Academic Integrity as a Transdisciplinary Field of Research, Policy, and Practice

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Acknowledgement of Land and Country

In the spirit of reconciliation I begin by acknowledging and paying respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community.

This recognition and respect includes valuing the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As a person from a settler background visiting this land, I extend my acknowledgement to other Indigenous lands and peoples, including those from my home country of Canada.

As a scholar of ethics and integrity, acknowledging the traditional territories of Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples is neither a rote, nor a performative act, but rather a reminder of the responsibility we all hold to contribute to the ongoing commitment to reconciliation.

Agenda

Overview of Transdisciplinary Research

Examples of global research expertise

Examples of methodological and theoretical approaches

Examples of transdisciplinary research projects

Threats to academic integrity and research ethics as fields of research

Calls to action

Provenance and scholarly situating of this work

- In this presentation I am scaffolding some concepts I first presented in my keynote address at the 2021 conference of the European Network for Academic Integrity (ENAI) and continued to develop in a subsequent presentation this year's ENAI.

- This work is also the basis for a chapter in the *Handbook of Academic Integrity* (2nd edition), for which I am serving as Editor-in-Chief, as well as Section Editor and contributor.

- In this knowledge synthesis keynote, I draw from my work as a scholar in the field, as well as editor of this major reference work and the *International Journal for Educational Integrity*.

Conceptual framing of academic integrity
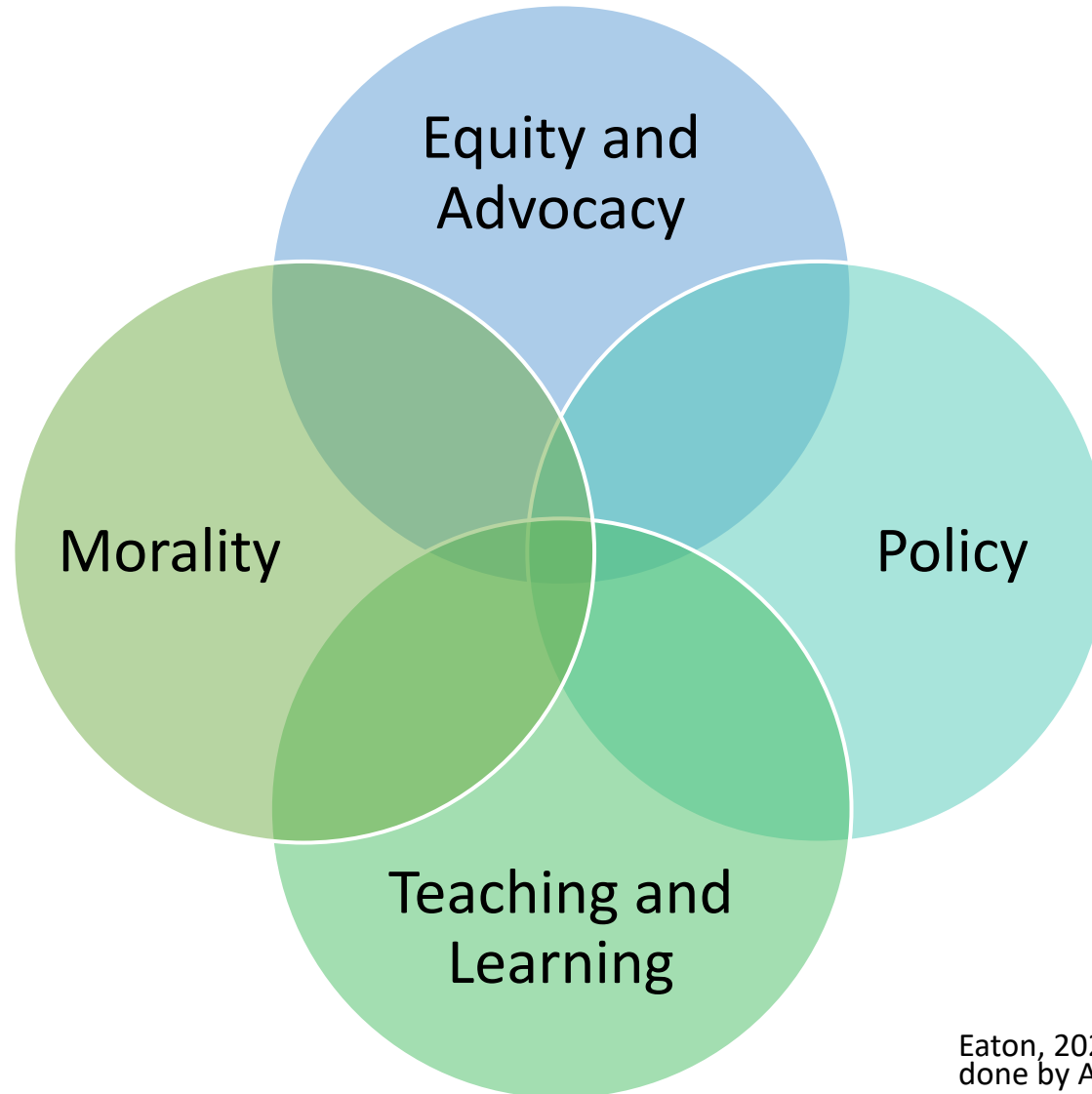
Eaton, 2022a, 2022b; Developed from work originally done by Adam, 2016 and Kaposi & Dell, 2012

What is Transdisciplinary Research?

Lawrence (2010) describes transdisciplinary scholarship as:

- Research tackles **complex problems** from **diverse and heterogeneous domains** which **cannot be solved by any singular group**.

- Scholars collaborate **across academic disciplines** and **across multiple stakeholder groups** that includes researchers, educators, professionals, policy-makers, students, industry, and others.

- **Cross-fertilization of knowledge and experiences from diverse groups, drawing from different methodologies and theories to develop action-oriented solutions.**

Examples of Global Expertise

This analysis was inspired by the work of Tracy Bretag (2019).

These are *examples*, not an exhaustive list.

Examples of research	Notes and sources
Large-scale quantitative surveys	United States has led the way (Bowers, 1964; McCabe, 2016)
Contract cheating research	Significant research funding in Australia facilitated large-scale projects among multi-institutional Australian teams (e.g., Bretag & Harper, 2017; Ellis et al., 2019).
Text-matching software	Research has been dominated by Europeans (e.g., Dlabolová & Foltýnek, 2021; Foltýnek et al., 2019; Weber-Wulff, 2016)
Research integrity and ethics	Has historically been only loosely linked to academic integrity, but lines are blurring (e.g., Hyytinen & Löfström, 2017; Israel, & Drenth, 2016)

Some Methodological Approaches

These are *examples*, not an exhaustive list.

Approach	Notes and Sources
Experimental & Quasi-experimental	Coiner, 1932; Howard, 2020; Jones, 2014; Curtis et al., 2021
Quantitative / Survey	Bowers, 1964; Bretag et al., 2019; McCabe, 2016; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009
Qualitative (primary data)	Eaton et al, 2020; Sivasubramaniam, et al., 2016
Qualitative (secondary data)	Example: Policy analysis – Bretag et al., 2011; Glendinning, 2013; Sutherland-Smith, 2011 Example: Website data – Lancaster & Cotarlan, 2021
Conceptual / Theoretical	Examples: Scholarly essays, theoretical papers, philosophy papers – Bertram Gallant & Drinan, 2008; Howard 1992, 1999

Theoretical approaches used in academic integrity research – Some examples

Theory	Notes and sources
Theory of planned behaviour	Coren, 2012; Curtis et al., 2018; Genereux & McLeod, 1995
Theory of reasoned action	Curtis et al., 2022
Organizational development/ workplace learning theory	Bertram Gallant & Drinan, 2006; Kenny & Eaton, 2022
Post-structuralism	Saltmarsh, 2005

Why we need transdisciplinary research

"The long tradition of monodisciplinary academic departmentalization in higher education institutions has crippled the development of human knowledge, way of doing, and even world view; ironically, it has hindered understanding of the interconnected and interdependent ecological human and natural world. Monodisciplinary academic departmentalization has perpetually and inherently limited the discovery of knowledge and its application to complex real-life problems that demand solutions to assure a sustainable and democratic human society." (Hyun, 2013, p. 87)

Let's look at some examples of transdisciplinary
academic integrity research...

Axiological Diversity:
Can be an Uncomfortable Strength

Artificial Intelligence & Academic Integrity

The Ethics of Teaching and Learning with Algorithmic Writing Technologies

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY   Funded by the University of Calgary Teaching and Learning Grants

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Degrees of Deceit: A Project on Fake Degrees and Fraudulent Credentials

- Started as a small scale survey and a webinar in 2020.
- Evolved into an edited volume with contributions from experts and scholars working in multiple countries:
  - Academic researchers.
  - Higher educational professionals.
  - FBI Special Agent (retired).

WEBINAR: UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE OF COUNTERFEIT CREDENTIALS AND UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS FRAUD

TRUTH
LIES

DEGREES OF DECEIT

Presented by Jamie Carmichael and Sarah Elaine Eaton, PhD

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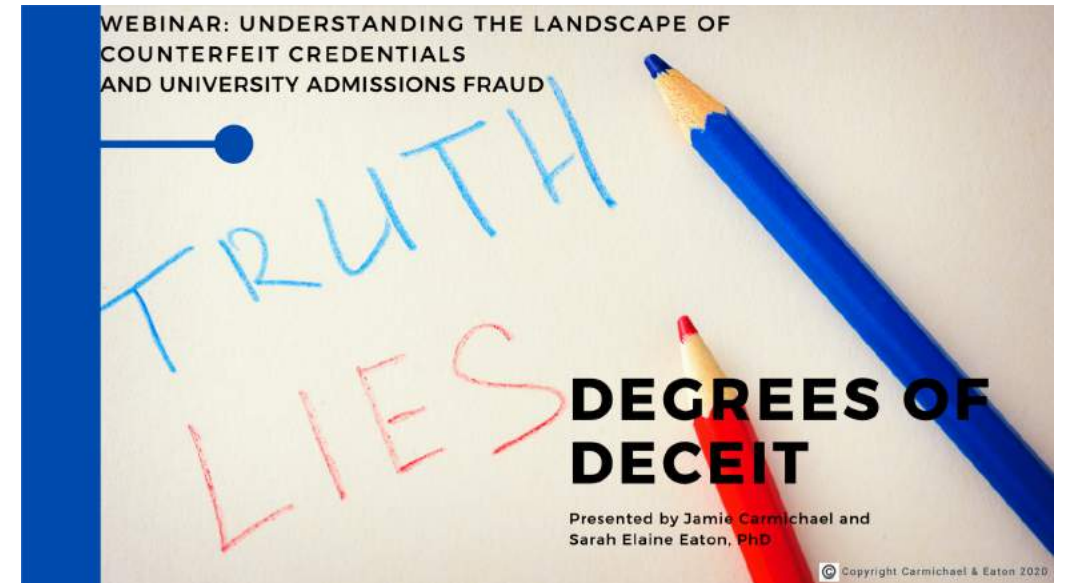
Degrees of Deceit: A Project on Fake Degrees and Fraudulent Credentials

- The opportunity to work with and learn from retired FBI Agent, Allen Ezell, has been fascinating and eye-opening.

- Learning the differences between fake and fraudulent degrees; fake universities.

- "Black lists" of fake universities have been around (and ineffective) since the 1950s. Fake university websites can be set up and removed online within minutes.

- Major outcome of this work is clear connections between industries that supply contract cheating services, fake and fraudulent degrees and other documents, admissions fraud, and scholarly paper mills.

Degrees of Deceit: A Project on Fake Degrees and Fraudulent Credentials

- We have been able to "connect the dots" in ways that has not been done before, including blackmail and extortion as part of the business model.

- As a result, we have developed a new and evidence-based framework that will help researchers, higher ed professionals, policy makers and possibly even law enforcement to understand the global commercial cheating industry in new ways.

Photo: Colourbox

The Ecosystem of Commercial Academic Fraud

Degree Mills

Fake and fraudulent diplomas, transcripts, reference letters, and other academic and professional documents.

Contract Cheating

Outsourced student academic work including term paper mills, assignment completion services, thesis writing services and student proxy services.
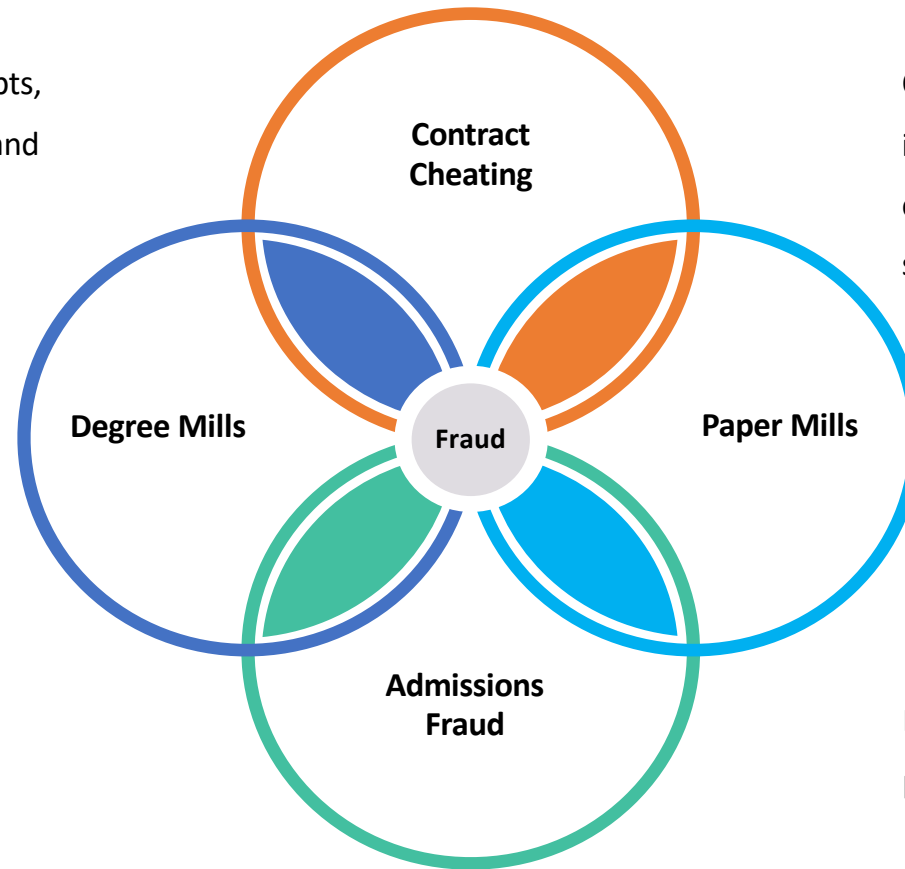
Admissions Fraud

Impersonation and fraud services for standardized admissions testing (e.g., SATs), language proficiency testing, unethical educational agents

Paper Mills

Manufactured scholarly and scientific publications, authorship for sale.

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Wicked Problems Need Transdisciplinary Research

The term "wicked problem" refers to "that class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing" (Churchman, 1967, p. B-141).

There are some exciting projects happening today that are bringing together researchers from multiple countries who are working on "wicked problems" related to academic integrity.

Multi-country academic integrity research project: PUPP

Partnership on University Plagiarism Prevention (PUPP) - https://pupp.uqo.ca/en/home/

Principal Investigator: Martine Peters, Université du Québec en Outaouais (Canada)

Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC): $2.5 Million CAD
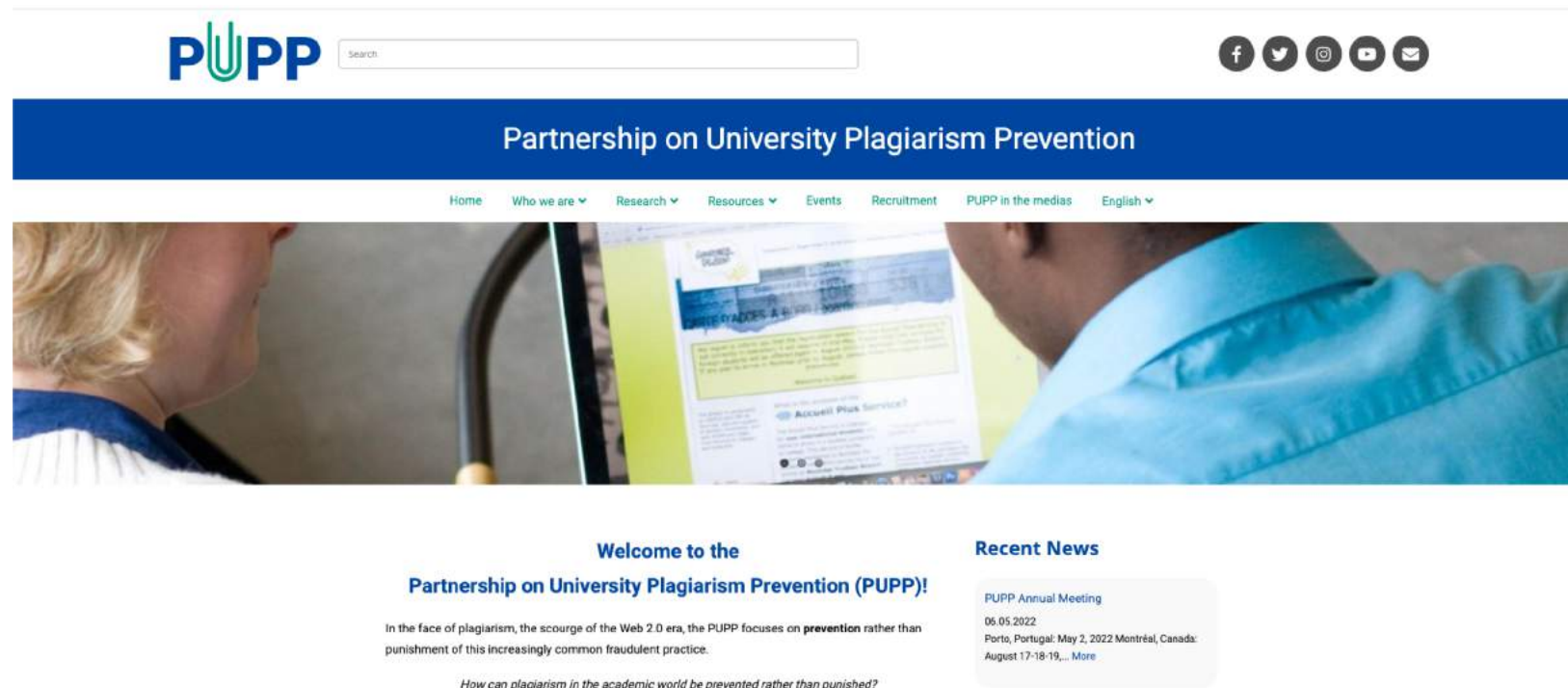
ENAI: Exemplar of Excellence for Collaborative Transdisciplinary Academic Integrity Research

The European Network of Academic Integrity (ENAI) has facilitated or supported many of the world's current multi-country projects:

- Facing Academic Integrity Threats (FAITH)

- International Contract Cheating Project (iCOP)

- Bridging Integrity in Higher Education, Business and Society (BRIDGE)

Sneak Preview: Handbook of Academic Integrity (2nd ed.)

- Currently under development

- 100+ chapters

- New sections to address topics such as Technology and Cybersecurity; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Research and Publication Ethics; and Academic Integrity as a Field of Scholarship

- Due to be published in late 2023 or early 2024

Sneak Preview: Handbook of Academic Integrity (2ⁿᵈ ed.)

Topic	Section Editor
Global Perspectives on Academic Integrity	Sarah Elaine Eaton
Academic Integrity Through Ethical Teaching and Assessment	Brenda M. Stoesz
Student Breaches of Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, Exam Cheating and More	Joseph F. Brown
Contract Cheating and the Commodification of Academic Misconduct	Guy Curtis
Academic Integrity Policy and Quality Assurance	Irene Glendinning
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Academic Integrity	Ceceilia Parnther
Ethics and Integrity in Research, Publishing, and Educational Leadership	Loreta Tauginienė
Role of Technology and Cybersecurity in Academic Integrity	Zeenath Reza Khan
Integrity as a Field of Scholarship	Sarah Elaine Eaton
Academic Integrity Leadership at National and International Levels	Wendy Sutherland-Smith

An Evolving Understanding of Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is about **more than student cheating**.

There are rapidly evolving "wicked problems" that no one researcher can solve alone, or even with a small team.

Complex problems require creative, transdisciplinary approaches.

Diverse perspectives can strengthen our academic integrity teams (researchers, professional staff, industry, government, etc.)

Key messages

There are a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches in academic integrity research.

Theoretical foundations may be expected in some fields of study, but not all.

Expertise extends beyond academia.

Threats

Failure to acknowledge complexities and nuances. Wicked problems are wicked because they are complex, messy, and ill-defined. There are no easy answers.

Imposition of one's own disciplinary norms on research from other disciplines (e.g., insisting that research must be written up in 3rd person is simply not appropriate in some methodological approaches).

Methodological or theoretical biases – Can lead to the unjustified dismissal of approaches from outside one's own field.

Failure to acknowledge expectations from other countries (e.g., ethics clearance is not possible in all countries.)

Threats

Intellectual snobbery and incivility – Could be exacerbated working across disciplines.

Academic integrity remains dominated by white scholars of European heritage. Need to create room for those from equity-deserving groups (e.g., those from the Global South).

Some questions cannot be answered by academics alone.

Conclusion

Transdisciplinary Academic Integrity Research: Calls to Action

Cultivate	Cultivate methodological and theoretical tolerance.
Include	Include those from equity-deserving groups. Include non-academics → Higher ed professionals, government, industry, etc.
Seek out	Seek out opportunities to move outside of one's comfort zone. Reject intellectual elitism.
Build	Intentionally build research teams with people dedicated to tackling the big questions.
Create	New knowledge by constantly challenging what we thought we knew.

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