

From ‘perplexities of plagiarism’ to ‘building cultures of integrity’: A reflection on fifteen years of academic integrity research, 2003-2018

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Abstract

Despite the relatively recent interest in academic integrity, Australian researchers have provided global leadership in reconceptualising academic integrity as a complex, multi-stakeholder responsibility which goes well beyond students plagiarising or cheating. The work of Australian researchers, while influenced by large-scale surveys of students’ self-reported cheating in the U.S., and technology-driven responses to plagiarism in the U.K., has been driven by the radically altered higher education landscape over the last two decades. Most Australian research has contextualised academic integrity as a teaching and learning issue, foregrounding the importance of students’ learning, rather than students’ character. Recent threats to academic integrity, such as contract cheating, have once again focussed attention on the role of governments, regulatory bodies and institutions to adequately resource teaching and provide critical support for vulnerable student cohorts.

Keywords: academic integrity, contract cheating, educational integrity, higher education, plagiarism.

1. Introduction

It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of academic integrity because it is fundamental to every aspect and every level of education, from pre-school right through to post-doctoral research. According to Universities Australia (UA) and with reference to both the International Center for

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Academic Integrity (ICAI, 1999/2013) and the Exemplary Academic Integrity Project (Bretag, Mahmud, van Haeringen, Stewart, & Pointon, 2013)

academic integrity means acting with the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility in learning, teaching and research. Universities consider that it is vital for students and all staff to act in an honest way and take responsibility for their actions and every part of their work. Staff should be role models to students. Academic integrity is important for an individual's and a university's reputation (UA, 2017).

Given the widely recognised ramifications of *not* upholding academic integrity in terms of students' learning outcomes, institutional reputations, educational standards and credibility, professional practice and public safety (Bretag 2018) it is somewhat surprising that as a topic of research it has had a relatively short history in Australia, beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In comparison, academic integrity research began in the United States over 50 years ago with Bowers' seminal research on students' cheating behaviours. Bowers (1964) reported that at least half of the 5,422 respondents in his study had engaged in some form of academic dishonesty. Comparable research was conducted 30 years later, with the finding that there had been no overall increase in students' self-reported cheating behaviours in the U.S., although there had been a rise in "unpermitted collaboration on written assignments" (McCabe, 1992; McCabe & Bowers, 1994). McCabe and colleagues' prolific research over two decades provided insights into students' motivations (McCabe & Trevino, 1995); individual, peer, disciplinary, and contextual influences on cheating behaviour (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe & Pavela, 1998; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1996); the role of Honor Codes (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1996); practical institutional solutions to address cheating (McCabe, 2005; McCabe & Katz, 2009); as well as the effect of students' cheating behaviour on professional practice (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1996).

As I've noted elsewhere (Bretag, 2018), research on academic integrity in the U.S. has tended to focus on self-reported cheating, the profile and motivations of those who cheat, and what could be done to prevent cheating. McCabe and colleagues' advocacy for the development of 'Honor Codes' as the means to address cheating resulted in a strongly moralistic approach which centred on students' commitment to values and ethics. However, as a field of inquiry, academic integrity research has developed

along different lines in other countries. For example, from the late 1990s, the focus in the U.K. was less on cheating and the moral development of the student, and more on students' responsibilities to avoid plagiarism through appropriate writing practices, coupled with institutional policies to deter and penalise plagiarism (Thomas & Scott, 2016).

Australian research has followed a similar trajectory and timeframe as the U.K., with an early emphasis on plagiarism, and in particular, plagiarism by international students. Massification and commercialisation of higher education, reduced public funding for higher education, increased numbers of international students, concerns for academic standards, and constant media scandals about 'soft marking' and dumbing down all contributed to a heightened sense of panic that there was an educational 'epidemic' which needed to be addressed (Bretag, 2016b).

The issue of how international students, most of whom are second language learners, use and cite sources in academic writing was a contested topic in linguistic, academic writing and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) circles in the 1990s. Some scholars argued that cultural norms had a profound impact on how non-native speaking students of English could express their opinions in English (Scollon, 1995) while others challenged the notion of culturally determined thinking and writing patterns (Bloch & Chi, 1995; Watkins & Biggs, 1996), or argued that there was little academic difference between domestic and international students (Mills, 1997). Despite differing views about the impact of socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds on students' writing practices, there was early consensus that international students require induction into the Australian academic environment, with specific academic language, literacies and disciplinary conventions training (Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Kirby, Woodhouse, & Ma, 1996).

Debates about the "text-based practices" (Warner, 1999) and "citation behaviour" (Chen, 2000) of second language learners, particularly Chinese or Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) students, led to concerns being raised about plagiarism by this group of students. The Australian media presented 'plagiarism' as the embodiment of falling academic standards in the increasingly commercialised and internationalised Australian higher education sector (see Rollison, 2001; Giglio, 2003; Illing, 2003; Lane, 2003). In most of the rhetoric from this period, the words 'plagiarism' and 'cheating' were used synonymously. Marsden's 2001 Honours thesis entitled *Who cheats at university?* was followed in 2002 by research from the *Electronic Plagiarism Detection Project* (Cooperative Action by Victorian Academic Libraries [CAVAL]) which reported that nearly 14% of the essays

in the 1,925 sample “contained an unacceptable level of unattributed materials” (O’Connor, 2003, p. 5) and 8% of students had taken large chunks of text without acknowledgement (as reported by Buckell, 2002, p. 19).

As I have suggested elsewhere, Australian academic integrity researchers and practitioners were taking a different direction to their American counterparts (Bretag 2016b). Much of the early interest in the topic in Australia focused on plagiarism, not as a failing by individual students, but as a by-product of falling educational standards and quality in the context of internationalisation. This contrasted with the U.S. where the focus was on values, morals and student breaches of academic integrity that were most often characterised as ‘cheating’ (see for example: Callahan, 2004; Davis, Drinan, & Bertram Gallant, 2009). It should be noted that the exception to this emphasis in the U.S. came from writing centre/composition instructors who regarded textual practices and academic literacies to be the central issue (see for example: Howard 1995, 1999, 2001).

2. From plagiarism to integrity: My 15 year research journey

Looking back over the 15 or so years that I have been researching academic integrity, I can divide my journey into five distinct phases, which I will outline as follows:

Phase I: 2002-2005, Practitioner research

My work was and continues to be informed by critical theory with the central theme of critiquing society and envisioning new possibilities (Cresswell, 1998). From my earliest forays into the topic I have been committed to research which prompts and enables action. I was heavily influenced by Woolcott’s (1990) insightful reminder, “You do not have to be neutral to try to be objective” (1990, p. 103). I have not been neutral when researching the myriad issues associated with academic integrity. My work has been premised on the notion that academic integrity is fundamental to and underpins every aspect of the educational enterprise. Academic integrity matters. It matters to governments, to funding bodies, to publishers and editors, to the media, to educational institutions at every level, to students, to teachers, to researchers, to families, to employers and to society. It matters to me.

This very personal motivation meant that when I started researching academic integrity, I felt despondent. I imagined that my own institution was not doing enough to thwart plagiarism, which I observed and struggled to manage in a worrying proportion of assignments in every single class for which I was responsible. When I talked with colleagues, they reported similar experiences. Why then, were policies and procedures virtually silent on how to address this issue? After interviewing 14 academics from 10 Australian universities I discovered that I was not alone (see Bretag 2007). My university was also not alone. Plagiarism and concerns about falling standards were splashed across the newspapers on a daily basis, but universities had yet to catch up and develop appropriate policies and procedures to deal with the issue.

As an early career academic, teaching communication skills to a large class of Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students in Business, I presented a short case study based on my classroom experience at my first ever conference, *Changing Identities* (2001). In my presentation I referred to the “tendency to plagiarise” by CHC students which I attributed to those students’ inadequate linguistic and academic preparation for Western tertiary study (Bretag, 2001). The debates and conversations engendered by that naïve presentation resulted in my decision to enrol in a doctoral program with one of the aims being to “explore how staff perceive the issue (of plagiarism) in relation to international English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and understand... the barriers that currently preclude the development of a culturally sensitive but firm, fair and transparent policy to deal with deliberate cases of academic dishonesty” (Bretag, 2005, pp. 107-108). I used practitioner research as “I consciously sought to make my daily work the focus of the research” (Bretag, 2005, p. 28), and “aimed to focus on both the local and the global by improving my own practice and contributing to a reshaping of policy and process at my own institution, and in the higher education sector more generally” (Bretag, 2005, p. 31).

As part of this process I engaged in action research with colleagues at the University of South Australia to develop team-taught support mechanisms for international ESL students in subjects where teaching staff were concerned about plagiarism and/or poor learning outcomes for those students (see Bretag, Horrocks, & Smith, 2002; Bretag & Kooymans, 2002; Bretag, 2004). That preliminary work has since been taken up and extended by other authors engaged in longitudinal assessments of such interventions, including Maldoni and Davies (2003), Kennelly and Maldoni (2007), Maldoni, Kennelly and Davies (2007) and Maldoni and Lear (2016). During this period, my colleagues and I published the textbook *Communication skills for international students in business* (Bretag, Crossman, & Bordia 2007) based on

the teaching materials we had been using with our own ESL students and which had a very strong focus on academic conventions and avoiding plagiarism. With more than a decade of research on the need to better support international ESL students to achieve their academic potential and meet the standards of English-instruction tertiary study (see for example Arkoudis & Kelly, 2016; Devlin & Gray, 2007; Marshall & Garry, 2006; Pecorari, 2003; Vieyra, Strickland, & Timmerman, 2013), it seems that little has changed in Australia (see Phase Five for more on this issue).

At the same time that I was involved in action research and interviewing academics on their experiences of student plagiarism, the first *Asia-Pacific Conference on Educational Integrity* entitled 'Plagiarism and other perplexities' was held at the University of South Australia. With keynote addresses by U.S.-based Don McCabe, who shared his well-established cheating research, and Jude Carroll, U.K. author of *Plagiarism: A good practice guide* (2001), the conference was largely attended by Australian Language and Learning Advisors, many of whom shared their perspectives on the socio-cultural-linguistic challenges of international students. Turnitin, since then established as the provider of the world's most widely used text-matching software, sponsored the conference. The presentation by Turnitin CEO John Barrie, which focussed on 'protecting' institutions through plagiarism detection, contrasted sharply with most of the conference presentations which were framed by understandings of plagiarism as a teaching and learning issue requiring a pedagogic response.

One influential Australian researcher, Ursula McGowan, has consistently and comprehensively written about the need to conceptualise plagiarism as an issue of scholarship and research pedagogy (McGowan, 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2010). From the earliest stages of academic integrity research, Australian researchers have distinguished between deliberate and inadvertent plagiarism, recognising that not all plagiarism is 'academic dishonesty' or cheating (see for example, Chanock, 2003; Cohen, 2003; Devlin, 2003; Green, Williams, & van Kessel 2003; Handa & Power, 2003). This emphasis has informed most of the academic integrity research in Australia, although the rise of contract cheating (discussed in Phase Five) in recent years has caused a slight shift in attitude and approach.

It should be noted that researching and speaking publicly about plagiarism, particularly in the context of international students, was at the time a highly controversial and overtly political thing to do. I was counselled on more than one occasion that this was 'not an appropriate field of inquiry', and one which would likely have a negative impact on my career. From a personal perspective, by making plagiarism one of the topics of my thesis,

entitled *Developing internationalism in the internationalised university*, I went from despondency to empowered understanding and the drive to effect change.

The 2003 conference was highly influential in setting the groundwork for my thinking, establishing important networks for future collaborations, and providing a valuable lesson about the politics of practitioner research. In the spirit of practitioner research, I had submitted a case study to the conference based on my own classroom experience. At the last minute, a senior colleague pulled this paper from the Conference Proceedings on the basis that it might result in 'reputational damage'. Whether or not this was the most appropriate course of action, I realised at this critical juncture that identifying and ostensibly 'blowing the whistle' on a particular institution (intentionally or otherwise) would be counter-productive. Rather than focus on my own institution, which the findings from my interview data had demonstrated was no worse, and in fact was arguably better than many other Australian universities, I decided to focus my research energies on systemic change. This would require a change of direction in terms of research methodology as well as a steep learning curve in relation to my own professional development.

Following the 2003 conference, Helen Marsden and I founded the Asia Pacific Forum on Educational Integrity (APFEI) to encourage collaboration across the sector. APFEI has continued to organise biennial conferences in Australia (Newcastle 2005, Adelaide 2007, Wollongong 2009, Perth 2011, Sydney 2013, Albury/Wodonga 2015, Sydney 2017), although in recent times the topic of academic integrity has also had a dedicated and well-attended stream at numerous other conferences such as Higher Education Research and Development, Academic Language and Learning, ASCILITE, TEQSA Conference and others.

Sutherland-Smith's book *Plagiarism, the internet and student learning: Improving academic integrity* (2008) summarised the key concerns during this period. Extending recommendations from the Centre for Studies in Higher Education at the University of Melbourne (James, McInnes, & Devlin, 2002), Sutherland-Smith proposed the 'plagiarism continuum' to inform discussion and the direction of plagiarism management.

Phase 2: 2006-2009 Plagiarism – not just a student issue

In December 2005, Marsden and I published the first issue of the *International Journal for Educational Integrity*¹ (IJEI), the journal of which I have been the sole Editor-in-Chief since 2006. Having started the journal using

the Open Journal System software, the IJEl was taken over by SpringerOpen in 2015 and is now published by BioMedical Central. From its inception, the IJEl has published papers on a very broad range of inter-related topics that include but extend beyond student plagiarism. Looking back, our decision to focus on 'educational' rather than 'academic' integrity was an interesting choice. As Jude Carroll said in her 2003 Keynote Address, "definitions matter", and our conceptualisation of educational integrity was strongly influenced by, but separate to, *The Fundamental Values Project* (International Center for Academic Integrity, 1999). The following excerpt from the APFEl website explains the genesis of the term 'educational' rather than 'academic' integrity:

APFEl defines educational integrity as a commitment to the key values of honesty, trust, fairness, equity, respect and responsibility, and the translation of these values into action (adapted from the Center for Academic Integrity *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity* 1999). This view of integrity involves much more than a commitment from students not to cheat or plagiarise. Educational integrity is multi-dimensional and is enabled by all those in the educational enterprise, from students to teachers, librarians, advisors, research colleagues and administrators. It is for this reason that APFEl prefaces 'integrity' with 'educational' rather than just the more conventional 'academic'. Additionally, from the first conference in 2003, APFEl has sought to be inclusive in our approach to the numerous stakeholders of integrity across the various educational sectors. (APFEl, n.d.)

The IJEl has continued to focus on educational rather than the more traditional view of academic integrity which tends to foreground student cheating and how to prevent it. However, the literature generally uses the terms interchangeably.

As a neophyte editor, with no publishing training or mentoring, I became interested in all aspects of the academic publishing process. When one of the first papers submitted to the IJEl for review was one which had already been published in the 2003 APFEl conference proceedings, I set out to explore the definitions, boundaries and practices of self-plagiarism (see Bretag & Carapiet, 2007a, 2007b; Bretag & Mahmud, 2009b). Having previously experienced the negative impact of exploring plagiarism by international students, I should have been cognisant of the highly politicised nature of plagiarism in any form. It was during this period that Australian

provocateur Dale Spender was writing about plagiarism in the media and presenting at various university campuses around the country, with the promise of a book (which unfortunately never eventuated) entitled *The Politics of Plagiarism* (see Spender, 2007; University of South Australia, 2008).

Once again, I was counselled that my area of interest was not an appropriate topic of research, and that what I was doing amounted to little more than a ‘witch hunt’ of hard-working and well-published researchers. While I was quick to defend my research as being motivated by the need for systemic change rather than seeking to identify individuals, just a few years later, a group of so-called ‘plagiarism hunters’ began to collaborate in Germany with the sole purpose of identifying and shaming public figures (Rothschild, 2011). The PhD thesis of German Defence Minister Theodor zu Guttenberg was found to have been plagiarised, ultimately resulting in his resignation, as was the thesis of the German Vice President of the European Parliament, Silvana Koch-Mehrin. Questions about numerous others dissertations were also raised on the collaborative VroniPlag website de.vroniplag.wikia.com (Kelsey, 2011). Others such as Jonathon Bailey in the U.S., who describes himself as a ‘plagiarism fighter’, also set about to identify and punish plagiarists (Bailey, n.d.). Opinion has continued to be divided about the ethics of naming and shaming individuals, and the topic of plagiarism hunting remains a controversial one – but it should be noted that in Australia, researchers have not sought to ‘out’ plagiarist public figures.

And this was certainly not our intention in 2007. We recognised that self-plagiarism is a “complex and delicate issue” (Bretag & Carapiet, 2007a) and a “contentious issue in academic research” (Bretag & Carapiet, 2007b), and that there is no agreement regarding how to define or identify it, or even if it exists. Samuelson (1994) suggested that, “It is, in truth, a far more complex matter to determine what is self-plagiarism versus what is fair use” (p. 25). While many academics continue to argue that self-plagiarism doesn’t exist, because “you can’t steal from yourself”, we agreed with Hexham (1999) who had maintained that just as it is generally considered unacceptable for students to submit the same assignment for credit in multiple courses, self-plagiarism by academics does exist, particularly when the author attempts to deceive the reader (Bretag & Carapiet, 2007a). It is not without some irony that in writing this review, I have had to revisit my previous published work and paraphrase and summarise the key ideas, all the while trying to avoid charges of self-plagiarism.

Our small contribution to the topic was to conduct a pilot project which sought to identify self-plagiarism in Australian academic publications, using the definition “10% or more textual re-use of any one previous publication

by the author without attribution” (Bretag & Carapiet 2007a, p. 1). Based on analysis of 269 electronically available published journal articles, we found that 60% of the authors in the sample had committed self-plagiarism in at least one of their published papers in the period 2003-2006 (Bretag & Carapiet, 2007a). We also looked at university policies and identified a lack of specific guidelines in current university codes of ethical conduct relating to textual re-use in academic publications (Bretag & Carapiet, 2007b). Finally, we sought to unpack the difference between self-plagiarism and appropriate textual re-use (Bretag & Mahmud 2009b), an article which continues to be consulted whenever the topic of self-plagiarism finds its way onto various discussion forums.

I have continued this interest in publication ethics, particularly in the context of the highly competitive ‘publish or perish’ atmosphere of contemporary academia (see for example, Randall-Moon et al., 2011; Bretag, 2012b). As I have stated in numerous public forums (see for example, Bretag, 2012a; Bretag, 2013; Bretag, 2015), much of the academic integrity research appears to hold students to a higher standard than that expected of academics and researchers (or senior managers). This view was also shared by Spender (2007) in regard to a *Higher Chronicle* investigation into staff misconduct:

On campus there was one rule for staff and another for students, and not just in the general reluctance to follow up offences by academics. Another double standard was about plagiarism itself: what could pass as standard practice in staff behaviour could be regarded as plagiarism when done by students (para 11).

Despite the conclusion of McCabe and colleagues that Honor Codes (student-led academic integrity policy and breach decision-making) provide the strongest antidote to the problem of student cheating, Bertram Gallant was a relatively early U.S. advocate for conceptualising academic integrity as a teaching and learning issue. In parallel with U.K. and Australian researchers, she called for campuses to shift from asking, “How do we stop students from cheating?” to “How do we ensure students are learning?” (Bertram Gallant, 2008). As mentioned earlier, from the earliest days of academic integrity research in Australia, McGowan had been writing about the need to conceptualise plagiarism as an issue of scholarship and pedagogy, suggesting that undergraduate study should be likened to a research ‘apprenticeship’ (McGowan, 2009).

With colleagues Davis and Drinan, Bertram Gallant (2009) continued to explore student cheating as a teaching and learning issue, with the claim that

confronting “student cheating is essential to the rejuvenation of teaching and its return to its central location in our educational systems” (p. ix). In all of her work, Bertram Gallant has highlighted the opportunity that cheating provides for a ‘teachable moment’ – for students, teachers, administrators, parents and all educational stakeholders (Davis, Drinan, & Bertram Gallant, 2009, p. 179). As Editor of *Creating the Ethical Academy* (2011) and in Chapter 3 of that book, Bertram Gallant and Kalichman proposed a systems framework which situated individual student cheating as being “shaped by systemic factors and the environment in which individuals live, study and work” (Bertram Gallant, 2011, p. 8; see also Bertram Gallant, 2008). This systems approach to understanding academic misconduct and creating cultures of integrity has had an important impact on my own work and on the development of the academic integrity literature more broadly (see Bretag & Mahmud, 2016; Morris & Carroll, 2016).

Ensuring consistency in responding to academic integrity breaches (particularly plagiarism) preoccupied policy-makers and practitioners around the world, and in the U.K. resulted in the project, *Academic Misconduct Benchmarking Research* (AMBeR) (Tennant, Rowell, & Duggan, 2007). This project led to a nation-wide approach to detecting and responding to plagiarism that has continued to rely heavily on the text-matching software Turnitin. As I have stated elsewhere (Bretag, 2016b), such universal acceptance of Turnitin was not necessarily shared in other regions of the world. Influential writers in the U.S. and elsewhere (eg Howard, 2001; Pecorari, 2012) were less welcoming of the software, which had been erroneously touted as ‘plagiarism detection software’. In addition to drawing attention to the fact that no software can ‘detect plagiarism’ (the best it can do is highlight text matches), concerns were expressed that using the software would establish an adversarial relationship between teacher and student which would not be conducive to learning (Howard, 2001). In the Australian context, and well before the outcomes of the AMBeR project, Sutherland-Smith and Carr (2005, p. 94) reminded educators and policymakers that Turnitin should not be considered “a panacea to plagiarism”.

As a result of this early interrogation of the value of the software coupled with a strong educative approach to academic integrity (Keuskamp & Sliuzas, 2007; Bretag & Mahmud, 2009a; Sutherland-Smith & Carr, 2005) text-matching software in most Australian universities continues to be used as an educative tool (for example, students are permitted to submit drafts to Turnitin so that they can correct referencing errors ahead of submission) as well as to detect potential plagiarism.

Phase 3: 2010-2012 Institutional responsibilities

As understandings of academic integrity started moving away from focussing on plagiarism as a student-only issue, there was increasing recognition of the need for universities to take responsibility for establishing and implementing appropriate policies. As I have noted elsewhere (Bretag, 2016b), this new emphasis can be traced to Gabrielle Grigg's 2010 doctoral thesis entitled *Plagiarism in higher education: Confronting the policy dilemma*. Not surprisingly, given the focus until that point on plagiarism, Grigg identified that every Australian university had a policy on plagiarism (Grigg, 2010, p. 185) as opposed to a policy on academic integrity. Based on linguistic analysis of those plagiarism policies, Grigg concluded that, "institutional policy predominately depicts plagiarism as an offence, with educative considerations incorporated into this framework" (2010, p. 8).

Having conducted focus groups to explore Australian students' perceptions of plagiarism, Gullifer and Tyson (2010) found that students viewed plagiarism negatively, for example with fear, confusion or resentment. The authors then turned their attention to students' engagement with and understandings of plagiarism policy at Charles Sturt University (2014), concluding that, "only half of the participants had read the policy on plagiarism and that confusion regarding what behaviour constitutes plagiarism was evident" (Gullifer & Tyson, 2014, p. 1202).

Sutherland-Smith (2010) used critical discourse analysis to examine the disjuncture between what she described as the "moral panic" engendered by ongoing media scandals and institutional responses to plagiarism. Sutherland-Smith was one of the first Australian authors to draw attention to the legal discourse underpinning many plagiarism policies and processes, not just in Australia, but around the world. She challenged the higher education sector to strive towards "sustainable reform" rather than retribution. In 2011, Sutherland-Smith further argued that many plagiarism policies and processes in Australia, Canada and the U.K. "bear closer resemblance to punitive legal outcomes than the broader ethical approaches usually associated with concepts of justice and fairness" (p. 127). This work has been instrumental in contributing to a reconceptualisation of the purpose, function and impact of Australian university plagiarism/academic integrity policies.

As the topic of academic integrity policy continued to be discussed in the literature, in 2010 the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) awarded \$174,000 in funding to an APFEL research group comprised of Tracey Bretag and Margaret Green (University of South Australia), Ruth Walker and Margaret Wallace (University of Wollongong), Julianne East (La

Trobe University), Colin James (University of Newcastle), Lee Partridge (University of Western Australia) and Ursula McGowan (University of Adelaide). The *Academic Integrity Standards Project* (AISP) aimed to extend the work of East (2009) who had advocated for universities to align policy, teaching and learning practices, academic integrity decision-making and academic integrity review processes. The following excerpt from the AISP website provides an overview of the project:

The Academic Integrity Standards Project: Aligning Policy and Practice in Australian Universities (2010-2012) aimed to develop a shared understanding across the Australian higher education sector of academic integrity standards with the aim of improving the alignment of academic integrity policies and their implementation... The project reviewed policies and procedures and the ways that universities educate students and staff about their academic integrity expectations. The project provided an overview of current responses to student breaches of academic integrity by analysing Australian universities' online policies... (AISP, n.d.)

The key conceptual deliverable of the AISP was the identification of five core elements of exemplary academic integrity policy: access, approach, responsibility, detail and support. The five core elements were informed by the Higher Education Academy (U.K.) document published at around the same time, *Policy works: Recommendations for reviewing policy to manage unacceptable academic practice in higher education* (Morris & Carroll, 2011), which provided a valuable point of reference and springboard for Australian-focused principles (see Bretag, Mahmud, East et al., 2011; Bretag, Mahmud, Wallace, et al., 2011).

AISP also conducted a large student survey on academic integrity (n=15,304) which aimed to explore Australian students' understandings of academic integrity and how best to inform and support them in avoiding an academic integrity breach (Bretag et al., 2014).

The key findings from the survey were that:

the majority of respondents reported a good awareness of academic integrity and knowledge of academic integrity policy at their university and were satisfied with the information and support they receive. International students expressed a lower awareness of academic integrity and academic integrity policy, and lower confidence in how to avoid academic integrity breaches;

and postgraduate research student respondents were the least satisfied with the information they had received about how to avoid an academic integrity breach. (Bretag et al., 2014, p. 1150)

Around this time, my own university established the Academic Integrity Officer (AIO) system based on the Oxford Brookes model of ‘Academic Conduct Officers’. This approach to breach decision-making had been promoted by Jude Carroll at the first Asia-Pacific Conference on Educational Integrity in 2003. I began my own journey as an AIO, relishing the opportunity to put into practice my burgeoning understandings of academic integrity. The preliminary work we had done in identifying self-plagiarism by researchers became very useful as I now had a framework for identifying and responding to student plagiarism (see for example Bretag & Mahmud, 2009a). The process of adjudicating students’ academic integrity breaches prompted much personal reflection on the impact of institutional policy and procedures on students’ learning and life beyond the university. I was interested to know how policy could be consistently and fairly applied, while simultaneously recognising and taking into account the complexity of students’ lives (see Bretag, 2008; Bretag & Green, 2009, 2010).

This challenge has continued to preoccupy me and other academic integrity breach decision-makers, particularly in the Australian context where higher education is both under-resourced and characterised by an increasingly diverse student body. Academic integrity breach decision-making also has a personal impact on the staff who must determine outcomes for students. The “emotional work” of determining outcomes for academic integrity breaches has not been fully explored, although preliminary findings from interviews with 15 academic integrity breach decision-makers has laid the groundwork for further research (Bretag, 2011; see also Bretag & Green, 2014).

Phase 4: 2013-2015 Academic integrity – a national priority

Following the completion of the AISP, and in response to significant policy shifts in higher education towards the end of 2012, the Australian Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) called for project proposals specifically relating to academic integrity. Four projects received funding as follows:

- 1) *Embedding and extending exemplary academic integrity policy and support frameworks across the higher education sector* (‘Exemplary Academic Integrity Project’ [EAIP] led by Tracey Bretag at the University of South Australia). The EAIP aimed to extend and embed the five core

elements of exemplary academic integrity policy identified by the AISP across the broader higher education sector, including both public universities and private providers of higher education. In particular, this project aimed to develop resources for student groups identified as needing support: international EAL students and postgraduate research students (EAIP, 2013).

- 2) *Working from the Centre: Supporting unit/course coordinators to implement academic integrity policies, resources and scholarship* ('Building Academic Integrity', led by Fiona Henderson and Paul Whitelaw at Victoria University). This project focused on the role of the unit/course coordinator in building academic integrity in teaching and learning. The project aimed to develop resources to assist unit/course coordinators in ensuring that academic integrity policies are appropriately adhered to (Henderson et al., n.d.).
- 3) *Academic integrity in Australia – understanding and changing culture and practice* (led by Abhaya Naya at Macquarie University). This project aimed to develop guidelines for policy development and benchmarking, create online resources that address identified cultural issues and gaps, and establish student societies to promote peer-driven cultural change (OLT, 2012).
- 4) *Plagiarisms and related issues in assessment not involving text* (led by Simon at the University of Newcastle). This project aimed to investigate the understanding of both academics and students about academic integrity in assessment items that are not written text, such as computer games and visual images. The project explored how both staff and students regard such breaches, and how academics discourage, detect and respond to such breaches (OLT, 2012).

As I have noted elsewhere (Bretag, 2016b), the allocation of OLT funds for such numerous and diverse projects represented a significant investment in nurturing shared understandings of academic integrity across the Australian higher education sector. It was apparent from the broad range of topics that the field had developed a level of sophistication and understanding that had gone well beyond the original preoccupation with international students' citation practices, although this group of students continues to be acknowledged as a stakeholder group in need of support. All of the projects have made important contributions, both theoretically and practically, to the way that academic integrity is articulated, understood and promulgated in Australian higher education (for examples of some of the research outputs, see Bretag, Mahmud, East et al., 2011; Bretag,

Mahmud, Wallace, et al., 2014; Mahmud & Bretag, 2013a, 2013b; Nayak et al., 2013; Simon, 2016; Simon, Cook, Sheard, Carbone, & Johnson, 2013; Simon et al., 2014).

In parallel with the 'Students as Partners' movement (see for example, Matthews, 2017 and other work in the *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal* <https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/raise/index>), academic integrity research in Australia started to emphasise the importance of collaborating with students to promote academic integrity (Bretag & Mahmud, 2016). As Director of the Academic Integrity Office at University of California, San Diego, Tricia Bertram Gallant had established the *Academic Integrity Student Matters Organisation*. This initiative provided inspiration for a comparable student-led organisation at Macquarie University which aimed at developing a culture of academic integrity on campus (Richards, Saddiqui, White, McGuigan, & Homewood, 2016). Sonia Saddiqui is currently completing doctoral research on the outcomes of this initiative (see Saddiqui, 2016).

De Maio's (2015) PhD thesis *The Perceptions of Academic Staff of Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures and Their Responses to Student Plagiarism in Australian Universities*, continued the national interest in policies and procedures, extending the enquiry to what many consider to be the other key stakeholder in academic integrity – staff. Increased attention to the role of teaching staff is also evident in recent research by Harper et al., (2018) and doctoral work in progress by Prentice (2018).

With so much publicly funded research, doctoral work and papers being published and widely disseminated at Australian and international conferences, there was a sense of urgency regarding the implementation of evidence-based approaches. The topic had gone from being a small subject on the periphery of 'acceptable' research to being highly lauded, impactful and mainstream. The influence of Australian academic integrity research is evident in the high-level documents published at the time, including the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* which foregrounded and embedded academic and research integrity across multiple strands of the Framework. The Tertiary Education Quality Assurance Agency (TEQSA) also provided a *Guidance Note on Academic Integrity* which was evidently influenced by the explosion of Australian research on the topic (TEQSA, 2017).

Numerous Australian researchers demonstrated leadership on a wide variety of inter-related issues in the *Handbook of Academic Integrity*, a reference book which aimed to bring together international perspectives on this "very complex, interdisciplinary field of research" (Bretag, 2016a, p. v).

Contributions by Tracey Bretag, Saadia Mahmud, Helen Marsden, Sue McGowan, Claire Aitchison, Susan Mowbray, Gigi Foster, Mark Brimble, Julianne East, Wendy Sutherland-Smith, Colin James, Simon, Annette Braunack-Mayer, Jackie Street, Mark Israel, Brian Martin, David Vaux and Sonia Saddiqui accounted for 20 of the 72 peer reviewed chapters presented in the book. In addition to existing research foci such as definitions, breaches, responses, policy, practice, academic literacies, digital technologies, teaching and learning, discipline-specific issues, research integrity and training, fraud, corruption and systemic approaches to developing cultures of integrity, the *Handbook of Academic Integrity* included a section on contextual factors which impact on academic integrity. Researchers explored the impact of socio-economic and political forces, demonstrating that, “‘a perfect storm’ of commercialisation, massification, disengagement, resource constraints, short termism, and increased opportunity for fraudulent behaviour” (Bretag, 2016a, p. 306) has influenced student and staff (mis)behaviour in higher education.

Phase 5: 2016-2018 Emerging threats to academic integrity

With the demise of the OLT on the horizon, and in the wake of media scandals (Mitchell, 2015; Chung, 2015; Visentin, 2015a, 2015b) about Australian university students outsourcing their assessment to third parties – a behaviour known as ‘contract cheating’ – the OLT commissioned one final academic integrity project. The *Contract Cheating and Assessment Design Project* aimed to investigate the prevalence of contract cheating in Australian higher education, students’ and educators’ experiences with and attitudes towards contract cheating, the individual, contextual and institutional factors that are correlated with contract cheating, and the potential relationship between authentic assessment design and contract cheating (see Bretag et al., 2018b; Harper et al., 2018).

The *Contract Cheating and Assessment Design Project* found that the key determinants which influence contract cheating behaviour by university students are Language Other than English status (confirming decades of previous research regarding this vulnerable student cohort), the perception that there are ‘lots of opportunities to cheat’ and dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment (Bretag et al., 2018a). The study also explored the impact of the broader institutional setting on educators’ ability to minimise, identify and respond to contract cheating (Harper et al., 2018) and the relationship between assessment design and contract cheating (Bretag et al., 2018b; Ellis & van Haeringen et al., in press).

During the two years of the *Contract Cheating and Assessment Design Project*, numerous other Australian researchers have investigated various aspects of the contract cheating phenomenon. Experiments in authentic teaching situations have been conducted to explore the challenges of detecting contract cheating (Lines, 2016; Dawson & Sutherland-Smith 2018a, 2018b), concluding that it is often possible to detect, particularly when educators are alert to the possibility that it is occurring. Practitioners have provided advice about *how* to detect contract cheating (Rogerson, 2017), or described teaching settings where interventions had reduced contract cheating (see for example, Baird & Clare, 2017). More recent research has sought to understand why students choose *not* to engage in this type of cheating (Rundle, Curtis, & Clare, 2018). Researchers have also begun to investigate the underlying business model of commercial academic writing companies (Ellis, Zucker, & Randall, 2018), and the marketing strategies used to promote these services (Rowland et al., 2018). Moving beyond individual and institutional responsibilities, there has been preliminary exploration of the potential role of legislation to make commercial contract cheating services illegal (Draper & Newton, 2017; Draper, Ibezim, & Newton, 2017; Steel, 2017).

With or without the support of a national funding body such as the OLT, academic integrity research in Australia appears to have come of age. There is increasing recognition across all educational sectors and disciplines that this is a topic not only worthy of research, but one that is critically important to the value of qualifications, the reputations of institutions and the preservation of Australia's multi-billion dollar higher education sector. Most recently, high schools, vocational education and training colleges and Non-University Higher Education Providers (NUHEPs) have joined the academic integrity conversation (see, for example, Bretag et al., 2019).

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has continued to take a proactive role in monitoring and promoting academic integrity across the higher education sector. In response to the MyMaster scandal, TEQSA requested those universities implicated in the media reports to provide evidence of their investigations and responses. The findings from that request led to the development of the *Good Practice Note: Addressing Contract Cheating to Safeguard Academic Integrity* (Bretag, 2017) which incorporated findings and recommendations from the *Contract Cheating and Assessment Design Project* and other Australian research. Shortly after the release of the *Good Practice Note*, Universities Australia (UA) published their own *Academic Integrity Best Practice Principles* (UA, 2017) to further embed the proactive, positive and educationally focussed approach which has been

at the heart of Australian academic integrity research from the earliest forays into this topic.

3. 2019 Looking forward

Recent research has contextualised contract cheating as occurring within an environment of higher education disruption, but the following quotation could be just as easily applied to all threats to academic integrity:

Concerns about contract cheating can be situated within a broader context of global higher education disruption, one in which the social, political and economic role of universities is undergoing unprecedented change. The massification and internationalisation of higher education has led to larger and increasingly diverse student cohorts, often without corresponding growth in institutional funding. As a result, universities have progressively come to operate as commercial enterprises, with all operations – from student recruitment, retention, and graduate outcomes, to research funding, outputs and university rankings – driven by competitive strategies. Job opportunities for graduates are increasingly uncertain, threatened by disruptive technologies and fluctuating job markets, which contributes to a rise in ‘credentialism’ (Brown, 2001) and more transactional and disengaged approaches to learning. A booming ‘sharing economy’², which facilitates the exchange of goods and services via online platforms, allows individuals to outsource almost any task, large or small, creating a shift from ‘you are what you own’ to ‘you are what you can access’ (Richardson, 2015). This context represents a ‘perfect storm’ in which contract cheating can perhaps be seen as an unsurprising symptom of an ecosystem under extreme stress (Bretag et al., 2018a, pp. 1-2)

Australian higher education has, in fact, been “under extreme stress” for some time, and it is this environment which has motivated most of my own and many other Australian researchers’ interest in academic integrity. After more than 15 years of research on the topic, and in response to the call by TEQSA for a “coordinated, collaborative approach” (2017a, p. 29), 14 Australian universities joined U.K. and N.Z. based universities to develop an online academic integrity training program for higher education students, teachers and professional staff published by Epigeum³ (part of Oxford

University Press). In contrast with previous training programs which have emphasised students' responsibilities to avoid plagiarism, the Epigeum Academic Integrity program articulates the complexities of the topic, the values and practices of academic integrity, and the role of all members of the academic community to promote and uphold academic integrity. The high representation of Australian universities in the Epigeum Development Group was indicative of the global leadership of Australian researchers and practitioners.

It is evident that much progress has been made in our understandings of academic integrity—what it means, how to promote it, how to embed it in assessment, how to respond to breaches, and how to ensure that it underpins every aspect of scholarly work. Unfortunately, that does not mean that once-and-for-all solutions have been found, or that there are no more issues to explore and questions to answer. For example, recent concerns about contract cheating, coupled with the propensity of some students to outsource their academic writing to online tools such as paraphrasing and translation software (see Rogerson 2017; Prentice & Kinden 2018) indicate that despite the best efforts of institutions and educators, a small percentage of students will continue to take shortcuts with their learning. That doesn't mean we should regard all students to be 'cheaters' or give up on educational responses to the issue.

The Australian research agenda benefitted from early international research and consciously took a direction away from student cheating and plagiarism towards developing educational frameworks which focussed on learning and teaching. Over time, this agenda has evolved to one which emphasises the need to build cultures which foreground learning, teaching and researching with integrity. Given that the highly commercialised, internationalised and under-funded nature of Australian higher education is unlikely to change any time soon, new and different threats to academic integrity can be anticipated. In light of the achievements of Australian researchers spanning more than 15 years, we can have confidence that such challenges will be met with evidence-based rather than moralistic responses.

4. Notes

1. International Journal for Educational Integrity is available online at www.edintegrity.com
2. The sharing economy is also referred to as the collaborative, gig, on-demand and crowd-sourcing economy (Richardson, 2015).

3. Epigeum Academic Integrity Program is available online at <https://www.epigeum.com/courses/studying/academic-integrity>

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