The role of the university Academic Integrity Advisor

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Abstract Queen's University is a comprehensive, research-intensive, but highly decentralized institution located in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. As part of a new institutional paradigm embracing the broader, proactive principles of academic integrity, a new university role was created, known as the Academic Integrity (AI) Advisor to the Vice-Principal (Academic). Focusing on three key areas – awareness, education, and policy and procedures – the Advisor has broad responsibility for AI policy development, information gathering and sharing, and for promotion of the values of academic integrity. Free from the challenges of handling specific cases, the AI Advisor can focus on establishing best-practices in the three key areas, by drawing on the research, experiences, and analysis of other institutional practices from the Canadian and international environments. Numerous university-wide initiatives targeted at students, instructors and faculty members, and administrators, have brought together a variety of institutional partners to raise the profile of AI across the university. By building on a principle of broad institutional inclusion, this position thus provides a dynamic lens through which a variety of academic-integrity issues faced within and by universities, both centralized and decentralized, can be discussed and effectively addressed.

Key Ideas

- The desire to change university culture from academic dishonesty to academic integrity on campus led to the creation of the Academic Integrity Advisor role.

- The role of the AI Advisor at Queen's University is unique among all universities in Canada.

- The role of the AI Advisor can encompass the academic-integrity paradigm in its broadest sense as it pertains to the university's entire academic mission – including service, teaching, and research.

- The AI Advisor can bring together institutional partners to effect changes in policies and procedures, to develop proactive educational programs, and to increase awareness through outreach activities and educational campaigns.

- The AI Advisor provides a effective model for operating in a decentralized university environment.

- The AI Advisor role could be a viable model that, if enhanced, could lead to a more centralized process for handling academic-integrity issues.

- Future challenges include adapting to new technologies available to both students and instructors and creating a culture of academic integrity that will become an integral part of lifelong learning.

Discussion Question 1 Do you see a role for an Academic Integrity Advisor at your institution and what kind of role could he/she play?

Discussion Question 2 How could this role be made even more effective overall in addressing each of the focus areas (awareness, education, and policies and procedures)?

Introduction and Historical Perspective

Queen's University is a comprehensive, research-intensive, but highly decentralized mid-sized (approximately 20,000 students) institution located in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. It is one of the oldest universities in Canada, being established under Royal Charter by Queen Victoria in 1841, and was the earliest degree-granting institution in the United Province of Canada prior to the Confederation of the nation in 1867.

The university is currently comprised of six academic Faculties and Schools – Arts & Science, Applied Science (Engineering), Education, Law, Business, and Health Sciences. In 2003, the University Senate (the governing body responsible for determining all matters of an academic nature) established a committee to review the culture and way of thinking about academic integrity across the university, in response to discussions with student leaders. In particular, the committee was mandated to do the following:

- undertake a review of the existing policies and practices with respect to academic dishonesty and academic integrity at this institution and to provide advice/recommendations to the appropriate bodies on issues arising from this review;

- examine the policies and practices on academic dishonesty and academic integrity at comparator universities in Canada and elsewhere, in particular, the U.S.;

- identify standards of academic integrity for Queen's University; to develop strategies for creating and maintaining an institutional culture in which these standards will be valued and embraced; and to provide advice/recommendations regarding the promotion of such strategies within the University community.

At this time, the university also became an institutional member of the Center for Academic Integrity (CAI), which is currently affiliated with the Robert J. Rutland Institute for Ethics at Clemson University in the U.S. The CAI is the premier consortium in North America with a membership of over 360 institutions that provides "a forum to identify, affirm, and promote the values of academic integrity among students, faculty, teachers and administrators" (CAI, 2009).

In the course of its work, the committee noted that although Queen's University had a longstanding policy on academic dishonesty, its scope was very broad, and permitted Faculties and Schools to operate in a semi-autonomous manner with respect to their own regulations and procedures involving academic-dishonesty matters. Furthermore, many of the university and faculty policies in effect at the time were found to be outdated or inadequate as a result of ongoing and rapid technological advances in the Internet and telecommunications. Perhaps the most significant finding of the committee was the realization that there has been a paradigm shift in the ways in which academic-dishonesty matters are discussed, promoted, and administered in the university context. In particular, many institutions in North America were transforming their traditional, adversarial and reactive-based approach (typically exemplified in academic-dishonesty policies) into one embracing a broader and more proactive philosophy in promulgating the concept, and indeed, culture of academic integrity.

As a result, the committee made several key recommendations First, it recommended that the university should adopt and embrace a definition of academic integrity based on that developed by the CAI – namely that "academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility, all of which are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive". Second, the committee recommended that that the Office of the Vice-Principal (Academic) (analogous to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic) should have the responsibility to promote the values of academic integrity (AI) in their broadest sense across the university. A final recommendation empowered the Vice-Principal (Academic) to form a working group or an advisory committee to further pursue the recommendations of the committee; all of these recommendations were subsequently approved by the University Senate.

Role of the University Academic-Integrity Advisor

In lieu of establishing a full advisory committee, a new position reporting directly to the Vice-Principal (Academic) was created in July 2007– the Academic Integrity Advisor to the Vice-Principal (Academic) – a unique and new role among all Canadian universities. The mandate of this appointment is to:

- provide leadership in support of AI at the university;

- advise the Vice-Principal (Academic) on all matters relating to AI;

- advise academic units on university-wide matters relating to AI;

- initiate university projects and programs related to AI; and

- co-operate with interuniversity and provincial bodies in promoting

    AI; and

- represent the university in these and any other fora.

Thus, the AI Advisor at Queen's University, who is also a tenured faculty member, serves as the resident "expert" on AI issues and policies, both internally and externally. Faculties and Schools may consult with the Advisor on specific issues, and the Advisor can serve as the university representative at conferences, on external bodies, and in the media.

The role of AI advisors and officers at various Canadian universities is quite diverse. For example, at some universities, AI advisors may act as counsellors or consultants for students against whom there has been an AI allegation. Other universities have designated AI officers, who may be departmentally or Faculty-based and may have responsibilities to investigate specific allegations involving AI. Finally, some universities have a single university AI officer who coordinates specific AI cases across the university. It is important to note that the role of the AI Advisor at Queen's University is quite distinct from these roles. In particular, the University AI Advisor does not become involved in handling specific AI cases,

but rather has broad responsibility for AI policy development, information gathering and sharing, and for promotion of the values of academic integrity across the university. In addition, many AI advisors or officers at other universities are involved with policies and procedures associated with undergraduate (and sometimes graduate) students; at Queen's, the role of the University AI Advisor has been expanded to include issues which are generally considered to fall under the aegis of research integrity, which includes many of the same student-related AI issues (e.g. plagiarism, fabrication of data, falsification of data, etc.) but also additional issues involving academic scholarship, student supervision, conflict-of-interest, misappropriation of funds, etc. Hence, the role of the University AI Advisor at Queen's encompasses a much more expansive interpretation of academic integrity in which academic integrity, in its broadest sense, provides an overarching framework as it pertains to the university's entire academic mission – encompassing service, teaching, and research. This particular aspect of the role, involving the academic responsibilities of staff and faculty members, appears to be a new facet of the AI bailiwick with respect to other Canadian universities.

A web survey of the vast majority (50) of Canadian universities highlights the variety of ways in which the responsibility for AI policy development is delegated within the university's administrative structure. In general, this responsibility may fall to one or more of the following five personnel: (1) a faculty or departmental administrator (e.g. Associate Dean or Chair), (2) a senior administrator (e.g. Associate Vice-President or Vice-President Academic), (3) a faculty or departmental AI officer (who is not part of the administration, e.g. a regular faculty or staff member), (4) a university AI officer, and (5) a university AI advisor. For AI policy development, different combinations of these five types of people have been implemented within the Canadian university system, leading to five different "models" that are currently in use; Table 1 shows these different models as well as their frequency of use among the institutions. From the table, it can be seen that the vast majority (45) of the universities develop AI policies through the direct involvement of senior university and/or faculty administrators. Of the remaining institutions, four use AI officers, who are also responsible for handling or coordinating specific AI cases for all academic units; Queen's University is the only university for which a University AI Advisor has this responsibility.

Table 1. University personnel who have primary responsibility for AI policy development

Role	# of Canadian Universities
Faculty/Departmental Administrator	18
Senior Administrator (no AI officer or advisor)	19
Faculty/Departmental Administrator and Senior Administrator	7
Faculty/Departmental AI Officer and Senior Administrator	1
University AI Officer	4

AI Initiatives

With the creation of the AI Advisor position at Queen's University, an effective and comprehensive AI strategy was adopted by drawing on the research, experiences, and analysis of other institutional practices in the national and international university sector. This strategy focused on three key areas: awareness, education, and policy and procedures.

Recognizing that students entering university for the first time will have varying levels of knowledge and experience with AI principles, it is important to engage students in the fundamental importance of AI in the academy as soon as they arrive. Awareness initiatives have focused on methods of improving outreach to students and faculty members, emphasizing the fundamental importance of AI in all academic endeavours, and increasing faculty "buy-in" by promoting AI concepts in the classroom. A university AI website was created to serve as a convenient "one-stop" source of information for students and faculty members by providing resources for students and instructors as well as links to each Faculty or School's AI regulations. In addition, several presentations about the AI Advisor role and associated initiatives were made to various campus groups, including student government, teaching assistants, Senate, Senate Committees, and the Deans of all Faculties/Schools; a secondary purpose of these presentations was to inform the university community about the newly-formed position and that he could be contacted for consultation and advice. At the same time, a regular AI column was established in the university newspaper, in which various AI issues such as AI in the classroom, AI in research, and the effect of cultural influences were discussed. Finally, an AI Working Group consisting of AI administrators, who have direct responsibility for the development of AI policies and procedures within each Faculty/School as well as graduate and undergraduate student representatives, was created in order to establish a strong foundation for AI initiatives built on a principle of broad institutional inclusion; this Working Group has become the primary venue for the discussion of AI issues and the dissemination of AI-related information on a university-wide basis.

This initial awareness can then be reinforced with continuing education and promotion over the course of study at university. Educational initiatives have focused on developing a variety of ways to promote AI among students and faculty members on campus, as well as exchange experiences and information among other universities. Internally, administrators in some Faculties/Schools have begun an AI outreach program by talking to faculty members and instructors about AI policies and procedures at departmental meetings. The increasing diversity of the student body has meant that students come to university with different experiences and understanding of AI principles. A new initiative currently in progress is the development of a university-wide AI tutorial which will allow students to become acquainted with the fundamental principles of AI, the standards and expectations to which they will be held in their academic work at university, and the AI regulations and procedures associated with their Faculty or School. In addition, partnerships are being developed with the library and the writing center which will result in the development of additional workshops that will permit students to improve their skills in essay writing, proper citation, time management, test writing, etc. Externally, a province-wide consortium of university AI administrators has also been created; these administrators are also members of a group listserv and meet on a biannual basis in order to discuss issues of common interest and share best-practices.

Finally, it is important that AI initiatives are supported by robust institutional policies and procedures. The University AI Advisor role has provided the impetus to launch several initiatives to review, modify, and or develop university policies on various aspects of academic integrity. Prior to the creation of this role, the main AI policy in effect at Queen's University was a policy on academic dishonesty, which was broadly informative, but not procedurally prescriptive and had not been updated since 1989. Consequently, the decentralized nature of the university had resulted in Faculties and Schools establishing their own AI-related regulations and procedures, leading to distinctly different ways in which student cases were handled among the different academic units. Subsequently, the University AI Advisor has worked closely with Senate committees to develop new policies framed in the context of academic integrity, including an Academic Integrity policy statement and another policy outlining clear and consistent procedures in the handling of student-related AI cases for all Faculties and Schools in the university. Another area which has involved the University AI Advisor is in the development of the university's first research-integrity policy for faculty members and researchers; although the overall investigative process in a research-integrity case is likely to be different in comparison to that in a student-related AI case, there are many common principles and procedures which are applicable to both.

Future Challenges

Although the creation of the University AI Advisor has many potential advantages for the institution, there are always ongoing and new challenges. At Queen's University, the strongly decentralized administrative structure of the university means that a careful balance between centralized initiatives and Faculty/School autonomy must be found; typically, broad consultation and discussion across the university community is essential. More generally, there are several questions which university AI administrators may face in the coming years. At Queen's University, one question to consider is whether the institution should move to a single AI policy with standardized procedures for all Faculties and Schools; although each Faculty or School invariably has unique characteristics that may have led to customized AI policies or procedures, issues of fairness, consistency, time, and financial resources are compelling reasons to examine the possibility of moving to a standard, university-wide process. In terms of education, how can new technologies be utilised in a way that is useful for both students and instructors? The advent of the technologies associated with Web 2.0 such as social-networking sites, file-sharing sites, blogs, and smartphones has created new (and often unanticipated) issues for students and instructors. Some argue that the challenges created by new technology must be fought using that same technology, and commercial tools such as text-matching software, like Turnitin™, are gaining widespread use in the higher-education sector in Canada and the U.S. Finally, there is the most basic question of all – how can we effectively impart the principles of AI in our students so that they will serve as guiding principles throughout their lives? A definitive solution still remains to be found, but it is clear that a greater awareness, knowledge, and application of AI principles in the academic endeavours of students, faculty members, and administrators will better serve and promote a long-lasting culture of academic integrity.

References Cited

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Acknowledgments