect across the country, with three provincial additional networks being launched within six months of the Symposium.

At the conclusion of the Symposium, participants were asking us when the next one would be. I put forward a challenge to others saying it would be ideal if another institution hosted the next national event. A couple of weeks later, colleagues from Thompson Rivers University contacted us to let us know they had their Provost's support to host the next symposium in 2021. I see this as a major impact of the Symposium; not only that we organized and hosted the first one, but that there is a commitment to continue this work going forward. To me, this is an indication of the amplification of academic integrity work in Canada happening at a larger scale, sustained by a network of professionals, scholars, and graduate students across the country.

It is imperative that this work not only grows, but is both sustained and sustainable. Since the Symposium, I have gone back to the book of abstracts or presenters' slide decks numerous times to dig deeper into the knowledge that presenters shared there. This issue of *Canadian Perspectives of Academic Integrity* is dedicated to those who have opted to share their work in this special issue not only to preserve it, but to amplify it. I hope you enjoy reading these pieces as much as we have enjoyed working with our colleagues to publish their work in the journal.

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