

**Institutionalisation of academic integrity:
Experiences at a distance education university in South Africa during COVID-19**

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Abstract

Academic integrity is an ongoing concern in higher education. Research dating back to the 1960s shows students self-reporting cheating, and with the advent of more online education, concerns about the integrity of degrees have become even more widespread. Due to this concern about academic integrity, especially in view of the changes brought about by COVID-19, I launched a research project that aimed to holistically understand how academics understand and teach academic integrity and institutional policies around academic integrity, and how these policies are employed through analysing five years' worth of student disciplinary records at a distance education university. I interviewed twenty-eight academics and academic managers and analysed sixty-six documents, as well as 3 383 student disciplinary records. Flowing from that larger project, I argue in this paper that there has not yet been institutionalisation of academic integrity at this university. I end by offering suggestions for how institutionalisation could occur.

Keywords: academic integrity, cheating, institutionalisation, policy

Introduction

Academic integrity is 'a commitment to the key values of honesty, trust, fairness, equity, respect and responsibility, and the translation of these values into action' (Bretag, 2016: 28). While research into academic integrity dates to the 1950s and 1960s (Marques, et al., 2019), COVID-19 and an increase in online education brought serious discussions and almost a moral panic (Goode, 2017) about academic integrity, with handwringing about technology making cheating easier for students and ideas that students are 'getting away' with large-scale cheating in the higher education system. Despite this moral panic, occurrences of cheating have shown to be relatively stable, and not insignificant over time (Curtis & Tremayne, 2021; McCabe, et al., 2001).

Comparing cheating over time is complicated because different definitions are used but McCabe, et al., (2001: 223-224) reported on USA based research that in the reported samples 75% of students admitted to cheating in 1963, and in 1993 82% admitted to cheating. A study in Saudi-Arabia at a medical school reported cheating by 59% of students in the 2014-2015



academic year (Abdulghani, et al., 2019). And 94% of medical students in Zagreb University reported cheating in a 2004 study, as well as 61% of a sample of Taiwanese students in a 2007 study (Iqbal, et al., 2021). In a comparative study of South African and American students, twelve and fourteen percent of students, respectively, admitted to breaching academic integrity standards (Mwamwenda, 2006). Staff at UK and Australian universities estimated that contract cheating in their universities are around ten percent of students (Awdry & Newton, 2019), while other research places it between 2% (based on self-reports) and 16% based on other analysis methods (Curtis, et al., 2022). And in a Turkish study that compared students' self-reported cheating in face-to-face and emergency remote teaching during COVID-19, students admitted to slightly more cheating in COVID-19 however, the biggest correlation for online cheating was cheating in face-to-face education (Yazici, et al., 2022). While much more attention has been paid to cheating recently, it is not a new phenomenon that has inexplicably increased with COVID-19.

The concerns around academic integrity attracted educational technology companies, all offering technological solutionism (Swauger, 2020a; Teräs, et al., 2020) to combat the so-called scourge of cheating. Technological solutionism is “believing that technology will solve pedagogical problems [that] is endemic to narratives produced by the ed-tech community” (Swauger, 2020b). With the COVID-19 pandemic, more universities moved towards emergency remote teaching, and, in this context, more technological solutionism was adopted by universities (Barriga, et al., 2020; Eaton, 2020). Academic integrity must be a shared responsibility between institutions, staff, and students (Mitchell, 2009) in order for it to be successful. It is in this context of a switch to online exams and discussions around student cheating and technological solutions being offered, that my interest in this research was sparked. In this article, I argue that the institutionalisation of academic integrity is not yet a completed project because the institution and the academics in the institution have contradictory positions that ultimately frustrates institutionalisation of academic integrity.

Academic integrity

Wider access to university education and commercialisation of higher education led to increased concern regarding academic honesty (Bretag, 2016). Distance and online education universities are sites for widening participation in education, but they often have a negative reputation (Xiao, 2018). One reason for this is the fear that they might be perceived as vectors for cheating because of their reliance on technology (Minnaar, 2012). However, cheating behaviour is less common in distance education than in face-to-face universities (Harris, et al., 2020; Kidwell & Kent, 2008).

While academic integrity is often framed as a student issue, ‘institutional and societal factors are increasingly recognised as having significant potential to affect academic cultures with respect to integrity’ (Fishman, 2016:12). Academic integrity is often an assumed universal value, but the fact that students outside the main centres of academia (UK, USA, Canada, Europe, and Australia) are often identified as being transgressors of academic integrity values (Openo, 2019;

Velliari & Breen, 2016) raises questions of its universality. And as Blum's (2009) work show even within the USA students had different understandings of plagiarism than faculty.

An important direction in research into academic integrity is the idea of the sharing economy and that students are likely to share notes and assignments with one another as part of the sharing economy (Bretag, et al., 2020). Blum (2009) uses the concept of performance self and authentic self of students, where performance self is less interested in originality and sees the boundaries between their own and others' contributions as permeable. This is re-enforced by joint authoring and crowdsourced contribution sites such as Wikipedia (Blum, 2009: 66-77) where collaboration is an important social value. Furthermore, students and academics have a different understanding of what constitutes cheating – students see certain behaviour as not cheating, while academics may judge it differently (Burrus, et al., 2007). Yet, collaboration is often devalued with unclear and excessively narrow definitions of collusion as an anathema to academic integrity, forbidding students actions that academics take for granted in the course of their own work (e.g., discussions with colleagues, proofreading and editing) (Crook & Nixon, 2019). In line with a reconsideration of the universality of academic integrity, the existence of this sharing economy may mean that we need to interrogate the universality of academic integrity.

Academic integrity: Institutional level

For institutions, the danger of academic dishonesty is something that threatens the very existence of the university and the perceived integrity of their degrees (Mwamwenda, 2012). Institutions must develop a culture of academic integrity because it is the basis of the higher educational enterprise (Thomas and Scott 2016), and a rise in the reporting of cheating in the popular media threatens this enterprise (Bajinath and Singh, 2019). There are concerns that academic dishonesty by students in university will / does lead to dishonest behaviour in the workplace (Guerrero-Dib, et al., 2020).

Academic integrity is best conceived as an institutional effort rather than an individual lecturer responsibility – these efforts include policy developments, training and establishing a culture of integrity on campus (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2001). Despite the centrality of the institution in institutionalising academic integrity, there is a lack of research around the how of institutionalisation (Bertram Gallant, 2017). One exception is the benchmarking of institutionalisation by Glendinning (2017). This benchmark evaluates ten components: institutional strategic commitment to academic integrity, clear and consistently applied policies related to academic integrity, fair sanctions when academic integrity are transgressed, community buy-in for strategies, an institutional culture of deep learning, student leadership towards academic integrity, transparency and communication around issues of academic integrity, continuously monitoring the effectiveness of academic integrity programmes and policies, engagement with new research related to academic integrity, and institution-wide understanding of what academic integrity entails (Glendinning, 2017).

Framing academic integrity as a social contract between students and academics may be one way of successfully combatting transgressions of academic integrity (Gregory, 2020). This

social contract approach to academic integrity might explain why institutions with academic honour codes are successful in maintaining academic integrity. Academic honour codes are a whole institutional approach where academic integrity is emphasised from a student's first attendance of the institution, to training of what it is, honesty pledges and having student-run disciplinary meetings (McCabe & Treviño, 2002; Tatum & Schwartz, 2017). Honour codes go deeper than asking students to sign an honesty or plagiarism declaration and actively involves mentoring students into what is considered acceptable behaviour, as well as involving them. Honour codes seem to lead to an institutional culture that values academic integrity (McCabe, 2005).

Rather than academic integrity being something that is narrowly focused on getting students to act in a certain way, it should be understood as a holistic enterprise for the ENTIRE institution as 'institutional integrity shapes individual integrity' (Gallant, 2016: 980). Individual integrity is necessary but not sufficient; there needs to be a ' "moral coherence" that encompasses an institution's structures, policies, and practices' (Gallant, 2016). Institutions have a responsibility to create an ethical environment through 'tone at the top' (Bristor & Burke, 2016: 4). Even if there are clear policies and training available to students and staff, institutions may not be perceived as ethical. For students to take the value of academic integrity seriously, they must feel that the institution itself is an institution of integrity, and that it does not have a culture where a lack of integrity is accepted (Gallant, 2016: 986). Furthermore, academic managers and top university structures must also create an environment where academics feel that they are supported when they implement policy (Bristor & Burke, 2016).

Institutionalisation of academic integrity can be thought of as a four-step process – recognising the urgency of institutionalisation of academic integrity; an institution-wide discussion on how to respond (response generation), which must be a thorough process and not merely a re-inscription of existing policies and practices; and implementation that goes beyond just stopping misconduct but a holistic approach that encourages academic integrity as a value. Lastly, academic integrity is considered an institutional value if it is integrated into the routine of the institution, including at policy and praxis level (Gallant & Drinan, 1969). In order for academic integrity policies to be implemented successfully, the process of policy development must be inclusive, not just of academics but also of students (Bristor & Burke, 2016), and academics themselves play a pivotal role (Gallant & Drinan, 1969).

Academic integrity: Academics

Academics are poorly educated about what academic integrity is (Ransome & Newton, 2018), despite being at the coalface of dealing with academic integrity. Academic staff should be the first to communicate what academic integrity is, and what possible sanctions exist if students transgress policies (Bristor & Burke, 2016). However, academic staff may have disagreements over who is responsible for teaching academic integrity, how (and if) it should be taught and who should handle cases of misconduct (Löfström, et al., 2015). Disciplinary and personal values, as well as policy and praxis between academic staff members might explain why there are such

diverse responses to academic misconduct. Consistency in policy and procedures, including having staff reflect on their own research practices, is one of the key elements of academic integrity (Bretag, et al., 2011).

When academics discover that students have committed breaches of academic integrity, they experience a breakdown in the pedagogical relationship and they experience a conflict between their responsibility of care towards students and their responsibility as quality assurance agents for degrees (Vehviläinen, et al., 2018). Academic integrity can be seen in two ways by academics – as a rule-based approach where the rules rather than discretion is emphasised and a principle-based approach where opportunity for self-correction and discretion is emphasised (Amigud & Pell, 2021). Academics do not consistently follow institutional policies regarding what to do in cases of breach of academic integrity, in many cases prioritising a relationship with a student over punishing a student for such breaches (De Maio, et al., 2020), but whether someone would view this disconnect in a positive or a negative light seems to be mostly down to whether policy or relationships are prioritised.

One way to decrease the likeliness of students to commit transgressions is by changing teaching and assessment practices to be more personalised and to require proof that plagiarism was not perpetrated; however, this has implications on academics' workload (Openo, 2019). However, academics are often not prepared for the ways in which assessments need to change in order for it to be successfully used online, especially with the advent of remote emergency teaching and online assessments (Eaton, 2020). One suggestion is closer relationships between students and academics in order for academics to notice when there are changes to a student's work, or a disjuncture between student talk and student submissions; this type of relational approach would imply more human resources in the academic sector (Singh & Remenyi, 2016). When students view their lecturers positively, they are less likely to engage in academic dishonesty practices (Stearns, 2001), which again highlights the importance of a relational approach to teaching. Other practices by academics that can lead to less academic dishonesty are through developing specific materials related to academic integrity and having open discussions on contract and other forms of cheating (Bretag, et al., 2019). Academics often take the lead in teaching students what academic integrity is, using a variety of methods, including a games-based approach (Vella, 2018) while institutional approaches such as a compulsory module on academic integrity for students and staff were also used (Sefcik, et al., 2020).

In South Africa, the massification of higher education is seen by some academics as being negatively associated with academic integrity – because of the impossible demands it places on academics (Mahabeer & Pirtheepal, 2019). This massification of student access has not necessarily been accompanied by an increase in academics, leaving academics overworked and emotionally drained when dealing with larger classes. Massification in African universities is often associated with larger enrolments without concomitant increases in funding and staff, a larger administrative burden, possibly compromised quality in teaching and a strain on physical infrastructure and library resources (Mohamedbhai, 2008). Massification can affect teaching and learning by, for example, creating fewer assessment opportunities, less individual attention, and less robust

feedback on assessments (Msiza, et al., 2020). This is not a uniquely African problem, with massification and class size being cited for increases in cheating in Australia as another example (Bretag, et al., 2019).

Methods

My interest in the topic was sparked by the emerging conversations about academic integrity amongst staff at a distance education university in South Africa. The article that this study is based on was a qualitative research project that aimed at understanding academic integrity issues in a holistic manner based on interviews with academics about how they understand and teach academic integrity to their students, a document analysis of policies in the university, as well as an analysis of five years' worth of institutional disciplinary hearings. In total, I conducted twenty-eight interviews with academics and academic managers from all faculties that teach undergraduate students (seven faculties), reviewed sixty-six documents (these included forty-five documents related to specific modules such as learning guides and tutorial letters, fourteen university policies and process documents which included policies that relate to academic integrity and disciplinary codes, teaching, learning and assessment policies, and two documents from the Council for Higher Education related to institutional audits and quality assurance) and the 3383 disciplinary records for cases from between January 2016 and December 2020.

Three separate ethics approvals were obtained – firstly, the ethics was approved at college level. Secondly, it was approved at institutional level as I requested student data (in the form a de-identified student disciplinary records) as well as university policies and access to staff in order to conduct interviews.. However, in engaging with the office responsible for the student disciplinary process, it became clear that there is no de-identified data available. I returned to the institutional committee to amend the original ethics application for permission to capture, and then deidentify the data for analysis (third approval). This amendment was also approved.

Participants were recruited in three ways. Firstly, I contacted academic managers for each undergraduate faculty to ask for referrals to possible participants; secondly, I asked within my own networks for participants or referrals to possible participants; and finally, through an institution wide email inviting academics to participate. In recruitment I was aware to trying to have at least some representation for each faculty, as well as in terms of race, gender and seniority, and that different sized modules were also represented. This was done in order to have as large a possible range of experiences and viewpoints. Table 1 provides an overview of the various participants.

The interviews lasted between 40 minutes to an hour and a half and were conducted online using Microsoft Teams. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then sent to interviewees for checking. I then imported transcriptions into Atlas.Ti and did thematic analysis. Other documents were also imported and analysed in Atlas.Ti. Disciplinary cases were captured in Microsoft Access, and both analysed quantitatively (e.g. how many students were found guilty, how many students appealed, what level were students at, what modules did the students take,

etc.) and qualitatively – what evidence was presented for the case and what can we learn from that.

Table 1: Table with participants

Field	Level
Academic Managers	
Accounting*	Senior Lecturer
Humanities & Social Science	Associate Professor
Science & Engineering	Professor
Environmental Sciences	Associate Professor
Business & economics*	Associate Professor
Special Projects*	Senior Lecturer
<i>*Also involved at institutional management level with policies and organisation for online exams</i>	
Academics	
Environmental Sciences	2 x Lecturers 1 x Professor
Accounting	4 x senior lecturer
Education	3 x senior lecturer
Business & economics	1 x professor 1 x lecturer 2 x senior lecturer
Humanities & Social Sciences	2 x senior lecturer 2 x associate professor 1 x lecturer
Law	1 x senior lecturer 1 x associate professor
Science & Engineering	1 x lecturer
Total	28

Data analysis was conducted in the spirit of ethnography, even though the research was not set up as a conventional ethnographic study. In my research, and especially my analysis I took the view that

[t]he anthropologist, despite months of literature reviews ... will have to eject hypotheses like so much ballast ... The ethnographer must, like a surrealist, be *disponible* (cf. Breton 1937), and open to *objets trouvés*, after arriving in the field. (Okely, 1994: 19)

I was informed by the features of ethnography, namely exploring naturally occurring relationships or phenomena rather than hypotheses testing, open analytical categories, a small number of cases in detail, and data analysis that focuses on interpretations of meaning and action (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). My data analysis then departed from this openness. Although I had read, and sometimes do use data categories found in the literature, I also started from the

data, categorising it, then trying to find connections between categories, and making sense of the connections and disjunctures, within the data. In the coding classification system of Saldana (2013), I used descriptive and open coding to identify basic topics, with a preference for vivo coding to stay close to participant words and phrases.

After data was initially coded, codes were categorised into more overarching themes. Through a memo writing process these themes were then explored. Codes were also visually connected as themes. These themes have been (and are being) developed into journal articles. This paper is based on two primary themes – academic integrity as game play (based on Sherry Ortner's (1996) serious games), and institutional disciplinary process.

Rather than reliability and validity, I tried to ensure trustworthiness of my research – a trend in qualitative research dating back to the 1980s (Krefting, 1991; Adler, 2022). One approach to trustworthiness of qualitative research is through truth value (how well does the findings reflect the truth of the findings), applicability in other contexts, whether the findings would be consistent in other contexts, and whether the research is neutral in the procedures and results (Krefting, 1991: 215-217). A different way that trustworthiness can be ensured in qualitative research is by using a number of methodological techniques such as triangulation, self-reflexivity, member checking, prolonged engagement, an audit trail of decisions, peer debriefing and thick description (Hadi & José Closs, 2016: 643–644). Using the first set of criteria by Krefting, I believe the findings reflect truth value in that it is consistent with other research and speaking to other academics my findings often reflect their experiences, as well as reflecting published academic research in other contexts. In terms of the second set of criteria while I did not make use of all the methodological techniques I asked members to check transcripts for accuracy (but not analysis), used peer debriefing extensively (through discussions with two expert researchers, and more recently in presenting preliminary findings) and reflexivity.

Description of institution

The university serves working students wanting to upgrade their qualification for work purposes, lifelong learners studying just for interest sake, incarcerated students and increasingly newly matriculated post-secondary school leavers. It has also been an important site of accessing higher education – with many students not meeting traditional acceptance criteria and making use of entry and bridging qualifications.

The institution has been progressively moving towards more online education, away from a more traditional distance education mode, since the early 2000s. Progress was being made with this vision, especially in terms of the submission of assignments (although not necessarily online assignments), some progress in some modules starting to make use of continuous assessment (which is delivered online) and at least a minimal presence for most modules on the learning management system. Often, this would be the paper behind the glass model of uploaded PDF documents, and perhaps a discussion forum where students could ask questions. Most modules (courses), however, still maintained venue-based exams. Previous research was conducted on summative assessment cheating by students at the institution and it was found

that most student cheating took place in physical venues by means of notes (whether on paper, rulers, or the body) (Mokula & Lovemore, 2014). This was confirmed by my own analysis of the student disciplinary records for the period 2016-2019 (however, this changed in 2020 as explained elsewhere (Marais, 2022)).

Findings

COVID-19 and the institution

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered what happened with the institution in terms of exams. South Africa instituted a state of emergency to deal with the emergent COVID-19 pandemic and placed the country under 'hard lockdown' from 26 March to 30 April (Government of South Africa, 2022b). A risk-adjusted level system was later implemented in an attempt to stop the spread of COVID-19. The first lockdown saw the closing of schools and educational facilities (with schools that were able to, going online), closing of all nonessential shops and services, and a stay-at-home order (Government of South Africa, n.d.). After 1 May, a risk-adjusted strategy was implemented with five alert levels – the lower the level the more services, shops and education were opened, still with some restrictions. These levels were adjusted depending on where in a COVID-19 wave the country was; the more severe the wave, the more severe the restrictions (Government of South Africa, n.d.), although never quite as strict as level 5 again. The lowest levels did allow for a return to almost normality, although some restrictions remained, including on the number of people allowed in venues, which were only allowed to operate at 50% capacity or a maximum of 1 000 people (Government of South Africa, 2022b).

The initial hard lockdown was a period of great uncertainty. There was no indication of how long it would last and what would happen thereafter. One of the hallmarks of distance education is central planning well in advance. Two examples of this relate to exams specifically, the time needed to print and distribute exam question papers, and venues that need to be booked, furnished and supplied with invigilators. In the institution where I conducted research, this meant practically that exam question papers were set in January for mid-year exams, with exam timetables already provisionally available in January when students registered (and venue bookings made long in advance). It was clear that the institution could not carry on with face-to-face exams because there was no certainty that students would be allowed to travel to venues, whether venues would be open, and at what capacity (all actions that were prohibited during the initial hard lockdown). An added complication was that venue-based exams were administered not only in South Africa but also worldwide, so the institution would also have to deal with other countries' restrictions and not just South Africa's restrictions.

Considering this, it was decided that mid-year exams for the 2020 would take place online. Later decisions were to extend that to the year-end exam of 2020, and then, that all future exams would take place online. Academic staff were encouraged to change their assessment practices from time-limited exams to portfolio and similar assessments, as well as continuous assessments. While some academics did take this route, many modules still made use of time-limited exams that were administered online instead of in a venue. While not the focus of my research the

permanent switch to online exams is not uncontroversial or uncontested but is seen in line with the increasingly online nature of the university.

After the initial exam sitting in May and with all indications being that the change would be permanent, discussions started around academic integrity – with some academics believing that widespread cheating took place in the first exam period (Interviewees 10 & 26). This has led to the issue of cheating becoming a much more central discussion within the institution. Where institutional discussions previously were mostly centred on plagiarism, especially at postgraduate level, and how to deal with that, the new discussions became more encompassing of a broad range of cheating activities and how to deal with it (Interviewee 28).

Institutional response to academic integrity

As mentioned, despite being a long-standing distance education institution, the university largely used venue-based exams. In many ways, neither the institution, the academics nor the students were prepared for this shift to online exams. ICT systems went down at times due to the sheer volume of students trying to access the services at once and academics were insufficiently prepared for how an online exam would differ from a venue-based exam. Students often did not have the technology or technological knowledge to complete the exams.

From the second instance of online exams, there was a shift from survival to institutionalisation of online exams and talk around academic integrity started in earnest. While there had previously been initiatives regarding academic integrity at the institution, it was almost exclusively focused on postgraduate students and plagiarism and controlling plagiarism through similarity detection software (like Turnitin). The first institutional awareness-raising campaigns about academic integrity at a larger scale only started to take place from mid-2021 on social media platforms (Interviewee 10) – and they were always negatively framed with phrases such as ‘don’ t do x, don’ t do y because you will be punished’ . The threat of punishment was vague, and while students were referred to the student code of conduct, they would receive no clarity there either, as transgressions were not spelled out but rather kept very broadly.

Institutional policies were still very much focused on sit-down venue-based exams – even though there has been an increasing number of online assessments taking place before COVID-19. The student disciplinary policy was last updated in 2017. The bulk of the student disciplinary code is focused on student behaviour in terms of physical presence on campus and examination processes. This was not unique, as a 2006 study of South African institutions indicated that most institutions at that stage were concerned with behaviour on physical campuses such as sexual harassment, rape, and vandalism (Walter Lumadi, 2008).

Through studying the disciplinary records, it was also quite clear that even before the COVID-19 crisis, the institution was struggling to handle the scope of dishonesty in online assessments, whether it was the use of ghost writers or sharing information during exams on Telegram or WhatsApp groups. In a grouping of cases, students were first found guilty of academic misconduct for sharing answers on WhatsApp during an exam after a lecturer had made a case against the students. Later the students had their sanctions overturned because the

lecturer had not gathered evidence in a legally acceptable manner. The theme of cheating through Telegram and WhatsApp groups is one that became especially pertinent in the online exams, but as the disciplinary code was never updated, it remains one that most academics are not competent in dealing with as it requires understandings of legal systems of evidence gathering. Following this case, there was also no institutional effort made to train academics in how to deal with such cases and what acceptable evidence gathering would be. In view of a devolving of responsibility towards academics for building cases against students to serve on the institutional committee, the institution should give clear guidelines as to how academics should gather the evidence in appropriate manners, especially for those who do not come from a legal background. One participant did dispute that the institutional committee was dealing with evidence in an appropriate manner, indicating that only direct evidence was accepted rather than evaluating evidence:

... to say this is substantive evidence, this is indirect evidence ... and this is corroborative evidence. (Interviewee 6)

Combine this uncertainty with the administrative burden that disciplinary cases bring, as well as feeling unsupported by the institution when academics do bring cases (Interviewee 13 and Interviewee 15), some academics doubted whether their colleagues were acting against students' cheating.

The charges that can be brought against students are vague in the disciplinary code (for example, certain behaviours are not described, such as sharing answers on social media groups or making use of ghost writers). Cases were sometimes made against students on the basis of bringing the institution into disrepute, and ghost-writing cases (where a third party is paid to complete an assessment) were often prosecuted as plagiarism because there is not a specified charge for this in the disciplinary code. While there might be an argument to be made that cheating is cheating and we all know what it is, and therefore specificity is not needed, having specificity would lead to both staff and students being specifically aware of what is transgressions, what to look out for and make students aware about, specifically clear away areas where students and academics may have different ideas of acceptable behaviour and in what context (for example when is working together acceptable or not). This also need to be dynamic because students evolve more quickly than what academics can make rules about. Furthermore, while guidelines for punishments did exist institutionally, these were not available to students, either in printed material or on the web.

Larger tensions in the university also play out in the disciplinary process – two examples are illustrative. For most of the records that I analysed for the disciplinary committee, it was quite consistent with the sanctions given to students, and in most cases, these were quite harsh (for example, five-year suspension from studying at the university and deregistration of modules). In what could be described as politically sensitive cases (related to, for example, student protests), it was often negotiated to withdraw charges to stop further tensions. However, in 2019, the

disciplinary committee suddenly changed tack – students still received the same sanctions as previously, but the sanctions were all suspended by the committee ‘*in an attempt to be transformative and not punitive*’ .

In 2020, the university switched to online exams, and with the October exams, there was a sudden explosion of disciplinary cases. From the between 50 and 100 cases per examination period in the previous years, suddenly 2 301 cases were reported (or put differently, 68% of all cases in the five-year period occurred in November 2020) (see Marais (2022) for further analysis). The already strained disciplinary apparatus of the university was completely overwhelmed with such numbers, and a new process was needed. Where, previously, students were called for a disciplinary case, evidence presented and deliberated by a panel, students were now given a warning on accusation and issued with a warning letter that stated that should students be found guilty of a similar offence, they would face harsher sanctions. If students disputed the charge, they had to appeal (or in the words of one interviewee, contest rather than appeal – interviewee 10). Thus, suddenly, the presumption of innocence was removed, and lenient sentences became acceptable to the disciplinary apparatus. Furthermore, the university was not consistent in their own process because approximately 100 students were issued with more than one warning letter in the same period for two or more different modules, without further sanction.

In reaction to perceptions of cheating in the May/June 2020 exams (despite no disciplinary cases having been logged), the university implemented a proctoring solution in the form of a cellular phone monitoring application that records sound while students are writing exams. The process was rolled out shambolically. Students and staff were alerted only a few days before the exam processes would start, leaving both students and staff uncertain about how the application worked.

But however, the introduction of it has been very unfair to students in that they were introduced in the last minute, and there was no training for students. Training for student was only a week or two weeks before, which was sent to them via [institutional] email. Majority of students sometimes don't even access these emails. (Interviewee 27)

Despite this application being used in November 2020, no disciplinary cases were logged using the proctoring tool as evidence in the November 2020 exams. According to an academic manager overseeing the examination process for both the November 2020 and May 2021 exams:

Students that have been identified through marking has been more effective than the other mechanisms that we have put in. (Interviewee 10)

In the face of technology, the human factor in identifying cheating proved more powerful. Despite this, the institution persisted in using proctoring solutions and, in fact, increased the number and types of proctoring solutions used.

An academic perhaps rightly identified the issues of institutional game playing that was about perception management.

I think we're looking for a metric ... that's simple enough that we can put it in a headline of a newspaper article. Yeah, that says, whatever, 'we installed a piece of software and our piece of software caught out 0.5 percent of students, meaning 99.5 percent of our students are now honest. (Interviewee 3)

This line of argument was strengthened when a prominent academic from a South African university¹ wrote an opinion piece for the national media indicating that the university has become a 'qualification factory' that is handing out degrees to anyone. This elicited several responses from people in leadership positions at the university defending the validity of the university's qualifications and pointing out its use of proctoring to ensure the validity of its qualifications, as the quote from the very astute academic above predicted.

Academics and academic integrity

One power contest between academics and the institution arose from the unilateral implementation of proctoring. While some academics may agree with proctoring in principle (as did a number of academics I interviewed), there were contestations around who then is responsible for the proctoring, watching or listening to associated video or audio files and then lodging disciplinary cases. One academic pointed out that when there were sit-down exams there was a department responsible for monitoring student behaviour during exams, and academics were only responsible for setting exam question papers and marking scripts.

I have to sit there and match [matching student identities or faces to the student who wrote the exam] them; I mean that's just not: I'm not gonna do that, sit and match the student look at student, first I must match the student to see that the picture and the student is the same I must match, I have 62 students I have to do that for. So I did not do and I'm not gonna do. Even now if [assessment administration department] exams is not assisting... Unless they do it, I'm not gonna do it ... during face to face, who was responsible for invigilate during that period who was invigilate. I don't remember last year going to invigilate. I was only made, I was only told that on the day, my test is being written, I must be available. (Interviewee 27)

And I want to point out that this role is a huge burden when considering the sheer number of students at this institution. Whether you are considering the full proctoring that some departments use, or the audio proctoring that is more widely used, if you have 25 000 students where even 5% of students are flagged, that is still 1250 audio files that needs to be vetted. And while the assessment administration department has now become involved in the process, their

¹ The details of the article have been withheld to ensure the anonymity of the relevant institution.

involvement seems to be on the level of sending academics a list with possible students to vet for cheating, rather than doing the vetting themselves (and subsequently taking responsibility for taking accused students to disciplinary hearings).

Academic complaints of increased workload are valid. In venue-based exams, the university employed a large number of invigilators (two invigilators for the first 30 students and thereafter an extra one invigilator per 30 students) (Mokula & Lovemore, 2014:263). Online exams has led to a perceived higher workload for academics as issues that were dealt with at an institutional level, has devolved more towards academics as this illustrate.

Cheating arising from venue-based exams was monitored by a department externally from academic departments, and disciplinary cases arising from venue-based exams were handled by this department with academics sometimes called in to give evidence on similarity between scripts. Academics would only become involved where they may have picked up cheating in written exam scripts but, more likely, if they picked up plagiarism from assignments or portfolios. With online exams, academics suddenly had an extra workload assigned to them; not only proctoring, but also now preparing cases to be tabled to the disciplinary committee. A recurring theme was that the academic workload had increased over a number of years, and that especially support departments have become ineffective, leading to academics using more of their time in a support role doing administrative tasks. The institution also had a huge increase in student numbers – some modules have enrolled 25 000 students, for example. One academic explained her process for identifying possible cases of cheating and the amount of time it took to work through her almost 3 000 students, identify and prepare files on possible cheaters, present it to a departmental committee and then send it to the college and university structure – where she felt it was then ignored (Interviewee 13). It is not just an increase in workload to monitor and prepare cases that staff identified, but also the feeling of being not supported by the university.

The fact that academics deploy the proctoring tools with their students is a form of power play, as is the institution implemented proctoring even though students were scantily prepared. It gave the academics and the institution power over students, caused anxiety through the process and communicated to students, ‘I am watching you, I have power over your future, I am in your private spaces’ (many critiques of proctoring has been written that touches on issues of power, privacy and human rights (cf Khalil, et al., 2022; Langenfeld, 2020; Scassa, 2020). This is different from existing unequal power relations of higher education because it invades students’ private spaces and marks certain behaviours, and bodies (based on race, sexuality, neuro-typicality as examples), as normal, or not (Swauger, 2020b).

Student reaction to the invigilation applications has been muted in general. A student organisation did circulate a rather playful campaign through social media that #TheOwlMustFall. #TheOwlMustFall is a playful connection to the logo of one of the applications – but also neatly links the struggle against the application to the larger quest for decolonisation of higher education in South Africa to the #RhodesMustFall movement. Ultimately, the student campaign was rather short-lived, and the institution reacted quite strongly to attempts to question the use

of proctoring applications stating that the applications were brought in due to the huge number of cheating cases against students.

A few academics understood efforts related to academic integrity as a form of gamesmanship:

I get the sense of we are busy setting up a game. We're busy setting up a game with our students, to say who can outsmart who? And in a sense, I get that I mean, I get that it can be fun for academic staff. I mean that kind of puzzle that kind of you know how can I better trace the data on this or the other? I mean, I like that as well ... but if we set up that kind of game, where we say can I catch you out? Or can you outsmart me so that I am not able to catch you out... it basically just boils down to, you know, we won the game and we are not going to win it, we are not going to win it. (Interviewee 3)

This conception is a battle of wits between the academic and the student. However, as the lecturer stated:

This battle of wits is stacked against academics, because students innovate faster than we can catch them. This battle of wits comes at the cost of relationship building. (Interviewee 3)

The same lecturer recognised that relationship building could only happen when the student:academic ratio is at a reasonable level – which is not always the case in this institution².

One academic described student cheating as happening because students are bored with assignments that lecturers think out and said that she had minimal cases of cheating because her assignments were unique:

So, they get an assignment. And they all have, 3 000 of them have to do this same assignment; it's the same thing. It's boring ... So boredom, and that's one reason why I think they cheat. But you know, there's another reason. Students are having fun with academics. So, they cheat because their academics are sometimes fools ... The academics are sometimes lazy, and they don't change their assignments. (Interviewee 17)

Since lecturers used one assignment for all students to do, but also used the same assignment year after year, students believe it is fair to cheat because academics did not play by the rules of the game through innovative assignments or at least differing assignments.

As already discussed, academic integrity needs to be seen as a part of the fabric of the institution. While my research did not set out to assess institutionalisation of academic integrity

² There are some fluctuations on the academic:student ratio with one report placing it at 177:1. As comparison a similar type of university in a developing country reported a ratio of 16:1 while one in a developed country reported one of 188:1 (Garrett, 2016: 24).

at the university, I found it useful to think with Glendinning' s (2017) benchmark of institutionalisation. When comparing each of her ten dimensions with my data presented here, it indicated that this university had a long way to go towards institutionalisation of academic integrity.

In terms of a governance and strategic commitment, I showed that the policies dealing with academic integrity were outdated in that it mostly focused on venue-based exams and physical presence of students on campus. Policies were also unclear because it did not state the range of sanctions on a platform available to students. This links with the idea of clear and consistent policies, as well as fair sanctions.

There was also not uniform buy-in from the academic community or the student community towards proctoring as a solution to enhance academic integrity, with academics pointing out that the university approached it as a game, or the problematics of proctoring on workload. Academic integrity strategies also did not originate from academics themselves. Very few of the academics I interviewed had created specific content to teach academic integrity, assuming that it is an institutional rather than academic imperative. For some, the extent of focusing on academic integrity was simply including a statement that plagiarism would not be tolerated without an engagement about what it is, why it is important and how to avoid it. Furthermore, academics indicated that they did not feel supported when they did decide to pursue cases against students for academic integrity infractions.

Discussion

In this paper I showed the ways that institutionalisation of academic integrity is an incomplete process at the case study university. There is no doubt that the university, and the academics, take academic integrity seriously, and recognise the threat to the academic project, the university, its graduates and its reputation. However, by looking at academic integrity institutionalisation at the hand of Gallant and Drinner (1969) and Glendinning (2017), the incompleteness can be recognised. This is an incompleteness that goes beyond dynamic student participation. Academic integrity is always on-going – a process rather than a singular end-goal. The process however should be institutionalised as described by the mentioned authors.

We can use Gallant and Drinan' s (1969) four step process to evaluate the institutionalisation of academic integrity:

1. Recognising urgency of institutionalisation – while the urgency of stopping cheating is recognised that has not translated into an urgency of the institutionalisation of academic integrity. Awareness raising for students was around negative behaviour, and the institutional policies was outdated. Responses was also aimed at stopping cheating through proctoring solutions rather than building an academic integrity culture.
2. Institution wide discussion on a response – responses has mostly been top-down without discussion and consensus building. It was clear from interviews that there were a variety

of responses to cheating, and what is considered cheating, as well as what academic integrity is.

3. Holistic approach to academic integrity – the response has been towards putting (often contested) measures in place to stop cheating in exams rather than building academic integrity as a holistic value that permeates teaching and learning, but also administrative aspects.
4. Part of the routine of the institution – existing institutional processes was overwhelmed with the start of online exams, and at the end my fieldwork this had not been resolved. Pre-COVID-19 institutional routines focused on plagiarism at the postgraduate level rather than cheating at undergraduate level. Academics' experiences, and their feeling of not being supported by the institution when they lodged cases at the institutional level is an example of academic integrity has not been part of the routine.

Glendinning's (2017) benchmark for institutionalisation consists of ten components and echoes the four above:

1. Institutional strategic commitment – with the start of online exams the institution realised to an extent that they were unprepared for the online assessment environment, and have shown a commitment towards trying to stop cheating but that has not necessarily translated into wide engagements about what the academic integrity culture of the institution should look like and how it should be achieved.
2. Clear and consistent policies – the policies are outdated and disjointed, neither describing specifics of offences and sanctions.
3. Fair sanctions – sanctions have been inconsistently applied especially in the last three years, and sanctions is not available to staff or students.
4. Community buy-in – the academics that I interviewed did not show buy-in with many contestations emerging especially around proctoring efforts.
5. Institutional culture of deep learning – I have no specific data around this
6. Student leadership – no students have been involved in efforts around academic integrity, and the only student voices was to run a campaign against one of the proctoring tools used.
7. Transparency and communication – at the time of my fieldwork very little transparency and communication existed around academic integrity with communication to students highlighting negative actions (i.e., don't cheat), as opposed to positive values (e.g. this is why academic integrity is important).
8. Monitoring the effectiveness of academic integrity programs and policies – there was no monitoring process that I became aware of and the institutional disciplinary body could not cope with the number of cases lodged during COVID-19 and had to change their process. This at least hint that the policies at that stage was not effective.
9. Engagement with new research – I have no specific data around this

10. Institution wide understanding of academic integrity – my research shows many contestations amongst academic around academic integrity and cheating. No institutional efforts during the period was centred around building consensus about what academic integrity is, how to teach it, and how to handle breaches.

Considering these fourteen elements, issues around academic integrity has not been institutionalised – despite the institution, and its academics, being committed to stop cheating. At the stage of my research there was no university wide dialogues about academic integrity as a value system, or agreement on how to stop cheating, and some academics indicated that they felt actively unsupported by the institution in their efforts. And in all of this, students were largely absent from the discourse, and instead of being seen as active participants, they are merely objects of efforts.

Conclusion and a way forward

It is clear that in this university, institutionalisation of academic integrity had not yet occurred. It was clear that efforts were under way towards this, but these were delayed and not as inclusive of academics and students as it could be. This became evident in policies that were not relevant in current situations, did not have academic and student buy-in towards some solutions, as well as the lack of university-wide discussions around what academic integrity would entail. This university is not unique in struggling with institutionalisation of academic integrity efforts, or in dealing with cheating.

Moving towards academic integrity as an institution would require a whole institutional approach where academic staff, management and students are involved in drawing up and accepting a student disciplinary code, where there is a joint understanding of why certain behaviours are accepted or not, and where everyone involved works with a shared responsibility and understanding of why academic integrity is the very fibre of what a university is about.

Author biography

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