



EXPLORING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (AI) IN
THE AGE OF A DIVERSE LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT - ISSUES & STRATEGIES
SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING & LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Academic dishonesty is on the rise in college and university environments as there is a growing need for students to conform, succeed and meet deadlines. With the planned increase of international intakes into Canadian educational facilities, there is an expectation that all cohorts of students will be able to succeed at the same level. The ensuing pressure can be overwhelming, resulting in learners looking for alternative methods to achieve these goals. Conducting an environmental scan surrounding Academic Integrity (AI) policies and structures as it relates to Centennial College, allowed this study to explore the rationale behind dishonesty and the increased need to put Academic Integrity at risk in diverse learning environments be it-online, hybrid or blended formats, within the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts (SHTCA). Second, it identifies current issues, challenges and trends associated with AI including finding loopholes, outsourcing and contract cheating. Finally, it addresses discrepancies in student intake levels, and the utilization of institutional digital software that aims to better support educators and staff in delivering a high quality academic experience.

INTRODUCTION

Centennial College's overarching vision is to transform the lives of student communities, therefore, as faculty, we are equally responsible in facilitating a rewarding educational experience embedded in AI. Growing pressure to conform, succeed and resultant student stress, has added to faculty's emotional labor in aligning learning outcomes and evaluation methods that remain current in burgeoning online and blended classrooms. An influx of international intake, cultural confusion and mis-assumptions have contributed to unreasonable student expectations and embellishments during field placement and employment interactions. This study is a first step in exploring and identifying issues and strategies that matter to Academic Integrity.

Literature Review

Canadian post-secondary institutions are cognizant of the academic dishonesty that is existent in their educational establishments. In 2016/2017 Statistics Canada, identified that over 2 million students were enrolled in Canadian Colleges and Universities. International students make up approximately 12% of that (Statistics Canada 2017b). Therefore, along with managing the continuing increase in student numbers, Canadian colleges and universities have additionally been encumbered with handling the ease and depth of academic dishonesty. Lang (2013, pp. 12-15) states that somewhere in the range of 65-82% of students have cheated, which indicates that the desire to challenge AI is relatively high. Additionally, with the use of ever-emerging technology, the ability to encourage unethical behaviour is increased (Sayed/Lento, 2016).

Although there have been several definitions of the term academic dishonesty, it is somewhat considered to be interchangeable with the term 'academic integrity'. As a result, it can be interpreted differently from the view of the educational institution versus that of the student. Furthermore, students often have difficulty in distinguishing the difference between passive and active cheating (Anista & Elmore, 2009), both being rampant.

Most, if not all Canadian colleges and universities have created their own AI policy, however, educators can be tested when confronted with academic dishonesty as to what the official consequences should be. Some believe that all types of breaches should be treated alike, while others feel obliged to only flag the more serious kind. Professors cite lack of administrative support and bureaucratic process as the main reason for this attitude (Jendrek, 1989). Instead, educators with the additional use of technology, continue to try to find their own disruptors to deal with the constant strain of managing the issue.

In this study we investigated the different facets of academic dishonesty, including how the use of technology is a motivating factor in supporting and encouraging dishonest behaviour. Additionally, we also considered what academic institutions need to factor in when creating and enforcing their academic integrity policies, as it applies to a diverse student body in person and online.

Research Methods

Qualitative Study

This study deals with the notion or reality of AI that is complex, constructed and ultimately subjective in nature. Such knowledge was best obtained by conducting the study in a natural setting. A qualitative study aligned well with unstructured and emerging ideas, thoughts, opinions, personal beliefs, perceptions, and data reflective of participant engagement (Sagor, 2000), that would be later compiled into a thematic pattern for easier understanding and analysis.

Research Tools

A combination of focus groups and online survey was selected to bring in the best of a diverse population amenable to participating in this study. **Focus Groups** can pull together common patterns or strands of varied discussions from a purposefully selected and small group of individuals in order to gain deeper understanding of the issue at hand (Nyumba et al, 2018).

i. The **first focus group** would include individuals representing SHTCA faculty (*full time & contract*) & institutional support staff (*Centre for Organizational Learning & Training (COLT), Student Success Advisors, Student Experience Office (SEO) and Centre for Students with Disabilities (CSD)*).

ii. The **second focus group** would include two mini groups of 5 students each from second or third semester, across 14 SHTCA programs to ensure a representative sample.

An **Online Survey** using predefined series of queries to collect information from a select audience (SHTCA graduates) was found most apt for graduates, given time, schedule and location factors. This method would allow a more wholesome approach to identify pertinent data that may have otherwise been overlooked.

Recruitment

i. Faculty & Staff focus group: A pre-approved broadcast invitation was sent by Chairs of SHTCA to all faculty and staff; the same was shared with members of COLT, SEO and CSD offices, and recruited on a first come first serve basis. A maximum of 12 individuals were confirmed.

ii. Student focus group: A pre-approved broadcast invitation was shared by SHTCA and posted on e.centennial (by admin support) for all second and third semester students. Responses were scanned for equitable program representation across SHTCA and a maximum of 10 students were confirmed on a first come first serve basis. Names of Primary Investigators (PI's) were not attached on any information sheet, the student Research Assistant directly supported and contacted participants to mitigate any bias or undue academic pressure.

Online Survey: The research team collaborated with the Office of Alumni Engagement to reach approximately 2,982 graduates of SHTCA. A pre-approved broadcast invitation with e-survey link (Qualtrics) was distributed, along with consent and complete information package about the study. A reminder broadcast followed to ensure better response rate.

ANALYSIS

A student Research Assistant (external to SHTCA) supported PIs in compiling information from each of the focus group sessions and survey to interpret, thematically arrange and analyze data obtained. There was a sequential transition from an issue to a research question or exploration in this case, to data and its analysis. The analysis would paint a vivid picture of existing issues, shared encounters or experiences and emergence of new ideas, when combined with literature review and secondary research (environment scan) to make this more robust, meaningful and relevant to all stakeholders.

RESULTS (raw data)

FACULTY & STAFF FOCUS GROUP

Potential Motivations for Students Cheating

- Need to succeed, lack of confidence, too many courses
- Repetition and motivation from other students who didn't get caught
- They think they're doing their friends a favour
- English level is low, entrance level so low they don't understand content and cannot cope
- If they cheated before in an early semester then most likely to cheat in other semesters
- They simply want their Permanent Residency, so don't want to fail the course

Full-Time Vs Contract in Addressing Cheating

- Full-time say not their job to babysit contract faculty's students when the contract faculty think it's not their job to deal with it
- Contract faculty are *only paid to teach*, so why go the extra mile and do unpaid work?
- Contract faculty may not face these issues on a consistent basis, while full-time faculty have been here longer and have seen more instances of cheating
- Became a somewhat heated topic between the full-time and contract faculty

Caught Students Breaching AI

**College policy - students are allowed to finish test, breach addressed separately afterwards*

- Several have caught a student cheating
- Most address it right away
- Most don't know how to support a policy that doesn't allow immediate addressing of a breach

Reporting Breach

- Everyone knows how to report a breach and the steps required
- Overall feeling: nothing serious is going to be done, never seen a student seriously penalized
- No proactive engagement on how to support the student afterward
- Difficulty in discussing with management - takes time, effort with minimal results
- If faculty had full support from management in knowing that something was actually being done, they would be more inclined to lay down the law
- Word would spread fast amongst students that a breach in AI results in serious consequence
- Does the college keep any record of serious AI breaches?

Training on AI

- Most faculty have not accessed COLT AI policy
- Most faculty would attend training on AI

Classroom Lessons

- Faculty constantly making changes to assessments to deal with breach of AI
- Larger classes prompt faculty to reduce short answer questions used in assessments
- Technology is hard to keep up with as students using smartwatches, other means to cheat

Online/Hybrid/Blended Learning

- Often have to babysit students to complete the work
- No true way to monitor the integrity of assignment and test
- If lesson is online but testing is in class, faculty can verify IP addresses
- Students still try to cheat by claiming they have submitted online test, but leave class and continue it
- More chances to copy off each other and try to fool Turnitin for online assignments
- Some use Respondous Lockdown Browser to monitor during online type testing

Do Teaching Methods Change to Accommodate Domestic vs International Students?

- Lessons created based on content of course and although we do, we should not be changing our lectures or assessments to accommodate one group over other
- Faculty know students are entering program at 130-140 level (English) where they should be entering at a 160 level
- Sometimes go against own AI to lower levels of learning to make sure that enough can pass the course
- Universal Design Learning has not yet been expanded on, this may change how assessments are balanced out given the different options that might be available (one way more valuable than other)

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

Motivation for Cheating

- Too many courses; not enough time to do school work, as they are working at jobs
- Lazy, easier to cheat than study for long periods of time
- Course/teacher boring
- Hard topic, confusion with language
- Pressure from friends
- Get better grades
- Addicted to cheating
- Domestic vs International (Domestic can afford to pay again if they fail/Intl failing is expensive)

Online/Hybrid/Blended Classes lead to Cheating

- Most don't like online courses- why pay to learn yourself
- Lack of communication between students and faculty
- Easy to cheat; socially encouraged to cheat
- Online is confusing- have to rely on friends for information
- Teachers do not get back to emails quick enough
- Students forget about online courses

Have You Seen Other Students Cheating (Academic Dishonesty)?

- Yes, almost every test or assignment
- Teachers are advised of cheating (some say they did not see it)

Would You Cheat If You Could Get Away with It?

- Yes, if nobody would find out
- Yes, if there is no risk of getting caught (if it's for an important exam)

Contract Cheating

- Some did not know what it was or have not done it
- Smart students will ask for money to write assignments
- Instagram and other social media posts advertisements for doing papers or assignments
- Websites offer to do homework, assignments, papers
- Yes, It would be considered cheating

What is Academic Dishonesty?

- Going outside of rules or guidelines, additional device or equipment (assignments and test)
- Copying someone's exam
- Plagiarism
- Looking at phone during an exam
- Looking up answers online
- Students who speak in own language

GRADUATE ONLINE SURVEY (total sample 2,982, total click rate 4.9%)

What Made A Class Difficult?

- Professors speaking fast and not explaining topics clearly or conducive to learning styles
- Teachers putting too much pressure on students to obtain good grades
- Other students in groups who are slow learners
- Overall workload being overwhelming and having to take a lot of classes in a single semester
- Not having specific curriculum to follow
- Difficulty adapting to the changes to the education in Canada when compared to their home country

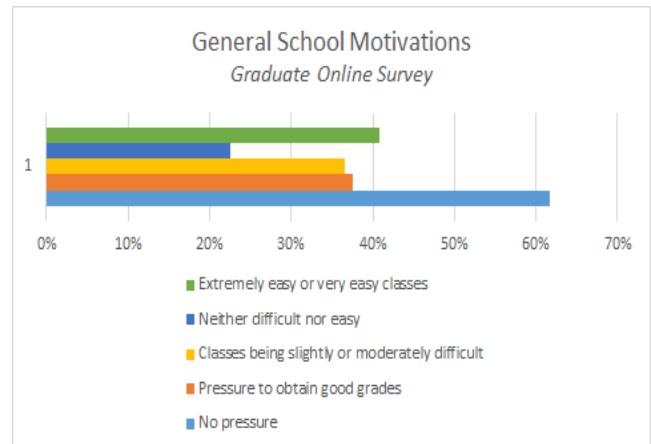
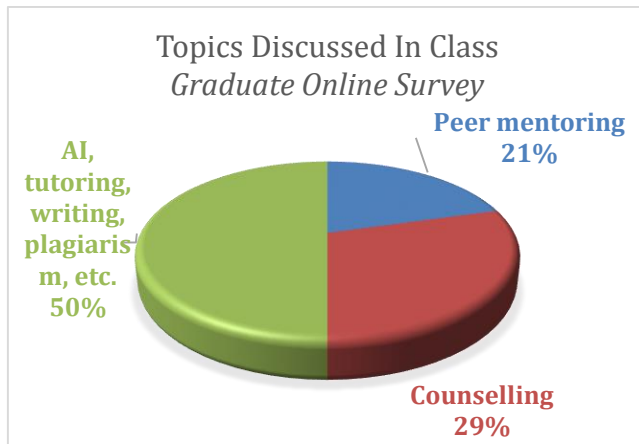
Academic Integrity Meaning (*most participants had some idea*)

- Using your own thoughts and ideas while citing sources
- Following institutional policy
- Most stated that it had to do with being honest with your work, having self esteem

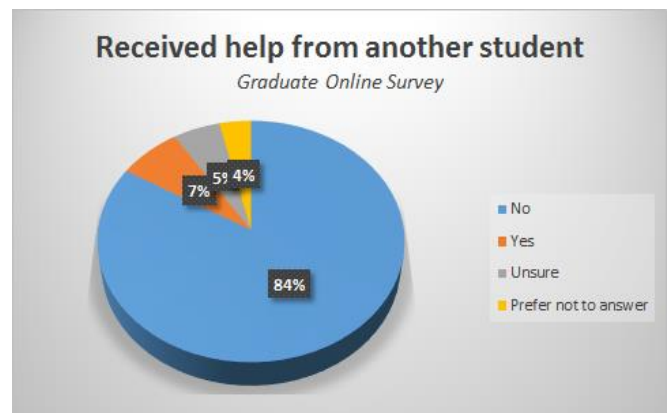
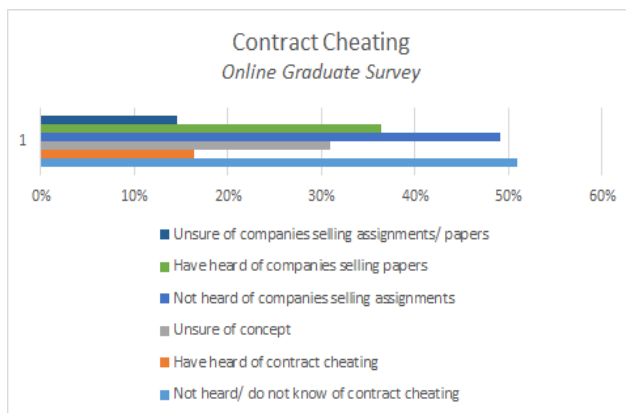
Cheating in Class v/s Online

4/55 stated that they were motivated to cheat in their classes. The motivations to cheat included:

- Didn't want to study for a test in elementary school and felt pressured to ensure they brought a good grade home to their parents out of fear of disappointment
- Deadlines with an unmotivated professor
- To get good grades and not fail the class in high school. This changed in college however when they had to pay for the classes if the work seemed pointless or unfair



Contract cheating and helping



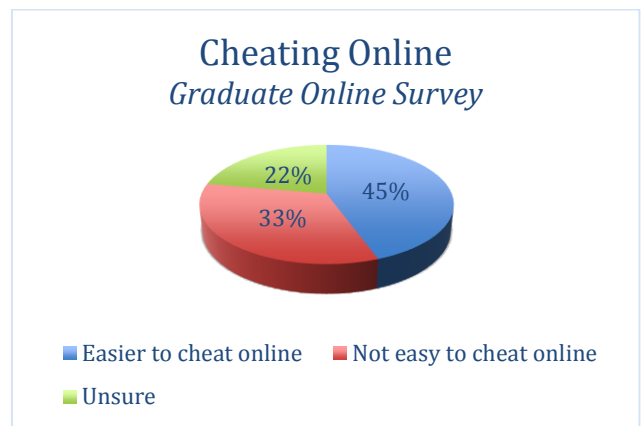
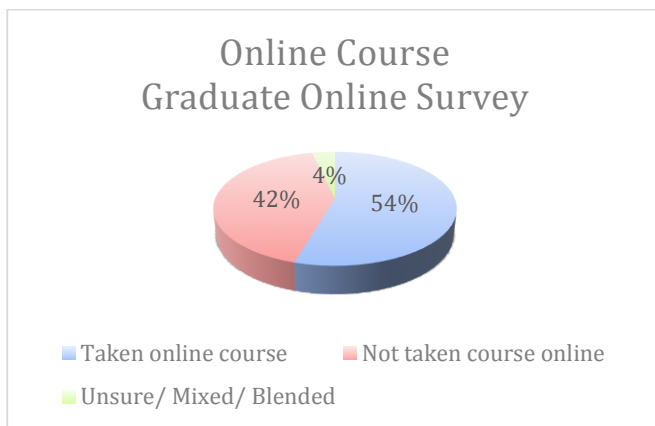
The four that responded with 'yes': "the teachers didn't explain things properly"; it was group work or helping a friend who was sick; that the assignment was important to finish so they helped each other; and lastly that they used a friend's old assignment in high school and submitted it exactly as it was.

Knowing Someone Who Cheated and Consequences

- Most reported that the student was not punished for cheating or was not caught. Some reported that the student's test was taken away but that was all that happened

Resources Provided in Class

- The majority of respondents believed enough resources were provided in order to succeed
- Some respondents believed that enough resources were not provided and that some professors didn't care about the lack of time and heavy workload



Respondents stated that it is easier because you are not watched during your examinations, students who took the class previously can provide material since it doesn't change, and because no one is supervising students.

Factors to Reduce Motivation to Cheat

- Respondents stated that more study resources, more external support, better use of the lockdown browser, and resources to improve on study skills could help reduce motivation to cheat
- One respondent stated that the pressure to get good grades in order to not look bad in front of classmates can contribute to cheating, and finding a way to reduce that feeling on campus could reduce motivation. They stated that students believe experience matters more than grades
- One respondent believes that teachers need to be stricter in regards to cheating, and the college needs to follow suit

SUMMARY FINDINGS

The evidence presented in this study recognizes that students are aware that a breach of academic integrity is wrong, however, if necessary, many indicated they would take the chance and cheat on an assignment and or test. In addition, their motivation for the breach of AI varied, but overwhelmingly it came down to the amount of courses they are required to complete each semester, actual course workload, laziness, and conflicts with working part time or full time jobs. This often created a stressful and overwhelming learning experience, both online and in person, hence the need to find ways to beat the system just to survive. Furthermore, students found online learning challenging, as the lack of direct interaction with peers and faculty, created no real motivation to actively participate in completing the course.

Faculty in the traditional classroom setting found it challenging to manage academic integrity with the onset of larger classes, especially during assessment time. In addition, the variance in student intake levels, can be troublesome as it relates to student performance in the class. Furthermore, monitoring AI in an online setting can be equally as challenging. If external assessments are done as either a quiz or exam, it can be difficult to know who is actually completing the test. Therefore, making it much easier for academic dishonesty to occur. If however, students are completing essay or term paper type assessments, commercial plagiarism tools such as Turnitin.com, make it easier for faculty to catch the breach. Nonetheless, the time it takes to research and assess the academic dishonesty can be somewhat daunting. Along with the time it takes to report the breach, and the lack of management follow-up afterwards sometimes seems futile.

Alumni felt that more information around academic integrity should be provided on a consistent basis to the students. The fact that students who were caught cheating, didn't seem to be punished severely, was also somewhat disturbing and adds to overall apathy in and outside learning environments. Additionally, they indicated that more study resources and external support would best assist students, and subsequently reduce the motivation to cheat.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving Forward

1. **AI Office:** Establish a central office to educate all on policy, promote transparency, make presence visible and clarify processes for students and faculty. This will send a strong and clear message to all.
2. **Records** (maintained by Success Advisors and Chairs): Faculty should be made aware of students in previous breach of AI; keeping in mind possibility of being judgmental, infringing student privacy, etc. The Business School maintains such a database- worth comparing with other schools.
3. **Mandatory AI Training** (module/ sign off sheet): For all students for every program. Offered on every course shell, as a prerequisite 'welcome' before commencing actual course work, holding them accountable.
4. **Student Success/ SEO:** Possible that students breaching AI or such behaviour is transferred into work environment, reflects poorly on institutional and student reputation alike. Establish a protocol in liaison with AI Office and Schools.

LIMITATIONS & CONSTRAINTS

- Sensitive nature of topic - students may or not have been completely honest in the focus groups
- Students recruited through broadcasts (made by instructor) were offered bonus marks for participating and submitting a reflection paper- these students were more reluctant to answer questions than others and as such may have felt uncomfortable in the group
- Students in the first group knew the note taker (academic advisor) and seemed a bit unwilling to contribute when called on to share perspectives
- Several students were found to be from the Hotel Operations Management
- Data was limited to SHTCA metrics and a more in depth or cross comparison with those found in other Schools could help further this endeavor

CONCLUSION

In order to achieve the goals of creating a conducive and diverse learning environment where academic integrity is significantly reduced, it is important to address and invest in resources that will assist with managing the school's goals. First, this would include, addressing the emotional labor involved in identifying AI with a renewed focus on support systems, mitigation plan and improved policies. Second, create a collaborative mindset among educators and liaise with the Centre for Organizational Learning and Teaching (COLT) to actively extend this offering and build academic knowledge and capacity. Third, engage in academic conversations, workshops and seminars to share and build a proactive community of practice in the realm of Academic Integrity. Fourth, educate and create a standard response system and support mechanism of available information and best practices within SHTCA for all faculty, staff and students. Finally, become a leader in Academic Integrity issues that pushes a robust educational agenda and grooms an equally committed and desirable student population.

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