

# A Deep Dive into Canadian College Policy: Findings from a Provincial Academic Integrity and Contract Cheating Policy Analysis

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# Overview



Introduction to the project



Purpose and research question



Method



Findings



Implications, significance and next steps

# Contract cheating

First 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 in Canada

Postsecondary students in Canada	Overall enrollment*	Possible contract cheaters**
University & College	2,034,957	71,223

\* Source: 2015/2016 Statistics Canada data:  
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/educ71a-eng.htm>

\*\* Based on Curtis and Clare's estimate of 3.5% of students in general (Eaton, 2018).

# Policy research literature review



Academic integrity policy analysis has involved broad investigation 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



Plagiarism has emerged as a topic of particular interest in academic integrity policy inquiry.

Brown & Howell, 2011; Eaton, 2017; Foltýnek & Glendinning, 2015; Grigg, 2010; Gullifer & Tyson, 2014; Hu & Sun, 2017; Price, 2002



In recent years, recommended practices for policy development have emerged.

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



How is contract cheating addressed in the academic integrity policy documents of the publicly-funded colleges in Ontario, Canada?

# Method



Our research methodology was based on existing document and policy analysis procedures.

Bretag, Mahmud, East, Green, & James (2011); Bretag, Mahmud, Wallace, et al. (2011); Grigg (2010)



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

# Method

## Selection

Academic integrity documents from the websites of 24 publicly-funded colleges in Ontario, Canada

## Retrieval

Cycle 1: 2 team members searched for and downloaded the primary documents

## Search

Institutions' web search function  
Or  
Google

## Requests

Documents that were unavailable publicly were requested from the institution  
( $n = 1$ )

## Retrieval 2

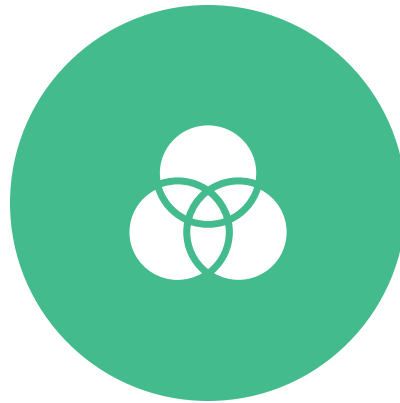
Cycle 2: Other documents that were mentioned in the primary documents  
( $n = 1$ )



# Method



The documents from 22 colleges were written in English and 2 were written in French.



Data extraction and analysis were delimited to 28 documents written in English.



All team members extracted information from the documents of 11 colleges independently.  
Each document was coded twice.

# Results: Titles



Titles communicate the overall intention.



A large range of titles were identified.



Frequency of titles using a single concept or multiple concepts.

e.g., “ Academic Honesty”  
vs. “Academic Honesty  
and Plagiarism”

(Grigg, 2010)



Some variation existed between policy titles within a category.

**Table 1. Frequency of Single-Concept and Multiple-Concept Titles of Academic Integrity Documentation in Publicly-funded Colleges in Ontario, Canada**

Single-Concept Titles	Frequency	Intended Audience		
		Students	Staff	Students & Staff
Academic Integrity	13	4		9
Academic Offenses	5	1	1	1
Code of Student Conduct	3	3		1
Academic Honesty	2	1		1
Academic Regulations	1	1		
Multiple-Concept Titles				
Academic Dishonesty and Discipline	1			2
Academic Honesty and Plagiarism	1	1		
Admission Requirement and Academic Regulation	1			1
Student Rights and Responsibilities and Discipline	1	1		
<b>Total Number of Documents</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>

“Academic Integrity” is the most common single-concept title.

None of the titles contained the term “contract cheating” or another related term.

# Results: Policy language

Policy language communicates intention, frames the narrative, and supports the reader's interpretations.

The specific definitions and language used to describe contact cheating were generally indirect within the majority of the academic integrity documents reviewed.

- The general messages were that students:
  - are required to submit work that is their own work or it is assumed to be their own
  - should not submit work completed by another.
- 8 colleges stated that plagiarism or cheating included buying, selling, or stealing or soliciting material for the purpose of academic gain.

*Table 2. Definitions and Language used to Describe Contract Cheating in the Academic Integrity Documents of 22 Publicly-funded Colleges in Ontario, Canada*

Summary of Language Used	Frequency
Students required to declare that the work submitted is their own.	1
Students should not submit work completed by another.	5
Submitted work is assumed to be the work of the student who submitted it.	3
Students should not submit work (or conduct research) completed by another, including work purchased or sold.	2
Misrepresenting one's own work.	3
Buying, selling, or stealing or soliciting material for the purpose of academic gain.	6
A violation of academic integrity (or cheating, plagiarism, impersonation) occurs when a students submits work completed by another.	3
Contract cheating is a form of academic dishonesty in which a student's academic work is completed by a third party on their behalf and submitted for academic credit. It may involve a fee paid to a third party.	1
Unclear, none	1

- One college defined *contract cheating explicitly* as . . .

“A form of academic dishonesty in which a student’s academic work is completed by a third party on their behalf and submitted for academic credit. It may involve a fee paid to a third party”

(Seneca College, p. 2).

- No other documents used the term “contract cheating”.

# Findings: Policy Principles

- 8 policy principles were identified
- 2 or more principles were identified in the documents from 11 colleges
- 1 principle could be identified in the documents from 8 colleges
- Principles could not be easily identified in the documents of 3 institutions
- The 3 most common principles were “academic integrity values”, “procedural fairness”, and “educative or education”

**Table 3.** *Policy Principles Identified in the Academic Integrity Documents of 22 Publicly-funded Colleges in Ontario, Canada.*

Policy Principle	Frequency
Academic Integrity Values	10
Procedural Fairness	9
Education	7
Natural Justice	2
Restorative Justice	2
Administrative Law	2
Burden of Proof	1
Presumption of Innocence	1

# Results: Core elements

(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.



# Results

## Access

Using search features, location of documents was easy. Using menus and hyperlinks greatly reduced access.

## Approach

10 documents suggested a strong commitment to the values of academic integrity. 8 focused on offenses and discipline.

## Responsibility

Documents primarily targeted students and not entire educational community.

## Detail

Documents ranged in detail, from sparse to substantial detail. Generally a lack of consistency in the amount of detail provided.

## Support

No supports were outlined in 18 of the 28 documents.

# 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



for policy contrast and comparison in the Canadian context



for discussing how policy language and approach relate to stakeholder interpretation



to consider how institutional policy aligns with national and provincial educational frameworks

# Conclusions



One of only a few national-scale research projects in Canada on academic integrity.



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



Need to advocate for contract cheating to be addressed more explicitly in educational policy.

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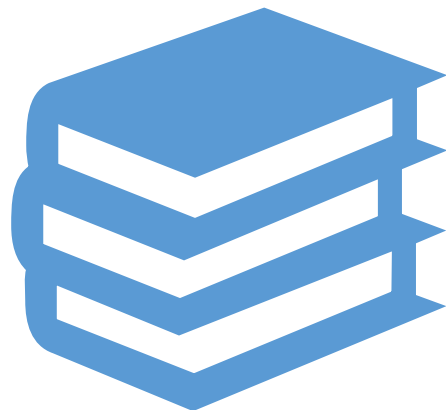
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