

Academic Integrity through an Equity Lens: Policy Analysis of Universities in Atlantic Canada

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Atlantic Provinces Academic Integrity and Contract Cheating Policy Analysis

Contract Cheating in Canada: National Policy Analysis (Phase 4)

<https://osf.io/n9kwt/>

Who we are, where we are situated,
and how we came to this work:

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Introductions and Land Acknowledgments

Overview



Introduction to the project



Purpose and research question



Method



Findings



Implications, significance, and next steps

Contract cheating

Term “contract cheating” coined by Clarke and Lancaster (2006)

“ . . . a cluster of practices relating to the outsourcing of students’ assessment to third parties, whether or not these entities are commercial providers” and suggests "deliberate, pre-planned, and intentional" deception (Newton, 2018, p. 2)

~ 3.5% of post-secondary students have purchased assignments or papers and submitted them as their own (Curtis & Clare, 2017; Newton, 2018)

Contract cheating is a global industry estimated to be valued at \$15 Billion USD (Eaton, 2022).

Contract cheating in Canada

Postsecondary students in Canada	Overall enrollment*	Possible contract cheaters**
University & College	2,155,425	75,440

* Source: 2018/2019 Statistics Canada data

** Based on Curtis and Clare's estimate of 3.5% of students in general (Eaton, 2022).

Existing policy research



Academic integrity policy analysis has involved broad investigations of post-secondary institutional policies . . .

Bretag, Mahmud, East, Green, & James, 2011, Morris & Carroll, 2016



. . . and large-scale policy comparison studies.

Foltýnek & Glendinning, 2015; Glendinning, 2013, Glendinning, Foltýnek, Dlabolová, Linkeschová, & Lancaster, 2017



Recommended practices for policy development have emerged.

Bretag & Mahmud, 2016; Bretag, Mahmud, Wallace, Walker, James, Green, et al., 2011



Contract Cheating in Canada: National Policy (3 phases complete; This project is phase 4).

Stoesz et al., 2019; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Miron et al., 2021

Map of Canada



How is contract cheating addressed in academic integrity policy documents of publicly-funded universities in Atlantic Canada?

Research Question



Methodology



Our research methodology was based on existing document and policy analysis procedures and was informed by our Canadian work in the area.

Bretag, Mahmud, East, Green, & James, 2011; Bretag, Mahmud, Wallace, et al., 2011; Grigg, 2010; Stoesz et al., 2019; Stoesz & Eaton, 2020; Miron et al., 2021



Involved a systematic extraction, evaluation, and synthesis of information to gain further insight into the issue of contract cheating in Canadian post-secondary education.

Conceptual framing: Core elements of exemplary policy

(Bretag et al., 2011)

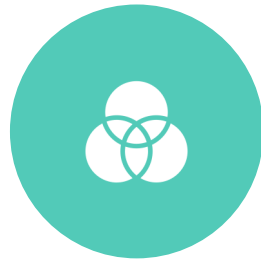


Image source: Bretag, T., et al. (2011). Core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy in Australian higher education. *IJEI*, 7(2), 3-12.

Unpacking the Method



We searched for documents from 13 universities in Atlantic Canada. Searches were conducted through Google search or each institutions web search function.



Documents were downloaded. After excluding duplicates and other ineligible documents, 28 documents written in English were retained for data extraction/coding.



Data from each document was extracted/coded independently by 2 team members. All 4 team members were involved in this process.



Data for 5 categories were extracted/coded: document type, titles, language related to contact cheating, policy principles, and the presence and clarity of contract cheating definitions.



Image source: Bretag, T., et al. (2011). Core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy in Australian higher education. *IJEI*, 7(2), 3-12.

Results: Core Elements



Results: Overview



28 documents were reviewed



9 documents were coded as
policies and 14 procedures



10 = academic regulations
1 = code of conduct

Access refers to, in part, to whether documents are easy to locate and include standard policy information such as effective dates and revision dates.



Results: Access



Of the 13 universities in Atlantic Canada, academic integrity policy was located as stand-alone webpages or pdf documents at six universities (Mt. Allison, St. Thomas, NSCAD, St. Francis Xavier, Saint Mary's, and Memorial).



Access to policy related to academic integrity at the other seven universities was found through searching the university academic calendar.



We coded based on URL rather than document due to the number of associated links within many of the documents.

Results: Access



6 of the documents provided approval dates (range: March 2007–2020/2021 school year) and three others provided effective dates (2020–2021).



9 documents reported revision dates all within the 2020-2021 school year.

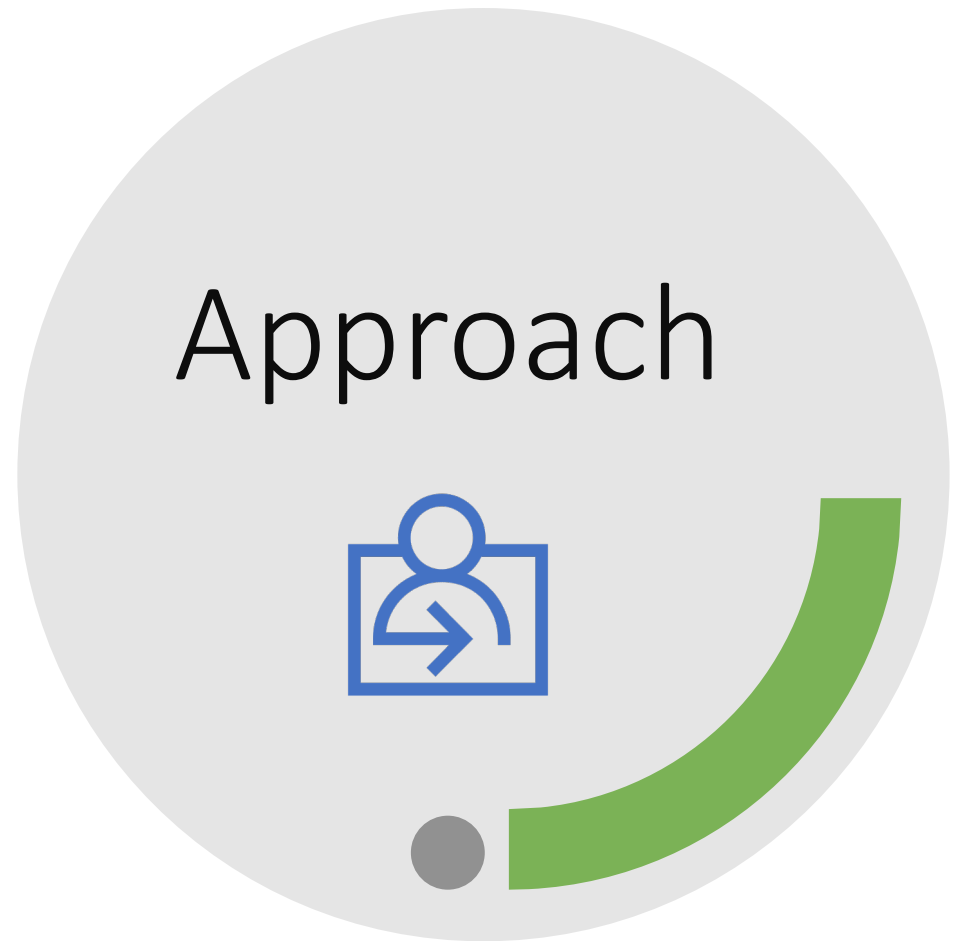


13 documents did not provide any approval or effective dates.



Only one university provided evidence of a policy review cycle but lacked specifics, "The matters dealt with in the Calendar are subject to continuing review" (St. Thomas, p. 2)

Approach provides the context for the policy which reflects the values of academic integrity and acceptable and unacceptable scholarly activities as written in the statements.



Results: Approach

Policy principle	Frequency
Punitive	17
Educative	13
Procedural fairness	10
Integrity values	9
Legalistic	8
Neutral	4
Compassion	3
Natural justice	3
Balance of probabilities	2
Burden of proof	1
Confidentiality	1
Presumption of innocence	1
Procedural	1
Morality	1

Results: Approach



14 policy principles were evident in the 28 reviewed documents



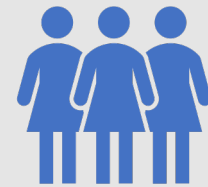
Two or more principles were identified in 19 documents, one principle could be identified in 8 documents, and the principles could not be easily identified in 1 document.



Many documents reflect a mix of approaches ranging in combinations from supportive to punitive.

Ideally, all members of an educational community are **responsible** for upholding academic integrity.

Responsibility



Results: Responsibility

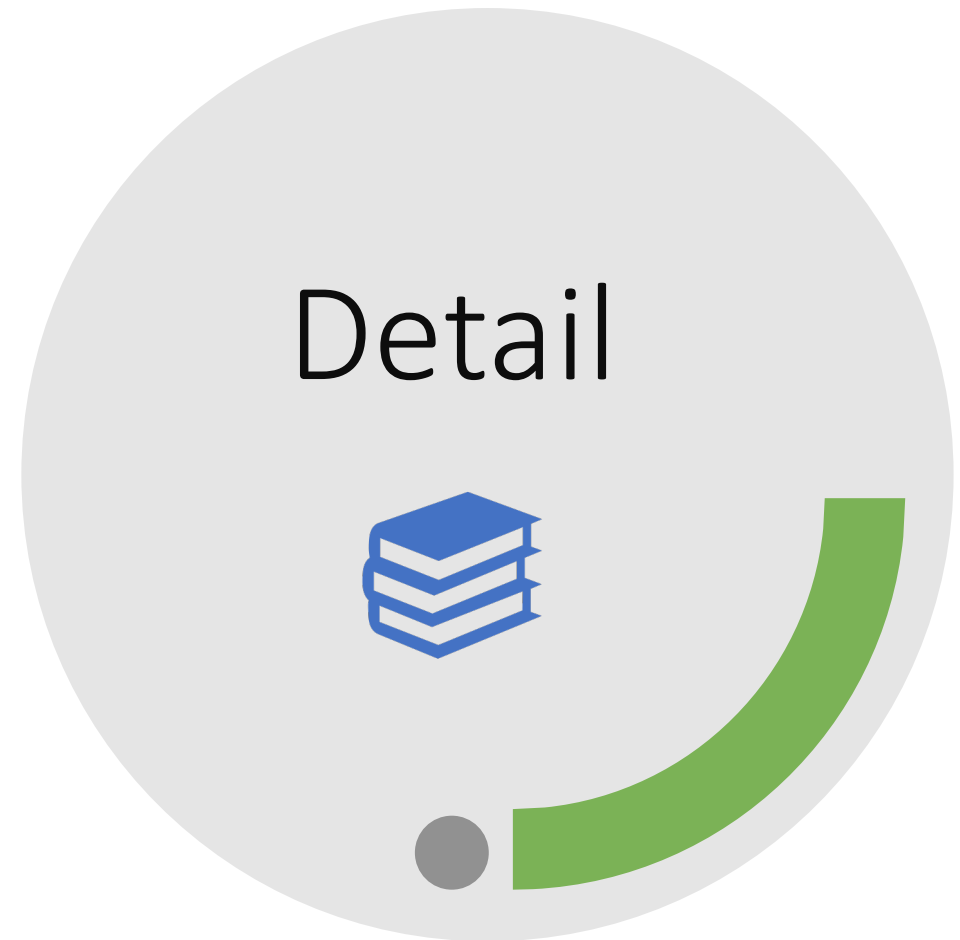
The intended audience for
28 documents was:

- Students ($n = 3$)
- Faculty ($n = 4$)
- Faculty and administrators ($n = 1$)
- All university members ($n = 20$)

Detail refers, in part, to well-developed documentation that uses clearly defined terminology and appropriate examples.

Well-developed documentation also includes details on

- the appropriate reporting mechanisms
- the set of fair consequences aligned with particular academic integrity violations
- a centralized system to record and monitor cases



Results: Detail (terminology)

- There is a broad range of terminology used across the academic integrity documents that we reviewed
- For example, the terminology used varied and included: plagiarism, misrepresentation, falsifying, collaboration/collusion, impersonation, tampering, use of unauthorized aid or assistance in tests or exams, interference, misuse or misrepresentation of course content

Results: Types of Academic Misconduct

The term *Contract Cheating* is not used in Atlantic Canadian university documents addressing Academic Integrity. It is implicit and subsumed under other headings.

- Plagiarism
- Misrepresentation
- Other

Results: Types of Academic Misconduct

Quotations from documents analyzed, showing indirect language used to talk about contract cheating:

- "purchasing documentation and presenting it as one's own work"
- "downloading all or part of the work of another from the Internet and submitting as one's own"
- "the use of a paper prepared by any person other than the individual claiming to be the author"
- "submitting work that is expected to be the student's yet, was contracted and/or obtained from another person or entity"
- "includes but is not limited to, selling, purchasing, borrowing or lending academic work for submission for academic credit"
- "obtaining, through theft, bribery, collusion, purchase, or other improper manner"

Results: Detail (documentation)

Well-developed documentation also includes details on

- the appropriate reporting mechanisms
- consequences aligned with particular academic integrity violations
- a centralized system to record and monitor cases

Support refers to the strategies and resources developed to educate students and staff about academic integrity and violations, and how to access supports.



Results: Support

No specific supports were outlined for

- faculty or students in 10 documents
- students in 13 documents
- faculty in 12 documents

Supports were suggested for

- students in 13 documents
- faculty in 15 documents
- both faculty and students in 11 documents

Supports were largely in the form of a set of procedures or what each stakeholder type could expect when a case of academic misconduct is reported and investigated

Implications

The findings from this study provide the basis . . .



for evidence-informed post-secondary policy development or revision



for discussion about better supporting student learning and faculty teaching especially with regards to equity, diversity, and inclusion.



for policy contrast and comparison in the Canadian context



for discussing how policy language, access, and approach relate to stakeholder interpretation



for considering how institutional policy aligns with national and provincial educational frameworks

Recommendations

Include key dates in policies:

- Date approved
- Date the policy takes effect
- Next revision due date

Policy governance - Develop a revision management cycle:

- Appointed unit within the institution to manage the revision process including time for review, revision (if needed), and approvals.
- State the policy cycle in the policy document itself (e.g., every 3 years).
- The revision date should indicate when the revision process should be completed, not when it should start. This can help to prevent bureaucratic backlog.

Considerations of approach

- Academic integrity as a key aspect of quality assurance.
- Recognized that academic integrity is being challenged in new ways and policy updates should reflect this.
- *Equity must be considered in student conduct policies.*

Conclusions



This project represents one phase of a national contract cheating and academic integrity policy analysis.



Atlantic universities vary widely in their approaches to academic integrity policy – leaving room for improvement and further dialogue.



Contract cheating can – and should -- be addressed more explicitly in educational policy. We cannot solve a problem that we do not name.

Significance and Call to Action

This work builds on previous academic integrity policy analyses conducted in Canada (Eaton et al., 2021) and brings an urgent new perspective on the work through an anti-racist lens.

We examined the ways in which academic integrity policies of publicly-funded universities in Atlantic Canada follow exemplary policy through an anti-racist lens.

Overall, we noted a general approach that set up systems for students to be treated equally, with sanctions being imposed based on the type of misconduct behaviour.

The lack of attention to the ways in which equitable treatment, as opposed to equal treatment, was addressed in the policies. This points to policy approaches that allow for systemic discrimination to continue to exist.

Call to Action: Universities must reconsider their student conduct policies through an anti-racism lens (Kendi, 2019), with the goal of seeking equitable solutions to student conduct matters.

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