Exploring the foundations of academic integrity in Canadian higher education

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Abstract

Purpose: In this study I explore the historical development of academic integrity in Canadian higher education.

Theory and method: Framed within the theory of historical agency, applied at a macro rather than an individual level, I analyze a variety of sources to show how the development of student conduct (and its management) in Canada have developed differently than in the United States, highlighting the American phenomenon of "honor codes" as being a key difference between the two countries.

Results: I illustrate how scholars have identified different periods of higher education history in the U.S. and Canada, exploring why these historical trajectories have led to differences in policy and practice as related to student academic (mis)conduct.

Implications: To conclude, I link this historical inquiry to present challenges associated with academic misconduct during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, cautioning that calls for Canadian institutions to develop honor codes such as those used in the United States may be ill-informed and ineffective.

Supplementary materials: 16 Figures; 31 References

Peer review: This presentation underwent blind peer review prior to its acceptance for presentation at this conference.

Keywords: Canada, higher education, academic integrity, academic misconduct, academic dishonesty, foundations, history, honor code, honor system, honor code school, critique, COVID-19

Welcome

Welcome to today's presentation, "Exploring the foundations of academic integrity in Canadian higher education".

Figure 1

Slide 1: Welcome

Territorial Acknowledgement

I join you today from Calgary, Canada, which is situated on the traditional territories of the people

of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. These include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the

Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations). It also includes people from the Tsuut'ina First Nation and the

Stoney Nakoda, who include the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. Calgary is also home to the

Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

Figure 2
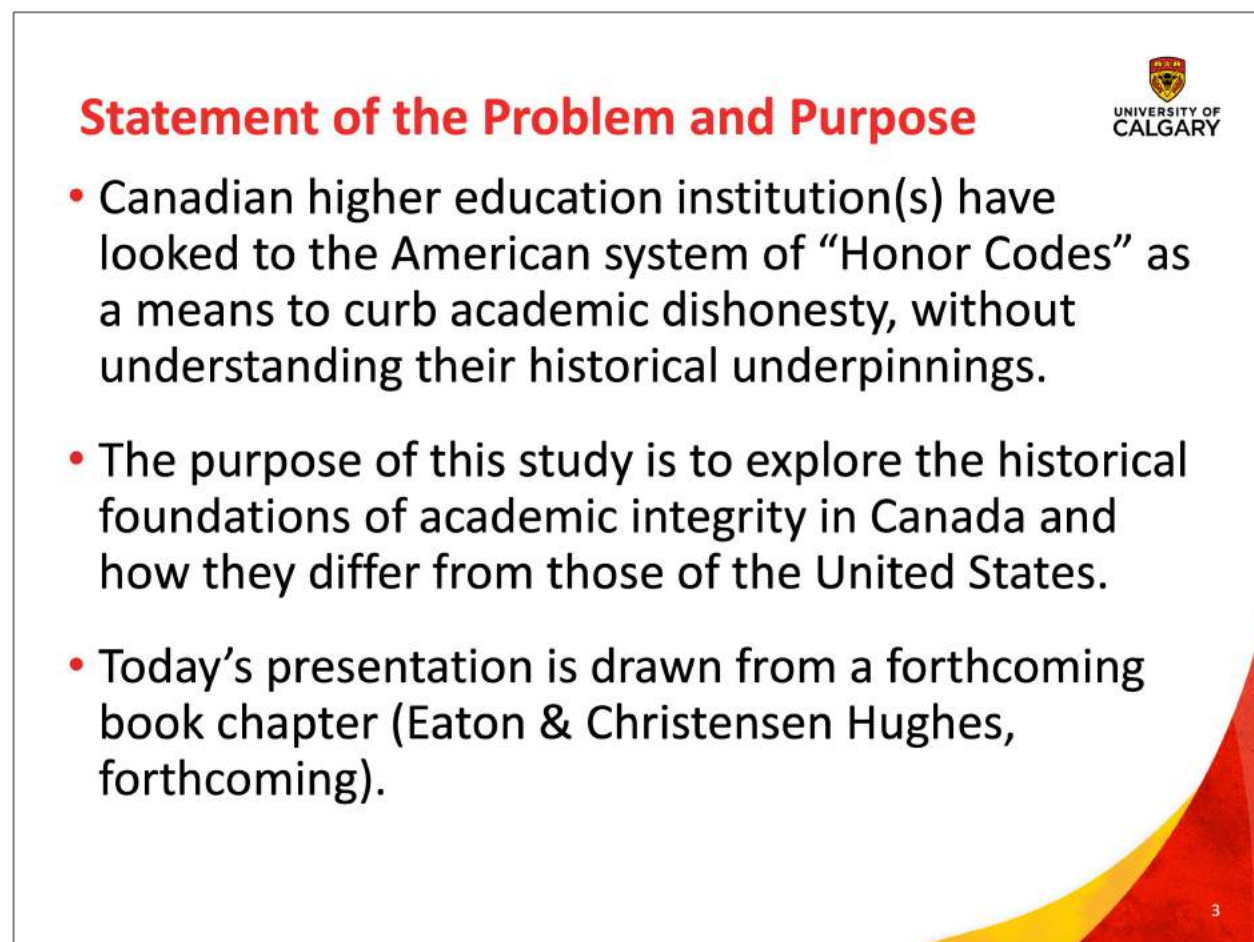
Slide 2: Territorial Acknowledgement
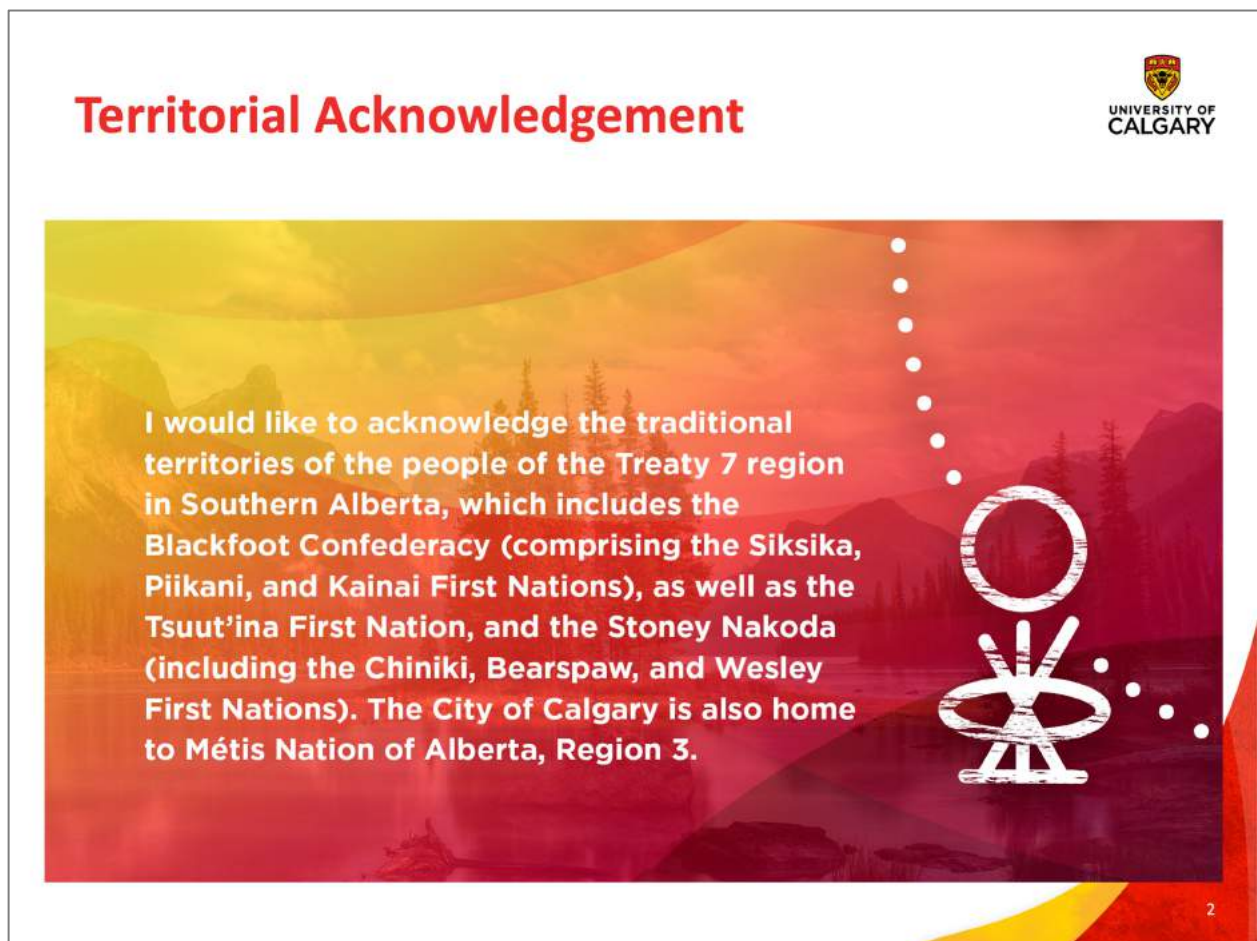
Statement of the Problem and Purpose

There has been an uptick in academic misconduct cases during COVID-19. As an academic integrity

scholar, I have observed that Canadian higher education institution(s) (HEIs) have been turning to the American system of "Honor Codes" as a means to curb academic misconduct, particularly during the pandemic, without understanding the historical systems and practices upon which these codes were founded.

Figure 3

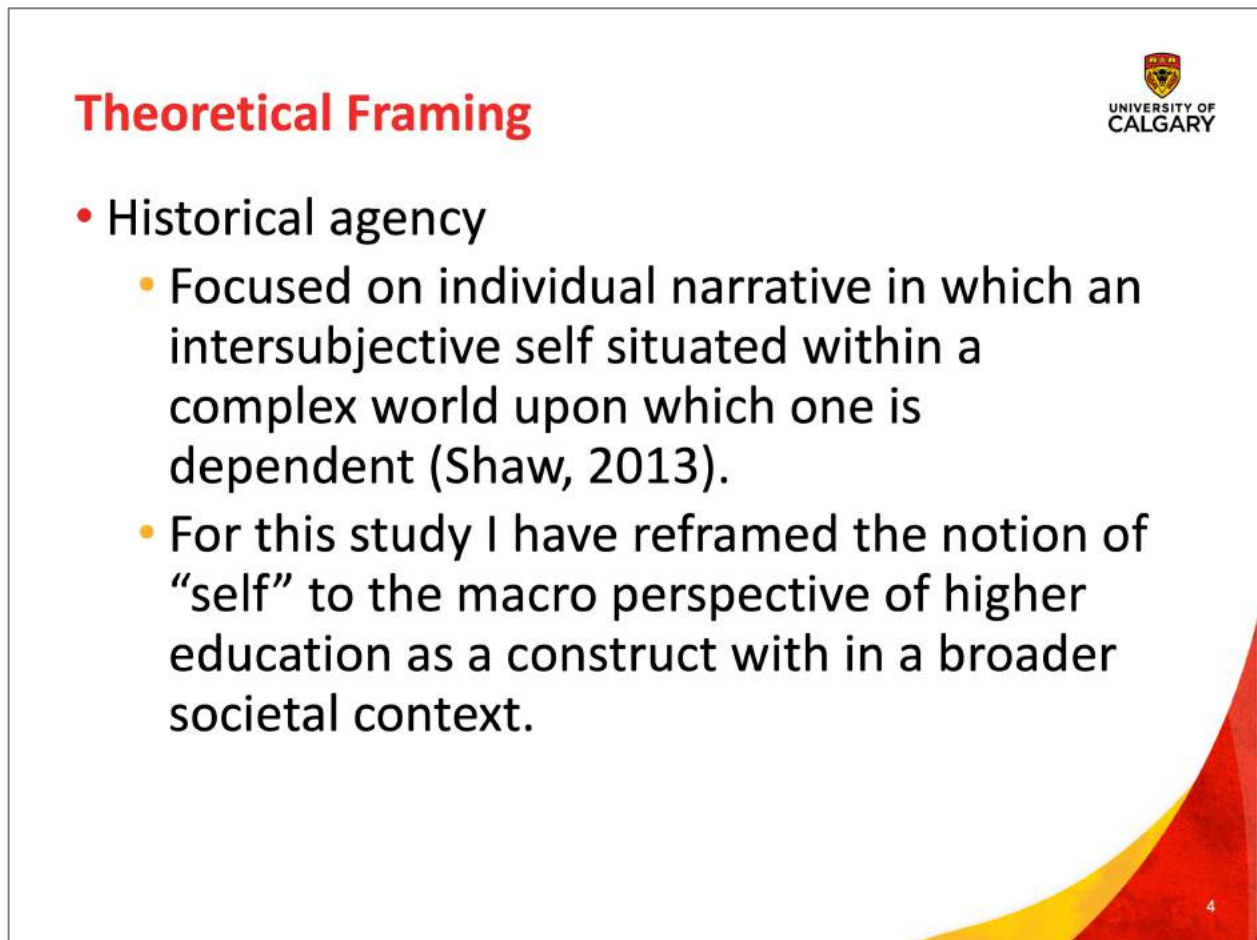*Slide 3: Statement of the Problem and Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to explore the historical foundations of academic integrity in Canada and how they differ from that of the United States. Some of the content of today's presentation is drawn from a forthcoming book chapter on the history of academic integrity in Canada (Eaton & Christensen Hughes, forthcoming).

Theoretical Framing

I have framed this study within the theory of historical agency, which focuses on individual

narrative in which an intersubjective self is situated within a complex world upon which one is

dependent (Shaw, 2013).
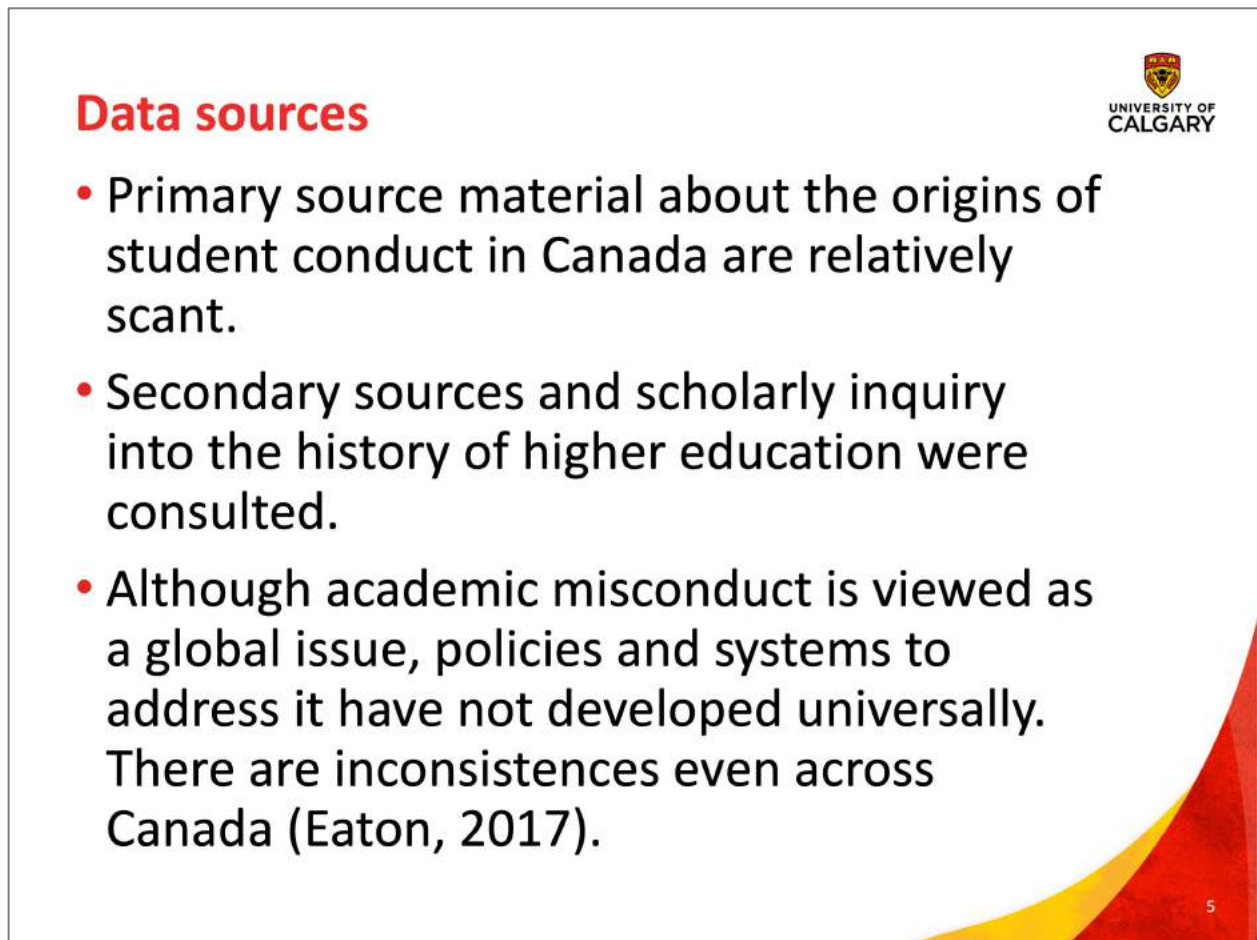
Figure 4

Slide 4: Theoretical Framing

For this study I have reframed the notion of "self" to the macro perspective of "system"; namely,

the system of higher education as a construct with in a broader societal and international context.

Data Sources

Primary source material about the origins of student conduct in Canada are relatively scant.

Much of what we know is derived from secondary sources and scholarly inquiry into the history of

higher education broadly.

Figure 5

Slide 5: Data sources

When you hear the term "academic misconduct", it is easy to think we are all talking about the

same thing, as it is generally regarded as a universal issue. Although the broad notion of academic

misconduct may be viewed as a global issue, the policies and systems to address it have not developed

universally.

HEI Historical Development in Canada and US: Parallel but Different

I came to study the foundations of higher education through my work as an academic integrity

scholar. The field of educational integrity scholarship is transdisciplinary, and relatively new, compared

with other forms of educational research (Macfarlane & Zhang, 2014; Eaton & Edino, 2018). Although

the different historical trajectories of Canada and the United States may be obvious to scholars of

educational foundations, I felt it was important to do my due diligence and examine these trajectories

through the lens of academic integrity scholarship. This table highlights key historical periods of

development in both countries drawing on the scholarship of Glen Jones (2014) for Canada. Julia

Christensen Hughes and I have proposed extending Jones's historical framing of the development of

higher education, focusing on academic integrity and the impact of the Internet. The American periods

are discussed by U.S.-based academic integrity scholars, Tricia Bertram Gallant (2008), along with

Rettinger & Searcy (2012).

Figure 6

Slide 6: Comparison of Higher Education Development: USA and Canada

HEI Historical Development in Canada and US: Parallel but Different

United States	Canada
Pre-Antebellum Period (Up to and including 1759)	Pre-Confederation (Up to and including 1866)
Antebellum period (1760-1860)	
Period of the Research University (1860-1945)	Confederation to WWII (1867 – 1949)
Period of Mass Education (1945 – 1975)	Post-War Education (1850 – 1994)
Contemporary Period (1975 – Present)	Era of of the Internet (1995 – Present)

(Bertram Gallant, 2008; Eaton & Christensen Hughes, forthcoming; Jones, 2014; Rettinger & Searcy, 2012).

I recognize that such historical periods are open to debate and discussion. I offer this table as a sense-making tool, to understand what the parallels and differences are. I acknowledge that the process of sense-making can lead to reductionism that misses important nuances and I wish to make it clear that I do not intend for this comparison to be regarded in any way that is absolute.

I do wish to highlight two important points, though. First, the American honor system developed in the mid-1700s, in the pre-Antebellum period. Second the American Revolution had an effect on the academic integrity that has not yet been fully explored by scholars in the field.

American Revolution (1775 – 1783): Effect on Higher Education (HE) and Academic Integrity

Figure 7

Slide 7: Effect of the American Revolution on American and Canadian Higher Education

Glen Jones (2014) has an excellent account of how the American Revolution affected the

development of education in Canada. As British loyalists moved north to Canada they catalysed English-

speaking education in this country. Meanwhile, in the United States, the U.S. Constitution (1787) set the

stage for entrepreneurial approaches to education (Fishman, 2016; Lytton, 1996), with for-profit

colleges emerging in the late 1700s and the market for fake degrees and fraudulent credentials

following shortly thereafter (Angulo, 2016). By the time the University of Toronto was launched in 1849,

in the U.S., honor codes, along with privatized education, and a market for fake educational credentials
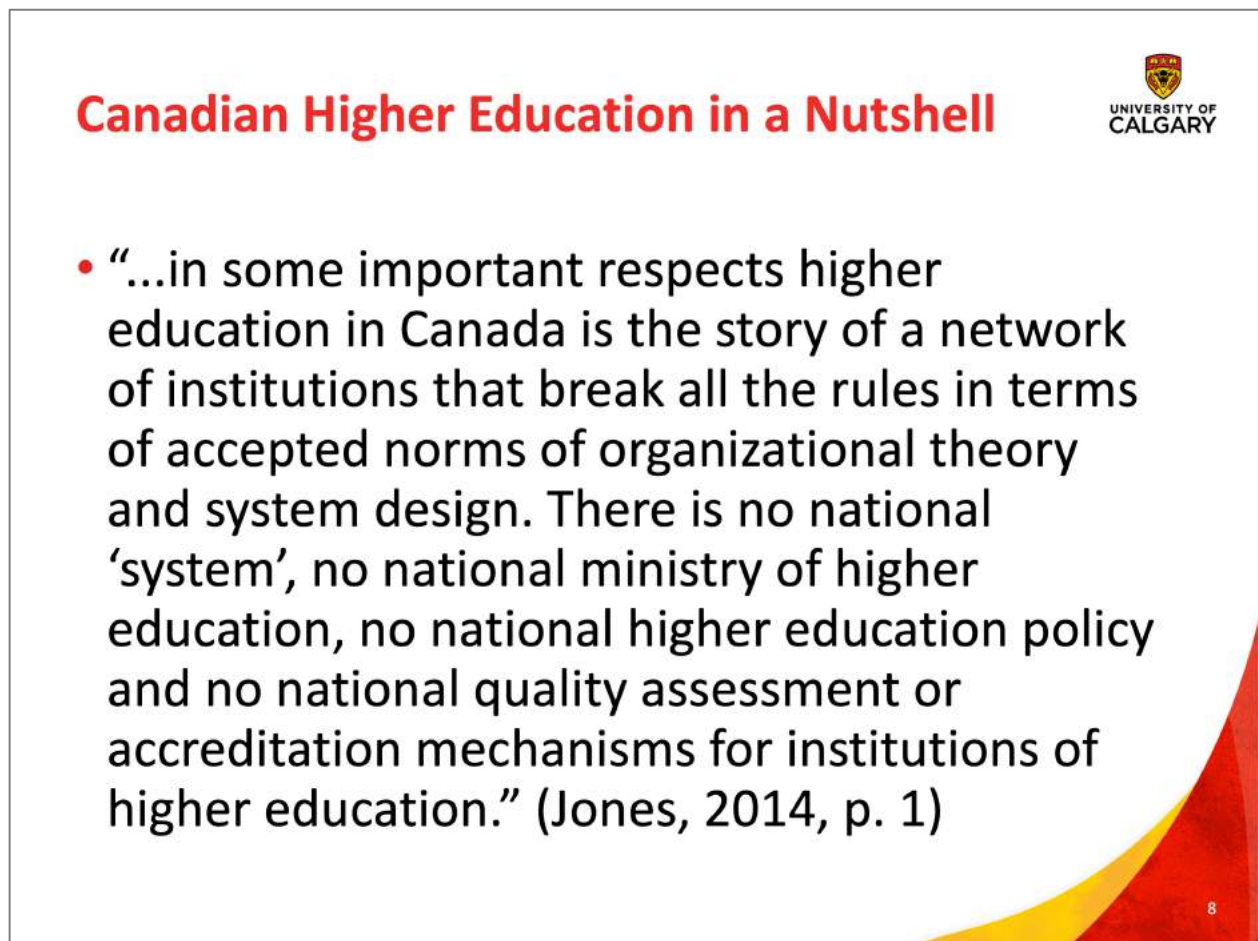
were already commonplace.

Canadian Higher Education in a Nutshell

I really like this quotation from Glen Jones that sums up higher education in Canada this way:

> *"...in some important respects higher education in Canada is the story of a network of*
>
> *institutions that break all the rules in terms of accepted norms of organizational theory and*
>
> *system design. There is no national 'system', no national ministry of higher education, no*
>
> *national higher education policy and no national quality assessment or accreditation*
>
> *mechanisms for institutions of higher education." (Jones, 2014, p. 1).*

Figure 8

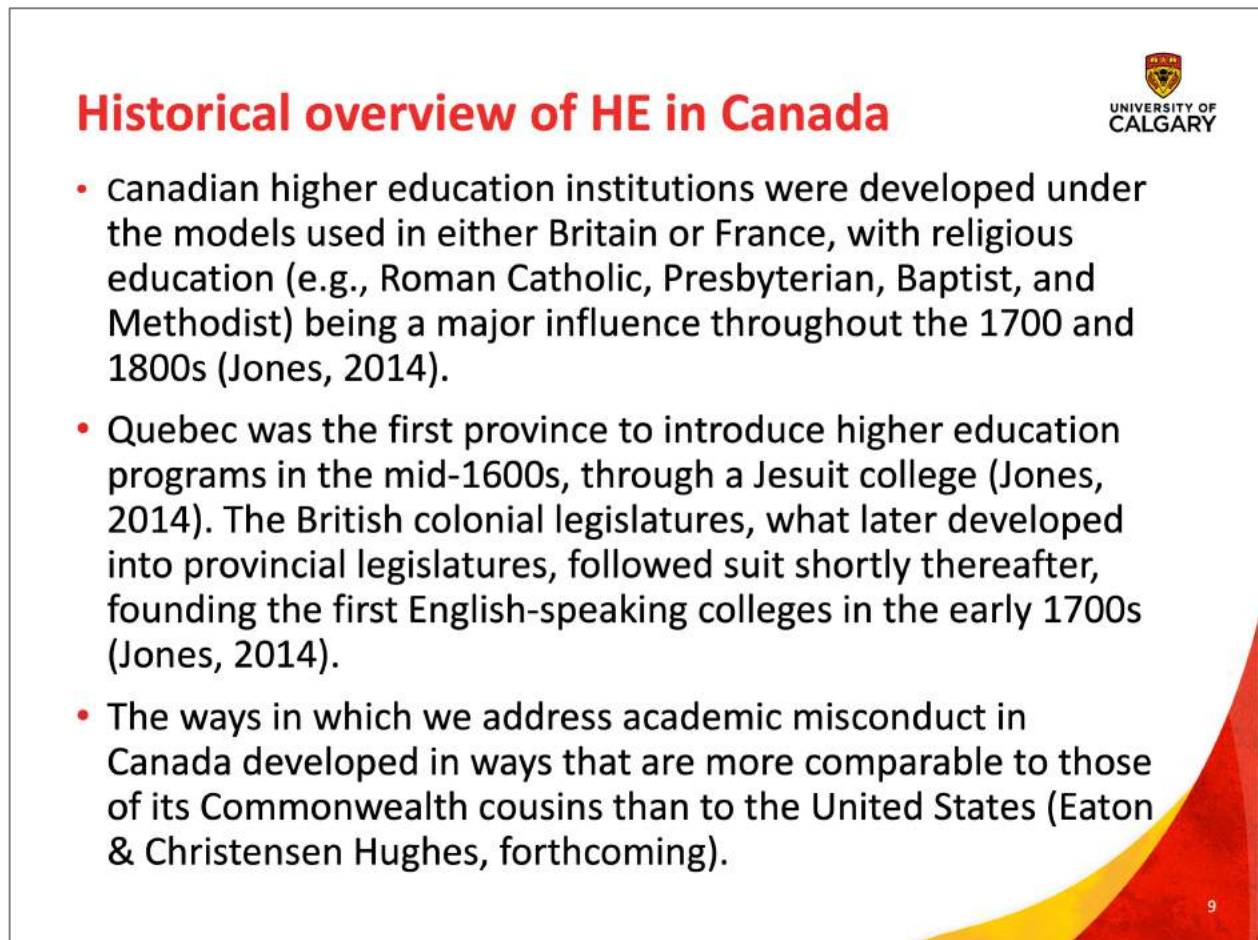*Slide 8: Canadian Higher Education in a Nutshell*

Historical Overview of HE in Canada

Again, I expect that for scholars of educational foundations, there may be nothing new on this slide.

Nevertheless, I wanted to situate my scholarship within what is currently known in order to extend it

through the lens of academic integrity in ways that are evidence-based and historically accurate.

Figure 9

Slide 9: Historical Overview of Higher Education in Canada

Canadian higher education institutions were developed under the models used in either Britain

or France, with religious education (e.g., Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist) being a

major influence throughout the 1700 and 1800s (Jones, 2014).

Quebec was the first province to introduce higher education programs in the mid-1600s, through a Jesuit college (Jones, 2014). The British colonial legislatures, what later developed into provincial legislatures, followed suit shortly thereafter, founding the first English-speaking colleges in the early 1700s (Jones, 2014).

Higher education – and the ways in which we address breaches of student conduct – in Canada developed in ways that are more comparable to those of its Commonwealth cousins than to the United States (Eaton & Christensen Hughes, forthcoming).

Findings

Figure 10

Slide 10: Findings: Traditional and Modified Honor Codes

Arguably, one of the most notable scholars and proponents of honor systems was Donald (Don) McCabe, who co-founded what is now known as the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI). Over the course of his scholarship on academic integrity from the early 1990s to his passing in 2016, he authored or co-authored dozens of works and collected survey data from more than 100,000 respondents around the world. Our knowledge about academic honor systems is drawn largely from his work and those of his colleagues (McCabe et al., 1993; 2012).

We know that "Honor codes" are deeply embedded in the United States, originating in the Southern states (McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 2002). There are two dominant types of honor codes: (a) traditional and (b) modified.

- Traditional honor codes

  - Honor code rituals and ceremonies (e.g., signing-in ceremony, integrity pep rallies); Students pledge honesty; exams are unproctored; students are obliged to report other students' violations of integrity; students often lead misconduct hearings.

- Modified honor codes (Emerged in 1990s)

  - Honor code rituals and ceremonies (e.g., signing-in ceremony); Students pledge honesty; exams may be proctored; students may be encouraged, but not obliged to report on peers who break the code; faculty and administrators may have more involvement when breaches occur.
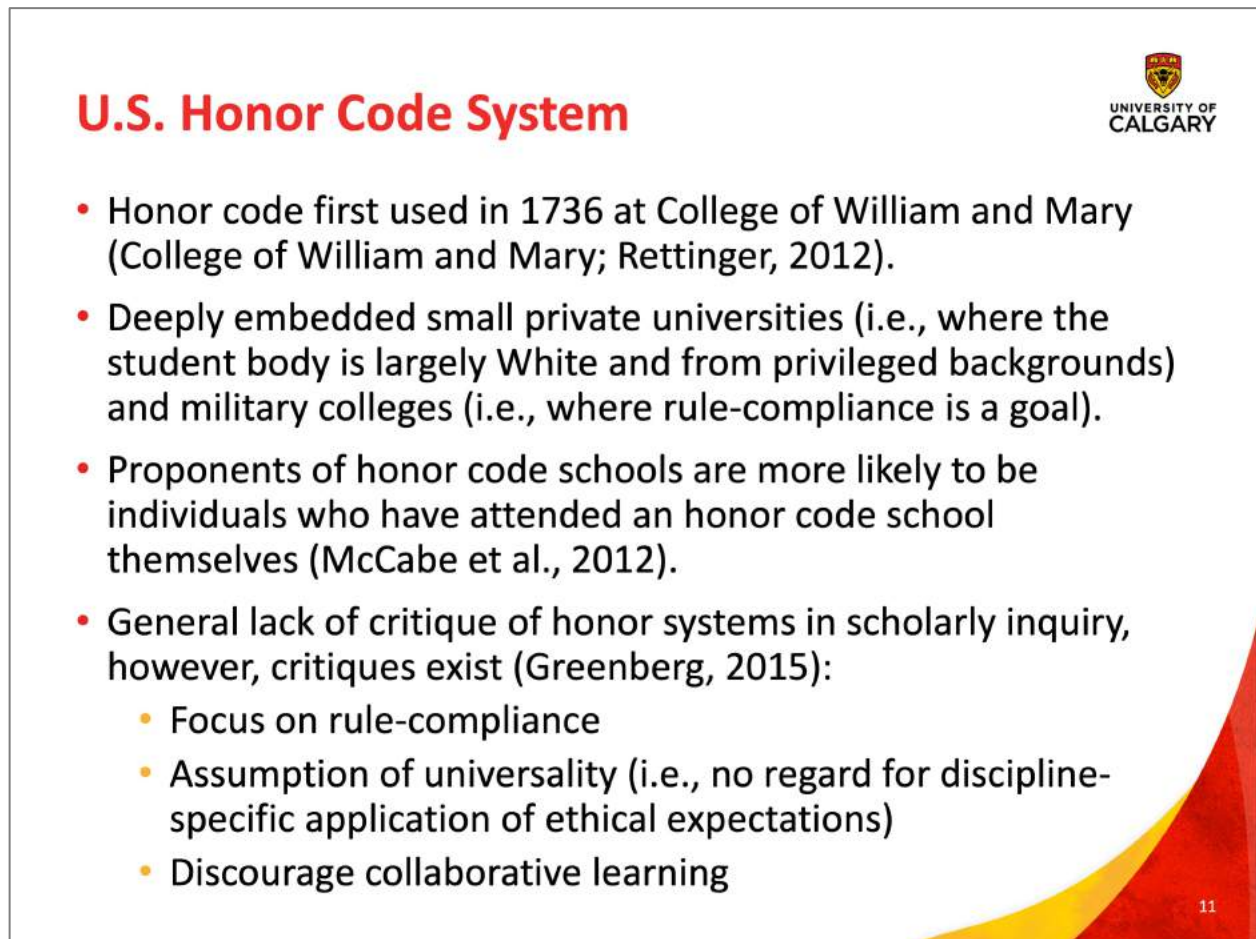
U.S. Honor Code System

The first evidence of Honor Codes dates back to 1736 at College of William and Mary (College of

William and Mary; Rettinger, 2012) in Williamsburg, Virginia in the pre-Antebellum period. It was

developed as a means to ensure honesty and honourable behaviour among the student population,

which of course, was dominated by upper class men at the time.

Honor codes are deeply embedded small private universities (i.e., where the student body is largely

White and from privileged backgrounds) and military colleges (i.e., where rule-compliance is a goal).

Figure 11

Slide 11: The American Academic Honor Code System

Proponents of honor code schools are more likely to be individuals who have attended an honor

code school themselves (McCabe et al., 2012). McCabe was a major influence on academic integrity

scholarship and also an adamant advocate of honor codes who went to an honor code school himself.

This has led to an almost disciple-like following of his work that stands largely unchallenged, even

among scholars. This extends to a lack of critique of the honor system in the scholarly discourse. The

critiques that exist are often not from scholars, but American citizens and journalists. One such

journalist, Greenberg (2015), offered a critique of honor codes that points out that they are focused on

rule-compliance and behaviour control and that there is an assumption of generalizability across

disciplines, with no regard for disciplinary differences in the application of ethical conduct. Just about

any scholar of plagiarism or academic integrity recognizes there are notable differences in citing and

referencing practices across the disciplines that make for interesting study and debate. Finally,

Greenberg notes that honor codes discourage collaborative learning as they promote individualistic

approaches to learning and knowledge claims.

Reconsidering the Honor Code...

Teresa (Teddi) Fishman, an American scholar and advocate of academic integrity who served as the

Director of the International Center for Academic Integrity that was co-founded by Donald (Don

McCabe) notes that "... severe, morality-based frameworks used in traditional honor codes and policies

may be missing the mark" (Fishman, 2016, p. 18).

Figure 12

Slide 12: Reconsidering the Honor Code

Honor Culture v. Honor Code

The Canadian and U.S. educational systems developed in dramatically different ways following the U.S. Revolution and Constitution. In my inquiries to date about the use of honor codes or honor systems in Canada, I found no evidence of these being used here until Christensen Hughes and McCabe (2006a, 2006b) began collaborating at the turn of the 21st century. Since working with McCabe, Christensen Hughes has also reconsidered her stance on honor codes, noting that the symbolic acts such as pledging to act honorably may have some value, but admits this is only one aspect of larger honor code system (see Eaton & Christensen Hughes, forthcoming).

Figure 13

Slide 13: Honor Culture versus Honor Code

Near the end of his career, McCabe et al. (2012) revised their position on honor systems, stating

that schools can have an *honor culture*, without having an *honor code* of any kind; Honor codes without

the institutional culture and systems to support them are merely lip service. I would argue that in

general, Canadian institutions aim to foster a culture of integrity but in ways that differ dramatically

from the American academic honor code system.

Further Considerations

It is important to recognize that academic honor codes originated at private American colleges for

elite students and have roots in colonialism. Research has shown that there is already an

overrepresentation of racialized and visible minorities in the reporting of student conduct violations.

Honor codes may foster bias in reporting.

Figure 14

Slide 14: Further Considerations

The American academic honor code system may be antithetical to the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada's (TRC) (2015) Call to Action . Honor codes tend to focus on rule-compliance and

punishment for failing to follow the rules. Assimilation with expected norms is an assumption of the

honor code system. It is naive to think that a system for addressing academic misconduct that is deeply

embedded in American HE, could simply be transferred to Canada.

Honour Codes in Canada: Well Intentioned, but Ill-advised

During the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, academic integrity has received heightened attention in Canadian higher education and globally (Eaton, 2020). There have been increased calls for Canadian institutions to develop honor codes similar to those that have been used in the United States (see, for example, Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2020). Such calls may be well-intentioned, but they are ill-informed insofar as they lack an understanding of the ***colonial roots*** of honor codes in the United States.

Figure 15

Slide 15: Honour Codes in Canada: Well Intentioned, but Ill-Advised

Honor codes are not a "silver bullet" to solve the problem of academic misconduct. Applying approaches

that have worked in the United States, or elsewhere, without considering how or why they might (not)

be appropriate in Canada could well result in ineffective, inappropriate, and even damaging responses

to complex ethical problems in higher education.

<div align="center">**Academic Integrity in Canada: Trends and Recommendations**</div>

Research on academic integrity in Canada has been limited, but is quickly growing as an area of scholarly

inquiry (Eaton & Edino, 2018; Eaton & Christensen Hughes, forthcoming).

Figure 16

Slide 16: Academic Integrity in Canada: Trends and Recommendations

Canadian First Nations scholars and practitioners are leading the way globally in terms of

understanding academic integrity through an Indigenous lens (Gladue, 2021; Maracle, 2020; Lindstrom,

forthcoming; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, forthcoming). Of note is that much of this scholarship has emerged during COVID-19, pointing to the need to re-think historically normative ways of approaching academic integrity and its breaches.

Rather than relying on colonial models that propagate hegemonic norms such as honor codes, and punishment for failure to comply with the rules, we need a "Made in Canada" solution for addressing academic integrity that includes student conduct, researcher ethics, and institutional integrity that respects and recognizes uniquely Canadian aspects of education, culture, and a collective commitment to decolonization and social justice as part of our ethical commitment to teaching and learning.

Restorative practices are one possible approach that offer an alternative to rule compliance-based systems. Canadians such as Paul Sopcak (2019, 2020; Sopcak & Hood, forthcoming) are leading the way with restorative practices to address student conduct issues. I advocate for further exploration of such alternatives and further, that revisions to student conduct policies and procedures include not only lawyers and academics, but also those most affected by the policies: the students themselves. In particular, we must include Indigenous and international students in the process of policy reform and discussions about how to improve the ways in which we understand and promote ethical conduct in our learning institutions and how to address breaches of integrity, regardless of whether they are academic or non-academic in nature.

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