

**Understanding Academic Integrity from a Teaching and Learning Perspective:
Engaging with the 4M Framework**

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Abstract

This article situates academic integrity within the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) discourse. The 4M framework frames integrity through a four interrelated organizational lenses: (a) micro (individual); (b) meso (departmental); (c) macro (institutional); and (d) mega (community).

Keywords: academic integrity, scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), pedagogy, 4M framework, systems theory.

Introduction

Using a framework can help us understand complex issues, such as those relating to academic integrity, can be helpful while avoiding being overly reductionist. For a long time scholars and educators haven't been calling for more pro-active and pedagogical approaches to academic integrity (Eaton et al., 2017; Howard, 2002; Morris, 2016). One scholar has even called academic integrity a "teaching and learning imperative" (Bertram Gallant, 2008). In addition, the position that academic integrity is solely a student responsibility is now considered outdated, as advocates call for multi-stakeholder approaches that engage various members of the learning community including students, educators, and administrators, in different but interconnected ways (Eaton et al., 2017; Morris, 2016). To help us understand how all these different stakeholders play a role, a systems approach to academic integrity can be helpful (Bertram Gallant, 2016; Bertram Gallant & Kalichman, 2011; Drinan & Bertram Gallant, 2008). Systems thinking is not new; it has been around for more than half a century, if not longer (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; 1981; von Bertalanffy, 1968).

The 4M Framework

Systems theory helped to inform the conceptualization of the 4M Framework, which was developed within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) community to help educators understand teaching and learning inquiry (Friberg 2016; Kalu et al., 2018; Kenny et al., 2016; Poole & Simmons, 2013; Simmons, 2016; Williams et al., 2013). The framework consists of four nested levels: micro, meso, macro, and mega.

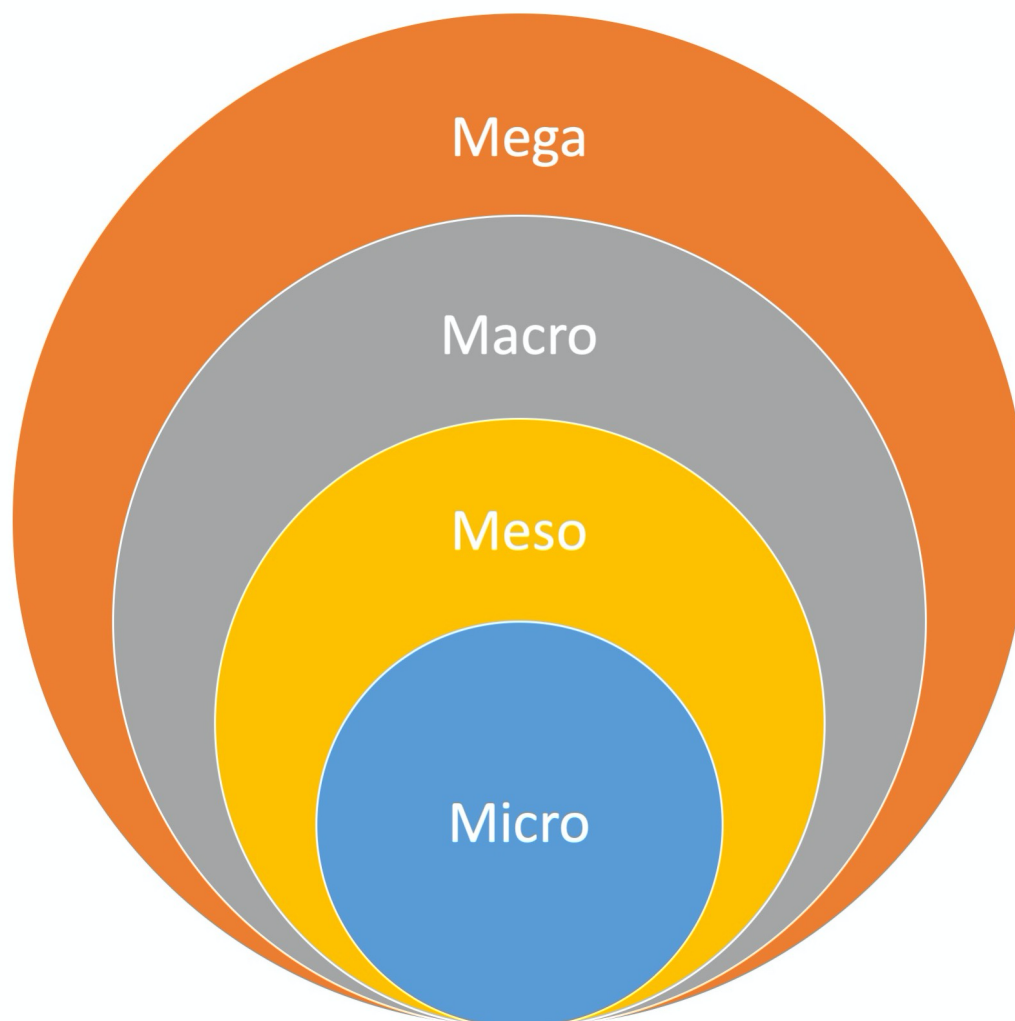


Figure 1: The 4M Framework: Micro, Meso, Macro, and Mega Levels

The Micro Level: Individual

Individual students and educators are at the heart of the 4M framework. Each person's conceptual understanding of academic integrity, as well as practical skills such as paraphrasing, citing, and referencing, develop at an individual level. But this learning does not happen in isolation. It is impacted by other individuals within the system, as well as the system itself.

Individual educators also operate at the micro level when they are preparing course content, lessons and activities. Research has shown over and over again that students are more likely to care about academic integrity when educators show that it matter to them, too (Bertram Gallant, 2018; McCabe et al., 2012; Eaton et al., 2017). It is at this level that educators can have

a direct and lasting impact on teaching students how to engage in ethical decision making and also how to build practical skills such as paraphrasing, citing and referencing.

The Meso Level: Departmental

At this level, academic departments and support units, such as the library or the student affairs office, provide resources and learning opportunities that allow academic integrity to be operationalized. At this level support for academic integrity can be hands-on and pro-active in the form of workshops, tutorials, and practical resources.

The Macro Level: Learning Organization

The learning organization (e.g., college or school) is responsible for setting the institutional direction and culture for academic integrity. This includes having clearly articulated policies and procedures that can be applied fairly and equitably across the institution. Leaders at this level can also act as champions who set the tone for the entire school (McCabe et al, 2012).

The Mega Level: Community

This level includes stakeholders who are connected with the school, but who may not be involved on a day-to-day basis. This includes government bodies, alumni, parents and others who can be engaged to as partners in promoting academic integrity and ethical conduct in a variety of ways.

Conclusions

The 4M lens helps us to understand who the various stakeholders are and how they can play a role in upholding and enacting academic integrity in our learning communities. Creating a culture of integrity cannot happen if only certain individuals are engaged (McCabe et al., 2012). Instead, creating a culture of integrity requires intentional and sustained effort across a variety of different stakeholder groups within the institution.

Discussion Questions

- Who are some of the stakeholders actively engaged in promoting academic integrity at your school?
- How are you engaging stakeholders at every level of your school to uphold and enact academic integrity?
- How are you creating a culture of integrity at your school?

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