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Taking a Restorative Approach toward Academic Integrity for L2 Writers

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Abstract: Plagiarism issues related to L2 writers may require a different approach, as some of these learners experience academic integrity through a different lens due to language, culture, or previous educational background. We identified the most common L2 writers' challenges in academic writing, investigated current opinions in pedagogics, and discussed whether plagiarism and patch-writing in L2 writers' academic papers can be equated to cheating behaviors and whether restorative practices have proven to be more effective in addressing the issue in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Finally, we analyzed statistical information collected by the Language Help Centre at Georgian College, based on faculty referrals, and provided insights related to the process of applying a restorative approach, as well as its outcomes for students. While there is no unique solution to the challenge of academic misconduct, we have established that taking a restorative approach to plagiarism in L2 writers' academic papers is helping students become active participants in the process and offers an opportunity for them to discourse about academic integrity and ways to improve their writing.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Canadian Post-secondary Institutions, Restorative Approach, Academic Honesty Training Sessions, L2 Writers, Plagiarism, Paraphrasing.

Introduction

Academic misconducts involving plagiarism have long been a controversial issue due to the fact that students and professors imply different interpretations of this offence when dealing with the situation. The actual term *plagiarism* has always held a negative connotation mostly referring to cheating behaviors, such as intentional stealing or violation of author rights due to improper paraphrasing, errors in incorporating academic sources, or failure to use proper in-text citations. However, L2 writers often feel they are discriminated against as they are assigned to the same category as the students who have intentionally engaged in cheating practices, such as contract cheating or copying a paper from peers. Given the negative bias the term carries, it's hardly fair to measure the unintentionally flawed textual activity with the same tools as the intentional breach of moral rules and conventions caused by deliberate cheating behaviors (Pecorari & Petric, 2014).

According to the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) (2021), it is crucial to facilitate discussions about academic integrity within society and educational institutions in a positive and encouraging way, rather than in prohibitive or negative ways. Academic integrity, as defined by ICAI (2021), is based on the principles of fairness, honesty, trust, courage, respect, and responsibility. Following this definition, it is safe to say that a violation of academic integrity, like plagiarism, would be demonstrated through dishonest, cowardly, irresponsible, and disrespectful behavior, rather than inadvertent repetition of the exact wording of the original source or lack of its acknowledgement.

Pedagogics will often discuss at length the types of behavior that can explicitly be classified as plagiarism. Overt behaviors, such as becoming engaged in dishonest actions like contract cheating where students intentionally pay someone to do their schoolwork for them, are not exactly like a situation of an L2 writer who is linguistically challenged to produce a proper paraphrase or summary. An L2 writer might resort to patchwriting, which they may sincerely consider the right way to paraphrase. As a result, there have been more and more calls to support such students with their language use and teach them paraphrasing strategies, rather than take punitive steps that will not improve the situation (Pecorari & Petric, 2014).

Rossi (2022) contemplates that academic writing has to include skills related to paraphrasing, quoting and summarizing information from sources. Incorporating sources is a complex process, and in addition to developing these skills, an L2 student also needs to comply with academic integrity expectations. Many students admit that they lack paraphrasing training and instruction, and it becomes especially stressful for L2 writers as they are sternly warned by faculty not to plagiarize. This creates additional fear and anxiety, depriving students of writing confidence and causing them to focus on language instead of using language as a tool to

investigate a topic and focus on content. Students rarely have a chance to practice paraphrasing or get feedback about their paraphrasing skills from their professors.

Mount Royal University learning centre implemented a restorative application to the student academic integrity challenges their institution experienced (Rossi, 2022). Their restorative approach had a context focus and was based on explaining the purpose of the source use as well as the academic integrity expectations. Additionally, the centre established a collaboration with instructors to ensure that paraphrasing activities were integrated into their course content and students received more explanation and not just conventional calls to put content into their own words to not plagiarize. The main goal of their approach was to promote positive outcomes related to successful paraphrasing instead of scaring students with the possible negative outcomes of poor paraphrasing. Needless to say, this approach was much more successful than the formal punitive academic misconduct process (Rossi, 2022).

Sopcak and Hood (2022) agree that inexperienced L2 writers typically have lower levels of confidence in their academic writing. As a result, they may use some paraphrasing strategies that are heavily reliant on original text borrowing. This can lead to patchwriting and plagiarism or using open-access or restricted access similarity checkers and modifying papers in an awkward way, which, even when done unintentionally, is still frowned upon by their instructors. Finally, based on the results of the study, as L2 writers with lower language skills, many students use patchwriting unintentionally. Therefore, it is particularly important to add explicit instructions regarding paraphrasing and academic writing strategies for L2 writers.

Eaton (2021) admits there is an issue with Canadian post-secondary institutions only offering academic integrity modules or tutorials that don't afford students the opportunity to actively engage in a discourse about academic integrity. These modules are devoid of human interaction, delivered mostly online asynchronously and aimed at disciplining students and loading them with information to make them aware of plagiarism implications. This mode allows students to access the information independently, which may be convenient; however, they aim to shift responsibility for academic misconduct to the student and only ensure they are made aware of the formal academic policies and procedures regarding plagiarism.

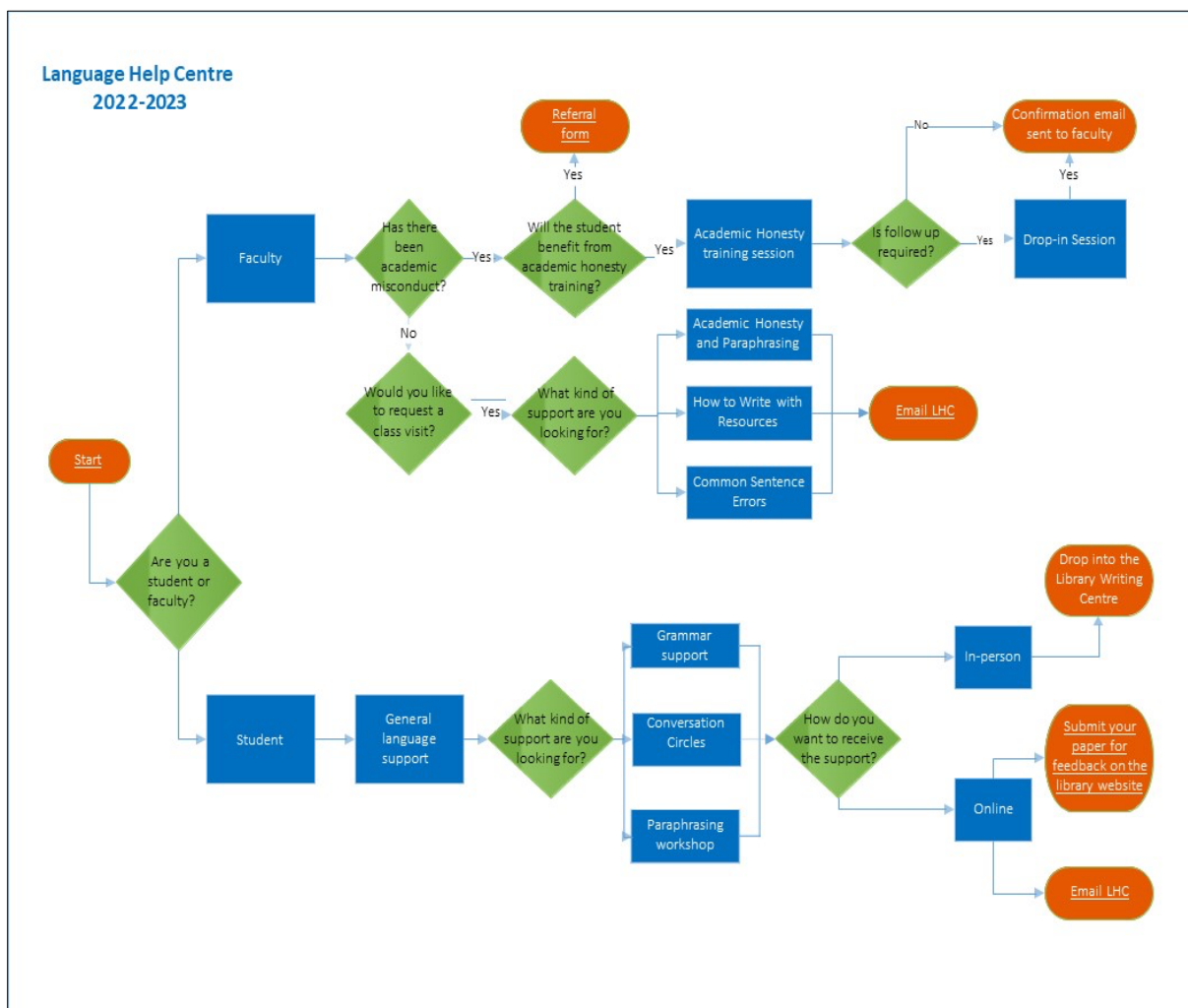
Georgian College's Language Help Centre's Restorative Approach toward Academic Honesty for L2 Writers

Georgian College's Language Help Centre has adopted their own restorative approach to this challenge. The Language Help Centre (LHC) at Georgian College has been championing a multi-faceted restorative approach. The Centre is aimed at helping students who have been identified as potentially at risk of committing academic misconduct or are facing

academic misconduct. College faculty are offered an option to refer such students to training sessions, which are not part of the official academic integrity process; however, the option for remedial training is provided using the official college Academic Misconduct Form. Since the nature of many academic misconducts related to plagiarism was linked to language-based challenges and no other service seemed to address the problem, the Language Help Centre became a vital resource aimed at demystifying academic misconduct and plagiarism for students (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Language Help Centre Services Faculty and Student Decision Tree



Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Data from Georgian College’s Language Help Centre Restorative Approach Application

Since the of Fall of 2018, when the LHC ran its first 13 academic integrity workshops and following up to the winter of 2020, there were 8 to 16 workshops each semester. With the onset of the pandemic and the

transition to remote delivery, the number of students referred to academic honesty workshops has increased from 33 in the fall of 2020 to 75 in the fall of 2021. The increase in demand was a call for the LHC to enhance the process and provide more individualized reach for higher outcome efficiency. To answer that call, academic honesty training sessions were introduced. In the winter of 2022, 136 students were referred to these training sessions and 107 students completed the training. Along with the academic honesty training sessions, the LHC started offering class visits with workshops: *Academic Integrity and Paraphrasing*, *Common Sentence Errors*, and *How to Write with Resources*. Over the three semesters they were being offered, LHC technologists conducted 38 class workshop visits with roughly 1,131 students in attendance both online and in-person. In the fall of 2022, the Centre provided training sessions on academic honesty to 113 students out of 191 referred. During the academic honesty sessions, students identified the following reasons for breaches of academic integrity: language barrier and poor paraphrasing skills; lack of knowledge about APA rules and requirements; poor time-management and planning skills; asking friends instead of services and faculty for advice; and negligence and unawareness of the consequences (no previous exposure to Turnitin®).

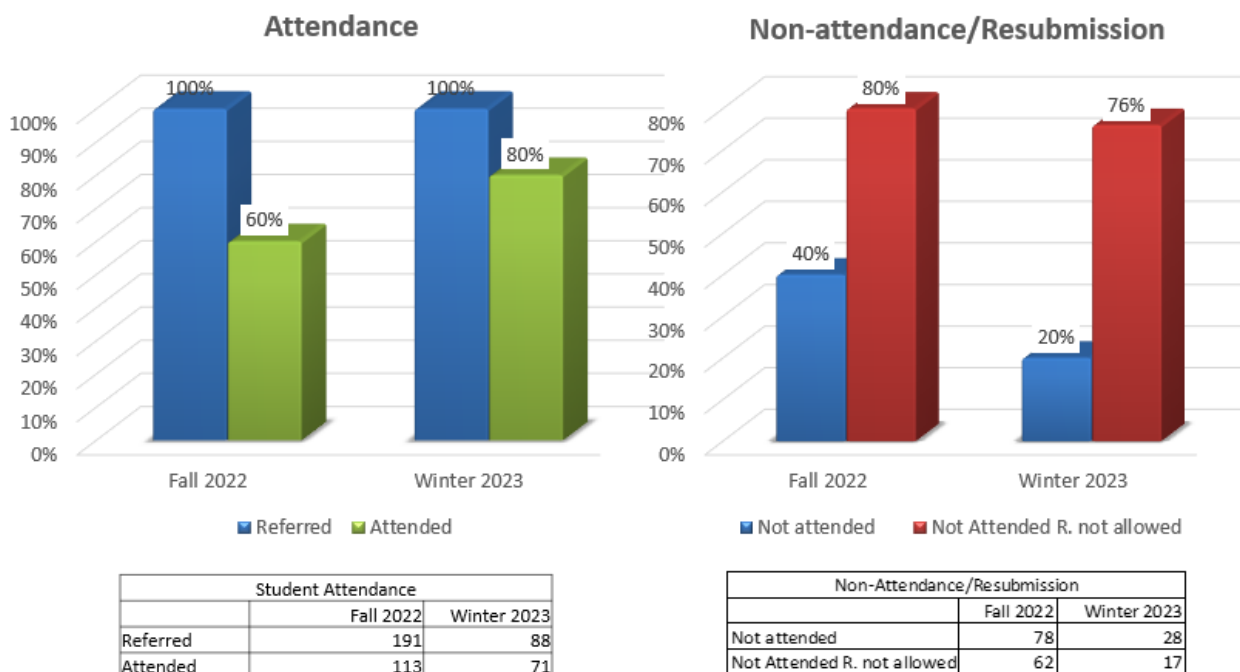
The LHC's academic honesty sessions have been designed as a two or three-step process where a student is referred by a faculty through an online form. The faculty provides all the relevant details and comments on the student's situation in the form, as well as a copy of the student's Turnitin® report if applicable. Then, LHC contacts the student to set up an initial one-on-one remote or in-person meeting where, depending on the nature of the situation the student is involved in, there is a conversation about the student's paper, the concept of academic integrity, paraphrasing strategies and the possible steps and solutions that can help the student overcome the issue. The second step is another meeting with the student in which they are either working with a technologist to fix the patchwriting or other linguistic errors in their paper or are working on another paper to show their understanding of the concepts discussed in the first meeting. As an optional third step, a follow-up meeting is booked to review their next paper and ensure the student is applying the concepts successfully. After the training is completed, a confirmation email is sent to the faculty to report on the student's progress. In looking at the data collected from the training sessions, it appears that many of the academic honesty issues are related to the fact that the referred students are L2 writers and are experiencing certain language or comprehension challenges, which caused them to use patchwriting or incorrect formatting. Moreover, students often carry a different educational experience, and have limited exposure to local academic rules and regulations around academic writing.

Out of 191 referrals in the fall of 2022, only 12 students (6.2%) were native speakers and the rest L2 writers. Another important detail is that half of the referred students were allowed to resubmit their papers to faculty for grading upon the completion of an academic honesty training session and

the other half were not allowed to resubmit. To illustrate, of the 113 students who completed the training, 56 students were permitted to resubmit their papers (49% of the students completed the training). In contrast, of the 78 students who chose not to attend the training, only 16 students were permitted to resubmit their papers for grading (20% of the students did not attend). This demonstrates that students are more motivated to complete the training if faculty are supportive of the restorative approach and offer students the chance to learn how to fix their paraphrasing errors, improve their language and writing skills, and have their paper considered for grading (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Student Attendance of Academic Honesty Training Sessions



Implications of Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence

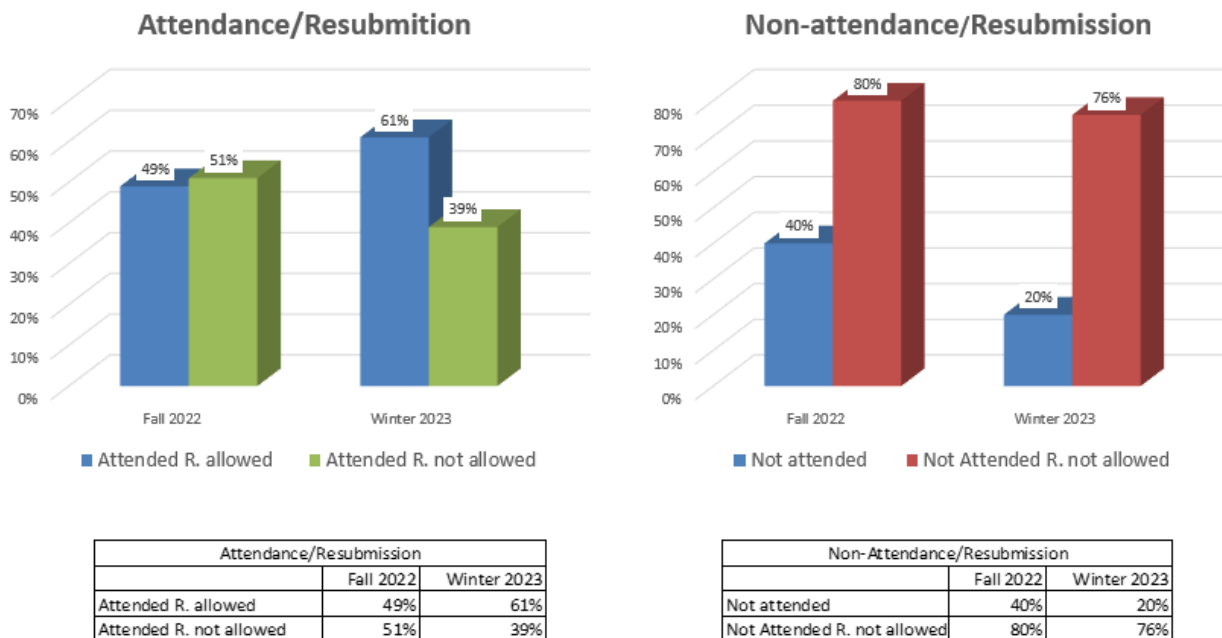
The winter semester of 2023 saw faculty and support staff facing new challenges related to the use of AI-generated content by students. Since only a few students get referred to the academic honesty training sessions at the LHC, it is hard to claim that what the LHC is witness to, is representative of the big picture of AI-related academic misconducts. Nevertheless, out of 88 students referred in winter 2023 semester (91% of them being L2 writers), 31 (35% of the students referred that semester) were involved in fabrication of their academic papers by AI software like Chat

GPT[®] and other AI platforms. Some of delimitations for faculty in these situations were the difficulty of proving the content is AI-generated and addressing it as an academic misconduct since there is no official tool yet to detect the paper was AI-generated (e.g., an AI detection feature in Turnitin[®] is running a pilot stage). However, comparing those papers with other writing samples of students, discussing the papers (e.g., asking to clarify some words), as well as checking the existence of sources used in the paper, helped faculty identify discrepancies and confirm their suspicions. Assessing papers for AI-generated content, the LHC technologists were able to identify common patterns: similar sentence patterns and length; advanced language with no grammatical errors; general sentences that lack specific detail and emotion, unless specifically prompted; and thesis statements beginning with a “while” clause. AI keeps the record of all produced content, so if a faculty member inputs a student’s content and asks the AI if it wrote it, the answer will be positive. It was also determined that no similarity is identified by Turnitin[®], even in the source links, and that verifying sources helps to identify non-existent articles or too outdated sources.

Having no official academic integrity policy specifically addressing AI is another challenge for faculty, but classifying AI-generated papers as fabricated has been helpful in identifying cheating behaviors and taking the next steps. All the students referred to the LHC because of AI-generated content were L2 writers, and, in some instances, LHC technologists could identify that the papers sent for grammar feedback (not part of academic honesty training) were AI-generated and warned students about the consequences. All the students who attended sessions with the LHC were directed to use language support as their writing tool instead of ChatGPT[®] or other software. Most said that they chose to fabricate their papers because they were struggling to understand instructions and produce the level of content they thought was expected of them. Working with a technologist on understanding instructions and getting writing support and feedback on the initial and final stages of each assignment helped the students who were close to failing the course successfully meet the learning outcomes and complete all course requirements. Out of the 31 students referred with AI-generated papers, 27 attended the sessions and successfully resubmitted their work. The overall number of referred students who completed the training was 71 out of 88 (80%). Of these students, 43 who attended (61%) were allowed to resubmit their papers, while out of the 17 students (20% of the total number of referrals) who did not attend, 13 students (76%) were not allowed to resubmit (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Restorative Approach Efficiency



The attendance rate of the students referred for AI-associated reasons was 27 students out of 31 (87%) and the percentage of those allowed to resubmit was 56% (15 out of 27 students who attended). Overall, the statistics again prove that implementing a restorative approach and giving the students a chance to improve is the best motivation for them to complete the training session.

The Language Help Centre’s restorative approach has yielded very positive results and made it easier for students to understand the mechanics of paraphrasing, the principles of incorporating research and information from sources into academic writing, as well as helped alleviate the stress and embarrassment from an academic misconduct charge. Offering LHC services as a means of restoring confidence in writing and acquiring integrity practices can be part of the solution to mitigate the increasing number of academic misconducts related to the fact that L2 writers are struggling to integrate into the Canadian post-secondary academic environment. It should be noted, however, that the practice of assuming that L2 writers are more prone to plagiarize, or that it is something inherent to their culture, is not only untrue but also discriminatory and diminishing. It is plausible to say that L2 writers might need more support with language to use it to express content and help them to divert from the old practices of writing strategies that specifically satisfy narrow post-secondary English language proficiency admission requirements.

Conclusion

Georgian College's Language Help Centre's experience with a restorative approach to academic honesty as demonstrated in this limited statistical selection of post-secondary student cases seems to attest a few things: L2 writers are more often at risk of committing an academic misconduct due to poor paraphrasing skills, language barriers or different cultural or previous educational experiences than students whose first language is English; and students are more motivated to complete academic honesty training and learn the academic writing strategies and rules if they are provided the opportunity to resubmit their papers or are directed to appropriate services that offer the restorative approach. Furthermore, having completed all the steps of the academic honesty training, students are unlikely to repeat the offense because they have had the opportunity to learn and know more about what to do to avoid intentional or unintentional plagiarism; they have had the opportunity to discuss and know about the implications of cheating; they have been exposed to academic integrity concepts; and, they have learned paraphrasing strategies and know how to use language support for their academic writing.

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Availability of data and material

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author's contributions

Both authors conceptualized, designed, and wrote the manuscript, as well as contributed to manuscript drafting and revision and approval of the final version.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval

No ethics approval required for this publication.

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