

Empowering Drivers that Ignite Change: Partnering With Students In A Collective Effort To Counter Contract Cheating Through The IDoA

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Keywords: *Academic Integrity campaign, contract cheating, international day of action, student leaders, student-faculty alliances*

RESEARCH AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The International Day of Action against Contract Cheating (IDoA) has witnessed increasing interest since it was initiated in 2016, with the purpose: to educate campus communities about the growing threat of contract cheating, and to achieve local and global impact - at educational communities, governments, and all citizens - by raising our voices in unison against it. The social media exposure achieved through promotion of the day/its events provides the medium for voices raised against its growing threat. The ideas and activities spawned on campuses globally are particularly telling examples of the kind of engagement academic communities have achieved in an effort to better advance a culture of integrity at their institutions.

The purpose of this workshop is to develop awareness of good practices being implemented around the IDoA. The session aims to:

- overview early results of the initiative as a promising and growing proactive strategy towards advancing academic integrity values more generally and combatting contract cheating particularly;
- reveal why/how any institutional effort advancing the initiative needs to create diverse partnerships, but place students as its most central partners and ‘drivers’
- help participants explore and generate strategies on how to address commonly shared challenges in organizing an IDoA, e.g. initiating collaboration with potential institutional partners to coordinate an institution-wide event; engaging constituents

It is hoped that participants will take away a vision of how to cultivate an integrity culture change having evaluated sufficiently students’ more creative and impactful role.

Those who serve in pertinent roles to advance academic integrity initiatives at their institution (whether as part of an AI office or not) especially representing institutions which may not yet have registered for the IDoA but intend or hope to do so in future are the anticipated, direct audience of this workshop. However, any individual interested to gain an overview of challenges and successful outcomes related to the IDoA can clearly benefit from attending the session.

The presenter will share her experience, both as the key member at her institution organizing such events, but also as a member of the ICAI 2019 IDoA Committee, leading IDoA event organization with hope of advancing participation.

METHODOLOGY

The workshop will encourage audience participation through use of an audience response system and attendees' smart phones. Those attending will respond to prompts highlighting factors integral to organizing an IDoA [e.g. constituents' attitudes; what happens when centralized support is lacking] (~5 mins), inviting reflection and group discussion to address challenges identified - particularly regarding forming alliances with various stakeholders to advance a collaborative campus effort (10-15 mins). The session also shares the presenter's institution as case study of challenges and successes faced over three years of IDoA participation – showcasing particularly students' creative resourcefulness and how they depicted a celebration of academic integrity values that resonated with students and educators alike (10 mins).

A brief comparative overview of what the initiative has ignited globally since 2016 as significant 'solution' will be presented and how sustained commitment to combatting contract cheating is becoming more visible, impactful, empowering. A good deal of the IDoA success achieved by many institutions globally is already documented online. Selections presented:

- mining of social media (particularly Twitter), assisted by the movement's use of hashtags (#defeatthecheat and #excelwithintegrity) (post 2018 IDoA – Feb.2019);
- website visits of HEIs, which search engines reveal as showcasing IDoA activities (post 2018 IDoA – Feb.2019);
- assumed results from the incremental organizational and promotional steps taken by the specially formed ICAI 2019 IDoA Committee (materials creation, webinars, etc.)
- observed and recorded changes in student and faculty perceptions and motivation over three years of conducting IDoA at the presenter's institution (cf Mourelatos, 2019)

Published research on contract cheating is limited, particularly in relation to solutions – even when exploring more traditional ones involving detection and punishment. In a recently created themed collection on the topic in a highly respected journal, in fact, alongside the few existing articles on various topics spanning fifteen months, opportunity for topics to be explored in-depth “and from multiple perspectives, so that meaningful responses and solutions can be instigated” as its Editor-in-Chief notes (Bretag, n.d.) reveals no writing on a proactive and positive stance, as afforded by the IDoA's call to action.

Publications focusing on AI campaigns more broadly – although also infrequent - were sought out if they highlighted students as agents in such promotional campaigns but bypassed if

they encompassed the more traditional scope of students as passive recipients of information.

Finally, at the presenter's institution a distinct limitation is that no empirical evidence on attitudes or perceptions exists. It is by way of observation, images, video capture and testimonial (as well as some internal data unable to be shared) that impact is evident.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The first article on contract cheating appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education, depicting a clear threat by an individual who wrote "our students papers" (Dante, 2010). The article became the most widely-viewed in the forum's history. Some readers were intrigued, most – horrified, but many were left quite uncertain what to make of the thus far covert phenomenon. Today, international headlines on contract cheating have become common place, with the industry estimated as involving disconcerting numbers of student clients (potentially ~15%) (Newton, 2018), contractors, and surpassing an estimated one billion dollars (Lancaster, as qtd. in Gikandi, 2020). Apart from traditional scopes discussions take (e.g. cheater's psychology; commercialization of education; the contact cheating industry as a 'response' to that commercialization) the effort to devise and act on effective strategies is generally compared to an uphill battle in this ever-evolving and pernicious industry.

The threats contract cheating poses to the education sector have been polarizing individuals for years – within and outside of the academy - on how to act or the *purposefulness* of acting to thwart it. Among a few of the scopes frequently addressed in the academic research and popular press regarding this intentional and most flagrant form of cheating are how it devalues learning/a degree's worth, compromises institutional reputations, decreases society's faith in higher education, and demands accountability.

One boon over the past few years, however, is the strong positioning of governments and qualifying agencies (TEQSA – Australia; QAA – U.K.; CHEA – U.S., among the largest). Another boon, argue others, is the creation of artificial intelligence solutions to help catch the cheaters. Can we not hope to address the issues more amongst ourselves - directly?

In particular areas globally, there may even be additional challenges handicapping the ability to address contract cheating – especially when attitudes towards cheating within certain regions depict what is seen as a more general social commentary concerning levels of corruption (Lancaster et.al., 2019).

It is in this and other ways, likely, that when students become vocal in their responses to issues revolving around contract cheating – as through a campaign – that they may feel they are able to play an important role – impacting understanding and response to a *social* problem. Positing contract cheating as a social issue, in fact, Khan et. al. (2020) examine how IDoA campaigns achieve similar outcomes to other socially focused campaigns (from alcohol abuse, health issues, even death) and serve as important tools to increase

understanding of incumbent factors, raise the integrity culture of an institution, and identify the positive role students play in influencing peers. It seems of little surprize then that students feel proud when involved in such efforts.

We can take this position one step further, posing the question: what predicted degree of success is possible when faculty-institutional synergies are created with students and students are given the opportunity to lead initiatives? A common pattern within research depicts the need for faculty and staff to work in partnership with students and to have them take active/major roles, as advocates or champions, in AI conversations (Piascik & Brazeau, 2010; Lancaster et.al, 2019). Rather than continue serving the traditional role assigned to them by the organizational-culture as passive recipients of change initiative, Richards et.al. (2016) call for students to be the ‘drivers.’ Serious topics might also then be explored in a non-traditional manner, engaging others in the unexpected, as we often hope and aim to do with our own teaching and learning contexts. Simulations and games can thus be added to the possibilities of media used to inspire and motivate as part of a learning opportunity, or ... campaign (Stoesz, 2018).

A few short months ago, a call was issued by a prolific writer in the academic integrity circle for potential researchers to begin filling the void of what she referred to as the “research desert” in student integrity leadership (Bertram-Gallant, 2019). To the list she provides of potential areas for research by those looking for fertile subjects, I would include examining whether student leaders:

- have a significant impact on perceptions of cheating?
- can potentially impact academic misconduct – as intent and behavior?
- Have a short? Or long-term impact? on other students? instructors? What about on the leaders themselves?

Finally, at the presenter’s institution, examining her college as a case study, the three years of participation in the IDoA witnessed remarkable changes in how students spearheaded initiatives, came up with brilliant creative activities, and impacted their peers as well as instructors/staff etc. Year one (2016) serves as the only exception since many institutions seemed not to be sure how to move ahead and so just completed the whiteboard pledges.

MAIN CONCLUSION

Campaigns are great ways to start conversations among ourselves and with students, about key issues.

Institutions are not buckling under the challenge of addressing the complex issues behind contract cheating; instead, they are coming together to act, constituting the best ‘buy in’ and engagement of the community - particularly of its most significant constituents: the students.

One expected outcome of the IDoA is that more institutions will continue participating in

the initiative. Effective activities have been produced to support the purpose behind the IDoA, as mining through social media reveals. Whatever the capacity and given context of each institution, the initiative is growing, is potentially very powerful, and showcases great - creative – ideas.

The evident but unique benefits accrued of recruiting student advocates and positioning students as leaders of the initiative needs to be centrally maintained. There can be more exploration whether a paradigm shift should be sought – involving students holding the creative reigns more, so as to pass messages that resonate with students as well as with faculty, and to potentially have a stronger impact on altering attitudes toward contract cheating.

Participants' sharing their experiences and views in the workshop may help generalize further recommendations to be made concerning future organizing of the IDoA.

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