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INTEGRITY HOUR: A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING AND FACILITATING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This guide provides insights and direction about how the Integrity Hour informal online community of practice was developed and continues to be facilitated at the University of Calgary. This report describes how Integrity Hour was launched during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic as a means to provide support to those working in higher education who were experiencing changes in the nature of academic integrity breaches, along with a general increase in misconduct cases.

Methods: Reflective analysis, informed by the extant literature.

Results: A summary and synthesis of how and why Integrity Hour has been a successful online community of practice for academic integrity.

Implications: This guide is intended to provide guidance to others who wish to implement their own academic integrity community of practice.

Additional materials: 4 references.

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COVID-19: A Catalyst for Connection

BACKGROUND

Connection and community during the COVID-19 crisis continues to be an important need. The academic integrity professional community in Canada is growing, but still fledgling in many ways. The academic integrity community is a heterogeneous one, comprised of educators, researchers, administrators, higher education professionals (HEPROs) (Kehm & Teichler, (Eds.), 2013; Usick, 2020; Whitchurch, 2008), students, and other campus stakeholders. In general, there are very few people on a single campus whose job is dedicated to academic integrity. In most cases, it is one component of a larger professional portfolio. The result is that individuals who work in academic integrity can be and feel isolated and lack opportunities to connect with one another and develop professionally.

Because of the COVID-19 crisis, numerous problems in society in general have surfaced and in higher education, issues around ethical assessment of student work and concerns about academic misconduct have been amplified. This has put extraordinary strain on those who work in the field of academic integrity. Almost immediately, large-scale webinars were offered to provide support for those working in academic integrity. However, very shortly afterwards, colleagues began to express their "webinar fatigue" and "Zoom fatigue". The need to figure out ways to respond to the crisis in the education field in appropriate and helpful ways remained, but the sense of disconnection was increasing as one-to-many formats of communication such as webinars began to pop up.

After offering a couple of webinars at the University of Calgary, I sensed that something more was needed. Opportunities to connect as professionals in a safe space where people could have authentic conversations, ask questions and not feel afraid of looking silly if they did not know something or if they felt ill prepared to respond to new demands placed on them professionally as a result of the pandemic.

This initiative is part of my work as the inaugural Educational Leader in Residence, Academic Integrity, at the University of Calgary.

Building a Community of Practice

PRINCIPLES OF INTEGRITY HOUR

I shifted my focus away from one-to-many communications (at least temporarily) in favour of creating a small community of like-minded practitioners where academic integrity professionals could gather. We have called it "Integrity Hour". We meet once a week for one hour via Zoom. The first time we met was March 30 2020, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis. Meetings have continued on a regular basis since then.

The initiative is based on the notion of a community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002), as it was built around these principles:

Voluntary participation: No one is obliged to attend, and no one is chastised is they can attend one week but not the next.

Safe space: We establish up front that we are there to connect and learn. There is no pressure and all questions are welcome.

Participants drive the conversation: Each week participants bring up topics they want to talk about. Others respond, often contributing resources or ideas. The contribution of resources is not a requirement. The conversation and opportunity to connect with one another are the main purpose.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTEGRITY HOUR

Particular characteristics have helped to contribute to the success of Integrity Hour, including:

- **Facilitated and organized.** I serve as the facilitator for the group. I schedule the sessions, send out the Zoom link, facilitate the session, take notes, and circulate the notes to those who attended.

- **Informal.** There is no formal program, no slides, and no keynote speaker. The topics are not pre-determined, but if a topic is brought up that we cannot answer in our hour together, we table it for the next meeting.

- **Controlled participation.** This is an informal quality assurance mechanism to assure a sense of safety for participants. Because contract cheating suppliers have been known to infiltrate academic integrity communities, I moderate participation. Only those with institutional e-mail address are given the link to join the session. In most cases, the individuals are already known to me, but not always. Once I have confirmed the prospective participant is affiliated with a legitimate Canadian educational institution, they are welcomed. This is not meant to be elitist, but rather to help provide a safe professional space for those actively working in a higher education institution.

- **Welcoming environment.** At the beginning of every session, I welcome everyone to the Zoom call. Then everyone introduces themselves, saying what institution they are joining from. From there we move into the conversation. At the end of the session, we have a brief opportunity for reflection and concluding comments from each participant.

- **Safe space.** We emphasize that this is a professional safe space. People can bring up any topic related to academic integrity that is on their minds. They are free to contribute and listen quietly. Everyone is given an opportunity to speak, but they can pass if they want. There is no pressure to be "on".

- **Participant driven.** I facilitate the session and I usually have some topics or questions "in my back pocket" in case no one brings any forward. In some sessions, the conversation has started slowly, but I resist the temptation to drive the conversation or to fill in the silence if it happens. In the end, participants usually end up determining the topics of conversation and the topics we cover.

- **Documenting and sharing back.** As the facilitator, I take notes during the session, noting down key questions, as well as responses, ideas, and resources that were shared. These notes are shared with those who participated in that particular session.

- **Bounded in duration.** We meet for one hour each week. The sessions start and end on time, as we know that people have many demands on their time. We conclude each session by confirming the date and time of the next session. We have been meeting Monday mornings each week, and for weeks when there has been a holiday Monday, I ask the group if they would prefer to skip a week or to move to a different day. The group decides how they would like to proceed.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Integrity Hour is a participant-driven online community of practice. It exists because people choose to attend and find value in the conversation.

Typically, 12-14 people attend each week. Some are regulars. Others come and go. A few have been only once. Eight to twelve people has proven to be an effective number to have a robust conversation and keep people engaged. We have had participation from several institutions across three provinces. We will keep going until the group no longer finds value or has exhausted the need to connect in this way.

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