

Editorial

Academic Integrity in 2020: Editorial Year in Review

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What a tumultuous year 2020 has been. As I reflect on this year and what it has meant for academic integrity in Canada and beyond, there is no doubt that the world has changed in ways we cannot yet fully appreciate.

For me, the year began with assuming the role of Co-Editor-in-Chief for the *International Journal for Educational Integrity*. I will return to this point later.

ICAI Conference 2020

I recall being at the annual conference of the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI, 2020a), held in Portland, OR, USA, from March 6 to 8, 2020. The conference provides an opportunity to connect with friends and colleagues from around the world. The Canadian Consortium Day, offered as a day-long workshop to the main conference, has provided Canadians with an opportunity to connect since its inception (McKenzie, 2018). I expect I am not alone when I say that it is the highlight of the conference for many Canadians.

We were delighted when Jennie Miron from Humber College was named to the Board of Directors of ICAI, joining long-standing Canadian board member, Amanda McKenzie. The conference also included moments of sadness, such as when news of the passing of Robert (Bob) Clarke was shared. Clarke was known for his work with Thomas Lancaster, including coining the term contract cheating (Clarke & Lancaster, 2006). The two of them became a dynamic duo of research and presentations on the topic, impacting scholars, practitioners and policy makers around the world. For details on Clarke's passing, see Reisz (2020).

During this year's conference, the state of California to the south, and the state of Washington to the north, both declared states of emergency due to the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) coronavirus.

I recall sitting in the Portland airport after the conference awaiting the flight home to Calgary when we learned that Oregon's Governor, Kate Brown, had declared a state of emergency hours before (Hyams et al., 2020).

Initial Impact of the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic

None of us realized that the ICAI conference in Portland would be our last opportunity to connect in person at an academic integrity event in 2020. Not long after returning home, we found ourselves going into lockdown as the federal, provincial, and municipal governments responded to the virus. Subsequent conferences, as well as provincial meetings, were either cancelled or moved online. As I write this, academic integrity organizations and networks are already in the process of planning for virtual events for 2021. None of us knows when we will be able to see one another in person again.

The pivot to remote emergency teaching and learning across schools and post-secondary institutions began in March to ensure classes could continue and students could complete their academic year. That shift brought with it increased concerns about breaches of academic integrity across the country and across the world, resulting in more attention to academic integrity as well as increased workload for those with *integrity* in their professional portfolio.

Webinars rapidly emerged as a way to engage in professional development and provide support to colleagues. The ICAI responded quickly with a worldwide webinar (see Bertram Gallant et al., 2020). Universities, colleges, and provincial academic integrity networks across Canada also developed and delivered webinars that were widely attended. Examples include webinars such as the one hosted by the Manitoba Academic Integrity Network (MAIN), featuring speakers Brenda M. Stoesz, Josh Seeland, and Lisa Vogt (2020). Another example is one offered by the Taylor Institute on Teaching and Learning at University of Calgary (see Eaton, 2020a). These are just a couple of examples of the dozens of academic integrity webinars offered from March 2020 through the rest of the year.

New online communities also emerged during this time. At the University of Calgary, a small internal community of practice for academic integrity, founded by Ellen Perreault in 2016, as a way for academic departments and other units across campus to share resources about academic integrity. Perreault invited me to take on the stewardship of the group in 2017 and I carried on with our periodic meetings on campus until the pandemic. Because it was not possible to meet in person after March 2020, I re-jigged the community of practice and migrated it to an online space. I opened up the first meeting on March 30 to colleagues at other institutions and *Integrity Hour* was born. This informal group has met regularly on Monday mornings throughout the year. Conversations are participant-driven and sharing of information, ideas, and resources happens at every meeting. We typically have between 12 and 16 participants from different institutions across a number of provinces, from British Columbia to New Brunswick, join in, creating an opportunity for academic integrity experts to connect and build their professional networks. Colleagues were curious about how to implement something similar for their own professional

communities, so I wrote a how-to guide for facilitating an online community of practice for academic integrity (Eaton, 2020c).

Virtual events, such as Integrity Hour and the various webinars, have resulted in a breakthrough of sorts for the academic integrity community in Canada. Prior to the pandemic, colleagues in Atlantic Canada had yet to become active in the academic integrity community in a regular and sustained way (see McKenzie, 2018). Connecting virtually meant developing connections with new colleagues, including some on the east coast. These relationships continued to flourish throughout the year thanks to technologies that allowed us to remain in touch.

Impact of Black Lives Matter

Police killings of Black people led to social and civil unrest, catalyzed by the killing of George Floyd on May 25 in Minneapolis, MN (Hill et al., 2020). The Black Lives Matter movement had an impact across the world. Protests were held in major cities, including in Canada, with calls to defund the police. The movement sparked conversations among academic integrity experts about systemic racism in how violations are reported and addressed. I wrote a white paper calling for action to collect demographic data about students who are reported for academic misconduct to identify how systemic racism affects particular student populations and to address that racism in our institutions (Eaton, 2020b).

The need for anti-discrimination advocacy became a focus of the Alberta Council on Academic Integrity (ACAI) during this period. It led to the Council's Statement Against Racism in Matters Relating to Academic Integrity (ACAI, 2020), calling for more equitable approaches to how alleged or actual misconduct among particular student populations is addressed. In addition, some members of the steering committee collaborated to offer a professional development workshop at the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) annual conference (Boisvert et al., 2020).

At a steering committee meeting held in the final quarter of the year, the ACAI steering committee unanimously agreed to establish a working group on equity, diversity, and inclusion. The working group will be led by Nazanin Teymouri and Sheryl Boisvert of Norquest College, Edmonton.

Wicked Problems Related to Academic Integrity Heightened during the Pandemic

Summer proved to be a busy time for those working in academic integrity. Many of us did not take a vacation in a traditional sense and we remained busy (and often exhausted) without the typical summer lull in our professional work. Instead, academic integrity professionals

everywhere spent their time preparing for September, as one by one, institutions announced that the fall semester would be fully or mostly online (or remote). Staying connected virtually provided many of us with the energy to keep going, knowing we were not alone and that we could help one another whether it was to share ideas or resources, or to connect on a personal level for video and phone calls to catch up, and even commiserate. The pandemic meant that we worked harder to stay connected, but the energy we put into that deepened our relationships with one another in a way that had not happened before the pandemic.

A number of wicked problems (see Churchman 1967) related to academic integrity intensified during 2020: unethical file-sharing, contract cheating, and remote invigilation (i.e., e-proctoring). Prior to the pandemic, I'd never heard of e-proctoring or remote proctoring, as it is also called. I am sure I am not alone with that experience. However, e-proctoring became a major point of debate as many institutions quickly signed up for multi-year contracts with companies offering services that would lockdown students' browsers and monitor via video during exams written at home. Educators and students began to protest the use of surveillance technology in educational settings. Students all over the world initiated online petitions against the technology, including in Canada (e.g., the one initiated by students at Concordia University (Change.org, 2020)). The topic received local, national, and international media attention (CBC News, 2020; Krugel, 2020; Sonnemaker, 2020; Wong, 2020). Academic integrity advocates became activists when one company sued Ian Linkletter, an employee at the University of British Columbia in September for allegedly disseminating the company's copyrighted, confidential, and proprietary information (Alden & Ha, 2020; Sonnemaker, 2020).

Companies offering contract cheating and file-sharing services have flourished this year, including those offering "24/7 homework help" (Isai, 2020). Some companies offering promises of removing unauthorized material from their sites has resulted in extensive additional work for academic integrity professionals, as the requirements to have materials removed often involves following an exacting process that requires time and effort.

The URL blocking project undertaken by colleagues in Manitoba garnered international attention when they wrote about their work on the ICAI blog (Seeland et al., 2020). Experts worked with members of their institutional administration and IT departments to implement the blocking of nearly 1,000 contract cheating and file-sharing sites on campus networks. Even though campuses were closed through much of the summer, they have not only set themselves up for success for when campuses re-open, but they have set a precedent for how collaborative action with people working together across multiple institutions can make a stronger impact.

Passing of Tracey Bretag

On October 7, 2020, Tracey Bretag passed away after a valiant battle against cancer. As I reflect on 2020 and also on the influence that Bretag had on so many of us, I recall when she came to the University of Calgary in 2019 to give the keynote address for the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity. One morning before the conference activities for the day began, she met the editorial board members for *Canadian Perspectives on Academic Integrity* for breakfast to offer advice and wisdom on how to make the journal a success. She felt unwell during the symposium, but none of us, not even her, knew the seriousness of her illness when she visited us. It turned out that her visit to Calgary was one of the last international trips she would take. By the end of 2019, she knew she was terminally ill, though she kept the news private for some time.

After her passing, tributes to Bretag came in various forms, including the dedication of the International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating on October 21 to Bretag, as contract cheating was a topic that she was passionate about.

International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating

The International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating was held on October 21 this year. Jennie Miron chaired the organizing group (ICAI, 2020b), leading a global planning team to conceptualize and implement “Twenty Live in 20 -- Global Conversations about Contract Cheating Schedule” (ICAI, 2020d). The live event, offered entirely online through YouTube and Zoom, featured 20 hours of programming, offered in 1-hour segments, with contributions from around the world. The Canadian hour was titled, “Unapologetically Ethical: Canada’s Stance against Contract Cheating”. The panel, led by Jennie Miron, included Susan Bens (University of Saskatchewan), Sheryl Boisvert (Norquest College), Tod Denham (Thompson Rivers University), Bob Mann (Dalhousie University), Amanda McKenzie (Waterloo University), Paul Sopcak, (MacEwan University), Alycia Stewart (MacEwan University), Brenda M. Stoesz (University of Manitoba), Martin Weilemaker (University of New Brunswick), and me.



Figure 1. Screenshot of Tweet posted by the Manitoba Academic Integrity Network showing some of the panelists for “Unapologetically Ethical: Canada’s Stance against Contract Cheating.”

A video created by students at Ryerson University was especially memorable. The video, “Imagine a World Where Grades are For Sale” (Ryerson University, 2020), featured students talking about the importance of doing one’s own work. The video had impact because it was created by students and hearing them talk about the importance of acting with integrity resonated with viewers. To further support students, the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO) released a new resource for the Day of Action entitled “Contract Cheating Student Tip Sheet” (Miron & McKenzie, 2020).

Concluding Reflections

As 2020 draws to a close, we are beginning to recognize the magnitude of the impact the COVID-19 virus has had on education generally, as well as on academic integrity specifically, not to mention society at large. We are still living in the midst of the pandemic and I expect that the full impact of the pandemic will not be fully understood for some time.

I mentioned in my introductory remarks, that in January 2020, I accepted the role of Co-Editor-in-Chief for the *International Journal for Educational Integrity (IJEI)*, working alongside Bretag, the co-founder of that journal. When she invited me to serve in the role, she disclosed her illness to me and made it clear that working alongside her as co-editor included a commitment to carry on as Editor-in-Chief of *IJEI* after her passing. As I take on that responsibility, it necessitates stepping down from my role as Co-Editor-in-Chief for *Canadian Perspectives on Academic Integrity (CPAI)*. Although CPAI is still in its first few years of development, it has a strong editorial board and Brandy Usick will continue to serve as its Co-Editor-in-Chief. She will be joined by Brenda M. Stoesz, who has served as a member of the editorial board since its beginning, and is the incoming Co-Editor-in-Chief, starting in January 2021, for volume four. I look forward to continuing to support the journal as a member of the editorial board going forward.

If 2020 has taught us anything, it is that integrity matters, whether it is in our classrooms (virtual or otherwise), in our interactions, and throughout society. Although leaving the editorial role for CPAI is bittersweet, I am excited to see where Usick and Stoesz take the journal into its next chapter of development. And so, as this year draws to a close, we look to the future for change and hope.

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