
Middle Eastern Perspectives of Academic Integrity: A View from the Gulf Region

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Abstract

Purveying education across the globe while adhering to good academic and institutional integrity values presents challenges for all. It requires cultural sensitivity and appreciation for cultural diversity. It requires attitudinal adjustments and open-mindedness along with a healthy dose of skepticism and tenacity in principled behavior. One can explain, without excusing, and understand, without condoning, what one encounters and perceives as less than principled behavior. However, can the international educational community arrive at a baseline of integrity norms of academic and institutional integrity? Educators

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T. Bretag (ed.), *Handbook of Academic Integrity*,

DOI 10.1007/978-981-287-098-8_8

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and administrators who work in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and particularly in the Arabian Gulf – in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – will do well to appreciate the historical antecedents and aim to understand diverse backgrounds and preparation of students and colleagues. Facile interpretations and attitudes of castigation before empathy and understanding will not help to foster integrity. Conversely, local intransigence and cultural excuses will do little to command respect in an increasingly globalized world that demands accountability, effectiveness, transparency and seriousness of purpose.

This chapter builds on the author's extensive exposure to and work on academic integrity in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) globally, throughout the MENA region, Europe, North America and Africa. While focusing on the GCC countries (Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia), occasional, contextual references will also be made to the Levant, Africa and Asia. It traces historical antecedents, explains socio-economic and cultural determinants as well as the difficulties being experienced with the rapid expansion of Western style higher education in the Gulf region.

Introduction

For the purposes of this study, the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA-region) spans the area from Morocco in the West to Iran in the East, from Turkey in the North to the Arabian Peninsula in the South.

For the sake of brevity and focus, the larger MENA region is broken down into three large subregions: North Africa, the GCC countries (or the Gulf), and the Levant. This section focuses on the Gulf region with sporadic reference to the other subregions and countries therein. The MENA region is home to more than 350 million inhabitants of whom more than 30 % are between the ages of 15 and 29, representing over 100 million youth (Brookings 2015). Each country in the region faces different challenges in terms of providing adequate quality education. Not surprisingly, the field of academic integrity has not been mapped, although initiatives and cooperative efforts, within the region and internationally, have produced a few studies that illuminate some common trends and generalities, while also acknowledging practices unique to the region or to certain countries.

Concepts such as honesty and integrity resonate with most human beings, as do values of honor and trust. Yet most writings and studies on academic integrity are presented from a Eurocentric or Western perspective, often anchored in Judeo-Christian values. Values, norms, injunctions, and commandments are often derived from scripture: "Thou shalt not steal", "Thou shalt not lie". Intuitively, most individuals from most cultures may nod in agreement. Yet these same commandments, along with those that say "Honor your father and your mother" or "Love thy neighbor" leave room for contextual interpretations and differing practices and values developed over time in diverse regions. Juxtaposed onto such seemingly universal norms are other cultural values: honor, commitment, and loyalty. These

concepts have sometimes become diluted in a fast-paced, modern, postindustrial society that focuses on individualism, right and wrong, and personal guilt; however, other more traditional (even if newly developed) societies remain focused on collectivist values, honor and shame. Respect and loyalty is due to family, tribe, and region as well as to country. Value statements such as “We help one another,” “We stand shoulder to shoulder,” and “Family comes first” will resonate with individuals in the MENA region, and nowhere is this more prevalent than in the Gulf countries.

The dichotomy facing a person educated in a Western-style education, but raised with a collectivist set of values, is having to select – or distinguish – between what benefits the individual and what serves the community. Over this is also superimposed a postcolonialist apprehension and occasional feelings of “us versus them”, and different practices of critical thinking versus rote memorisation. It is easy to see why academic and institutional integrity ideals appear lofty yet somewhat illusive goals for even the most caring professionals intent on instilling, nurturing, and maintaining honesty and righteous values.

The Academic Integrity Literature and the Gulf Region

Just as the literature on higher education has been presented from a Western perspective, so have the fields of academic and institutional integrity. A range of studies indicate that academic misconduct in HEIs is prevalent among students at all levels (Lipson and McGavern 1993; Love 1997). Some posit that misconduct is more prevalent among international students faced with university level work in their non-native language. The literature has addressed foreign students at English medium institutions (Arkoudis 2007; Bista 2010, 2011; Park 2003). By extension, expatriate instructors and administrators have observed similar trends among students in Western-style universities in countries where English is not the first language.

Irrespective of cultural background and differing value systems, students and others engage in various forms of integrity infractions: cheating, plagiarism, sabotage, deception, fabrication, colluding, impersonation/imposter behavior, bribing, misrepresentation/inflating credentials, and much more. The literature – and the theories, such as they exist – focuses on various aspects of integrity, or lack thereof, and also explores reasons given for wrongdoing as well as potential incentives for doing the right thing – be they actions on the part of students, faculty, or administrators. When seeking explanations for infractions by students, researchers cite stress, peer pressure, personality, poor time management, financial pressure, parental pressure, incompetence, lack of understanding of academic integrity, lack of awareness or lack of understanding of prevailing rules as contributing to unethical behavior (Bamford and Sergiou 2005).

Some research has examined incentives and methods for detecting and preventing infractions, highlighting the promise and the limitation of technology. Yet, too frequently the emphasis is on managing academic conduct rather than preventing wrongdoings, and on catching the perpetrators rather than first aiming to

instil a culture of integrity by inducing, supporting, and celebrating good behavior. An age-old problem, plagiarism has been made easier through technology, bringing ever more deceitful means of integrity violations. But technology has also brought enhanced means of detecting, demonstrating, and reporting infractions. Plagiarism prevention through use of text matching is one example of attempts to manage and discourage plagiarism but is lamented by many as a sterile, detached high-tech policing function that might detract from a sorely needed holistic and educative approach.

While some empirical research looks at reasons or excuses for plagiarism, other works seek to find remedies or factors conducive to best practices in fostering and sustaining academic integrity (AI), including the effect of honor codes on students (Bowers 1964; McCabe and Treviño 1993) and why and how such codes may work (McCabe et al. 1999). Some authors have advocated a holistic approach to understanding AI (Macdonald and Carroll 2006), yet most studies focus on and present the student as the main culprit, and cheating and plagiarism as clear cut cases, although some have called for distinguishing between intentional and unintentional plagiarists (Hammond 2002).

Only more recently have scholars and practitioners from the Gulf (and the broader MENA region), or authors schooled in the West but with experience from or interest in non-Western settings, begun to research AI matters that are particular to the region (Feghali 1997; Hayes and Introna 2005; Kendall 1991; McCabe et al. 2008; Olson 2008). Some authors acknowledge the reluctance to address the topic from within the Middle East “due to the fact that the subject is sensitive in such a culture; hence, many local universities are reluctant to publish data on the issue for fear of affecting their image and student enrollment” (Abdelfatah and Tabsh 2010). Data scarcity and fear contribute to the relative paucity in regional academic integrity scholarship.

The View from the Gulf Region

The Middle East and North Africa is a vast and incredibly diverse region, home to 350–380 million people depending on the number of countries included in this elastic region (World Bank 2015). About one in five is between the ages of 15 and 24. In the Arabian/Persian Gulf Region, the GCC countries being home to more than 45 million, 48 % of whom are non-nationals (Gulf Research Center 2014). In some countries, e.g., the United Arab Emirates, it is estimated that as little as 7 % are nationals. It would be impossible, indeed misguided, to try to link any propensity towards honesty or dishonesty to a certain ethnicity, language, culture, or religion. However, it cannot be overlooked that historical events and antecedents have interacted with cultural practices and local mores in such a way as to discourage critical thinking and instead encourage and even value memorisation and thought development within the confines of the socially acceptable. Diverse socioeconomic development and resource endowments have further exacerbated the trend to outsource work – in some economies more than in others. Cheating as a

social coping mechanism and survival tool is prevalent and commonplace throughout the MENA and Gulf region, but the same can be said of many other regions of the world. By extension, some warn that by creating more ethical students, one might deprive them of a coping mechanism used by everyone in the society in which they have to live and function. Good deeds might inadvertently disadvantage the ethical person in the short run. One would hope that such a point would not deter attempts at enhancing integrity and good behavior.

The focus here will be on modern day HEIs – private and public – in the GCC countries (Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia) with occasional reference to other MENA countries (e.g., Iran, Lebanon, Egypt). Further discussion on Egypt is provided in the following chapter in this volume. The information presented draws on personal experience, literature, empirical studies, and primary sources. For the purpose of this chapter, the term academic integrity (AI) encompasses the definition developed by the *International Center for Academic Integrity* (ICAI) in its Fundamental Values Project, which defines AI as "... a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. From these values flow principles of behavior that enable academic communities to translate ideals into action" (ICAI: Fundamental Values 2014). This definition is applied to a broad scope that goes well beyond student misconduct to include institutional professional integrity. It also invites consideration of a holistic, societal approach to fostering integrity. It illustrates through a few examples the modern day dilemmas faced by educators – indigenous and foreign to the region.

Oral Versus Written Traditions

Traditionally, MENA society has maintained an oral history – stories verbally transmitted from one generation to the next, poetry recitation, and memorisation and recitation of sacred text. The region has for centuries accorded great place of pride to committing to memory the Holy Qur'an as well as the ability to create and recite poetry. There was little need for citing a source, as most people grew up with and knew their sacred text, as well as their favorite and venerated poets. As many were illiterate, verbal transmission of knowledge and texts were the only way to preserve heritage and tradition. This is but one example of a distinct sociocultural norm, or historical acculturation to repetition, which is time-honored and respected (Foley 1989). One can forgive the confusion felt by a person, particularly a child or a young individual, raised in that tradition, who has yet to learn the modern ways of proper citation and referencing. Intuitively, memorisation, and by extension rote memorisation, is expected, valued, and even revered (Bremer 2014). As stated in an overview of quality assurance in higher education, "Most of the Arab universities adopt traditional education based on rote memorization of material without enabling students to be innovative and mix scientific knowledge with practical application. Students are not encouraged to take a critical, analytical approach

towards numerous problems in society, creating a spirit of student submissiveness and fear to voice their opinion” (Al Rashdan 2009).

Related to this is a custom of respect for both tradition and for authority. One is not supposed to question authority, be it the ruler, the religious leader, the parent, and certainly not the sacred text. A critical thinking approach, as promoted by international, Western-style education, in many ways runs counter to this tradition and cultural mores and is a bit unnerving to the student (Al Rashdan 2009). Creating an intellectual learning space where students are encouraged to dispute the answers and disrupt established traditions and patterns with their own creative and critical inquiry is a challenge. The safer space is that of repetition and regurgitation of the teacher’s or professor’s words (Howard 1999). Questioning things and altering the text is considered impolite. This inclination is not exclusive to the MENA region; one hears the same refrain from Asian and African students. Ballard and Clanchy (1997, p. 54) citing Ryan, state that “In a Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, or Islamic society, for example, the ability to quote from sacred writings, from the saying of the ages, from the words of leading scholars, is the essence of scholarship”. Again, citing Ryan, Hall (2004, p. 4) adds, “Making changes to a text may therefore be seen as disrespectful”. Likewise, in some cultures it is considered impolite to explain or give citations, as this might offend an instructor.

Post-Colonialist Educational Traditions and Influences

The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the end of the Great War ushered in “Britain’s moment” in the Middle East. Those who were able to obtain primary or secondary education and perhaps later attend university were typically schooled in British or American style institutions in the Levant and Egypt. American and French missionaries established schools in Turkey, the Levant and Egypt; some later evolved into universities, while others were created independently. These institutions aimed to impart American-style curriculum and learning values and attracted students from the wider region. In 1927, the first group of Bahrainis enrolled at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. Then, concurrent with the decline of British influence and the rise of oil revenues which facilitated an influx of migrant labor to the Gulf, inroads were made by educators from other countries. Teachers, professors, and administrators from Egypt, Jordan, Syria along with educators and bureaucrats of Palestinian origin came to dominate several of the ministries of education in the Gulf countries to the point where some residents lamented the dominance of “foreign mafias”. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, American- and Indian-style schools were also established to cater to an increasing population and to the children of expatriate workers from all corners of the world.

From the 1990s onwards, American- and British-style universities have proliferated in the Gulf. A few individual manifestations aside, one detects a clear difference among those students who have received their primary education from a local school with instructors from the Gulf (rare) or from Egypt, the Levant or India, and those schooled in a western environment. The propensity towards rote

memorization and a teacher-centered/authority-driven approach is clear in the non-Western style. One also finds a certain lack of focus on originality, or of valuing individualism and individual thought processes and ingenuity. Perhaps not surprisingly, such students will usually not have been trained in good academic integrity practices. That is not to say that they have a low moral character, only that they have not been acculturated to good practices of valuing originality, respecting authentic sources, and giving credit via proper citation. Students coming from an American-style curriculum and modes of instruction have generally been exposed to some integrity or antiplagiarism awareness and training during their course work.

Language training and command of English as a foreign or parallel language is critical in this education setting (Carroll 2007). Understandably, students trained in an English language setting tend to have less need/excuse to copy, plagiarize or purchase assignment solutions from paper-mills than those coming from non-English medium institutions, who often feel overwhelmed at having to master the subject material *and* a second language. This may explain, albeit not excuse, why one group may feel more pressure to take shortcuts (Di Maria 2009). While there are culprits in both groups, and while laziness or poor time management may be the real reason for cheating, one cannot minimize the angst and sense of inferiority felt by some of the students who find themselves unprepared for university learning because they do not have the comprehension and expression skills in the language of instruction (Yusof 2009; Dawson 2004) An interesting parallel here is the path-dependency created by colonialism when it comes to language: in countries where English is imposed as the national language, despite hundreds of native languages and dialects (for example, India and Nigeria), students are generally comfortable with English at the university level. That removes one of the components that may induce some students to cheat.

University administration, admissions officers, guidance counselors, and teaching staff must be vigilant, exercise good judgment, and display integrity when placing students in college courses. Where preparatory or remedial courses are required – whether in language, mathematics, or other subjects – such officers must resist the pressure from parents and students asking to be allowed direct admission into credit bearing courses. Too often those students end up failing and feeling humiliated. Stressed and depressed they may fall into the temptation of cheating to pass a course. Sooner or later the truth catches up with the student, the family, or the institution: families are humiliated and angry, and feel betrayed and exploited. Where students make it through to graduation, employers soon complain that their new hires cannot string together a sentence – whether in English or in Arabic – for the simple reason that they have never mastered either, before or after university.

Institutional Integrity

Violation of integrity at the institutional level comes in many shapes. It includes appointing and promoting individuals based on nepotism, favoritism, and providing privileged access for some students based on kinship. Where meritocratic

achievement is overshadowed by advancement through influence attempts, nepotism, favoritism and parochial interests, good faculty and staff members will soon become disillusioned and leave for a more professional setting. Unfortunately, imposter degrees, inflated CVs and misrepresentation regarding credentials are all too common in the region (Alrumaih 2013).

Institutional integrity begins with transparency and fairness in hiring, promotion, tenure and other policies, where an emphasis on and adherence to institutional guidelines, policies, and procedures rather than undue influence and trading favors determine the fate of each individual employee. According to article 43 of the UNESCO International Recommendation (Lamine 2010), teaching personnel should enjoy:

... a just and open system of career development including fair procedures for appointment. ... The most important procedure for ensuring this fairness is transparent vacancy announcements which should be accessible to a wide audience and consist of a clear description of the required tasks, qualifications and selection standards and procedures. The position should be filled without distinction of any kind other than relevant qualifications and attributes. Finally, peers at the faculty should take part in this process. (Lamine 2010)

Adherent to this, institutions with good governance and detailed grievances processes are likely to fare better in the area of institutional integrity and command more respect in the educational landscape, and come to be seen as employers of choice and a workplace where clearer expectations and a sense of recourse and fairness trumps arbitrary decisions. The same applies to the area of student recruitment, admissions and retention. It would seem that more transparent policies and applications thereof in hiring, admission processes and clearly documented exceptions and exemptions could go some way to remedy the problem.

Institutional integrity breaches also include admitting students who are unprepared for university level work or re-enrolling them even when they fail year after year. This practice is rampant among the many private for-profit institutions that place revenue generation and accommodation of powerful society members above adherence to academic quality. In many institutions students can buy their way in, through and out of university. Bribery and influence attempts and using connections and trading favors when dealing with certain oversight bodies is not unheard of, and more vigilance and ongoing monitoring is needed to hold all institutions to task. One can hardly expect and demand honesty and integrity of students if such values do not exist throughout the institutions of learning and the oversight bodies charged with monitoring quality.

Equally important is an institution's commitment to supporting those faculty and staff who enforce good integrity practices, rather than undermining their efforts by allowing for exceptions or lax application of rules and regulations. The support of good practices must be sustained over time to create an environment where faculty members can enforce regulations without fear of retribution or denigration. Finally, faculty and staff members should be able to air general concerns without fear of retribution. Often senior management will change policies rapidly, without

consulting with the academics who are tasked with carrying out the changes, for example, in admissions standards, student prerequisites, and class sizes (Mervis 2012).

The Curse of Oil Wealth and Peculiarities of the “Rentier State”

The phenomenal influx of funds derived from natural resource extraction and export in the Gulf, primarily oil and gas, has afforded most of the GCC countries exponential growth and incredible wealth at the state and individual levels, and have turned them into what is referred to as “rentier states”. As an example, the tiny state of Qatar – home to 2,2 million people with an estimated indigenous population somewhere between 280,000 and 400,000 (Qatar Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics 2014) – is the richest country in the world as measured in GDP per capita (and among the poorest in terms of census data and accurate statistics). The MENA region, particularly the countries situated in or adjacent to the Arabian Peninsula, as well as some countries in North Africa, derive substantial income from hydrocarbon exports.

The rentier state and the political dynamics – or lack thereof – ensue as a result of windfall profits from natural resource endowment and extraction which allows the rulers certain political luxuries and licenses not available to rulers and elites in traditional economies. As indicated by Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciano, enormous national incomes, largely unrelated to productive enterprise as seen in a typical national economy but rather derived from marketisation/monetisation of resource endowments through extraction and hydrocarbon exports, create specific political side effects. Beblawi and Luciano (1987) state that the dynamics and peculiarities of the rentier state may better explain what will *not* happen, rather than what *will* happen: rentier states exhibit a remarkable absence of pressure for a participatory political environment on the part of the general populace. Such nonproductive sources of national (and somewhat distributed) income make Middle Eastern regimes less reliant on extraction of wealth (in the form of taxation) from their populations to finance the state. It is the reverse of “No taxation without representation”. If nobody pays the piper, nobody can call the tune.

National income derived from such resources, particularly oil and gas in the Gulf region, serve to mediate the political space between ruler and ruled, attenuating any pressure for participatory politics or democratization. It may also contribute to a certain apathy and intellectual laziness on the part of the populace, even those educated and with the intellectual capacity to question the appropriateness of absolutist rule in the twenty-first century. However, it would be contrived to posit that the rentier state dynamics in themselves would induce or contribute to lesser or greater degrees of integrity – including academic integrity. It should also be noted that corruption at Olympian levels are found in countries devoid of natural resource endowments, or in countries that are not typical (or exclusively) rentier states, other than by some geographic proximity or through labor migration which ties them to

the rentier states. Transparency International's ranking of countries on the corruption perception index would substantiate this caution.

This wealth accumulation and distribution to nationals of rentier states have afforded a rather spoilt society in which most products and services are available for a fee, and where shortcuts can be made for a "facilitation fee". In a society where most families have several domestic workers – sometimes referred to as a nanny culture – nannies and drivers are expected to "help" the children with their school work. When students outgrow their nannies, their parents typically hire a tutor to do the work for the children, and finally at high school and university level these same youngsters cannot keep up with the demands and feel forced to plagiarize, find a shadow writer, or buy an essay from a term paper-mill. In a study of more than 2,000 students at six private and public universities in the UAE, "more than 80 % admitted to cheating by either copying other students' work and submitting it as their own, or paying someone to write their papers or do their exams for them" (The National 2014).

Understanding the *Wasta* Culture

Barnett et al. (2013) outlines the meaning of *wasta* as follows:

Wasta is an Arabic term that refers to an implicit social contract, typically within a tribal group, which obliges those within the group to provide assistance (favorable treatment) to others within the group. Members of the group have a largely unqualified obligation to provide assistance when asked, and those who ask for assistance have no obligation to provide direct compensation for assistance provided. (Barnett et al. 2013, p. 2)

While the literature on *wasta* is rather sparse for such a commonplace phenomenon and term, an early study by Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993) identified two types of *wasta*: intermediary and intercessory. Intermediary *wasta* is utilized to facilitate the resolution of intergroup or interpersonal conflicts. In this system, *wasta* improves human relations and reinforces social norms. Intercessory *wasta* on the other hand, involves someone intervening on behalf of a client to obtain an advantage or overcome a barrier from an authority figure (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993).

In an academic context, the latter may be applied to the affects of hiring or admissions decisions, inducing a grade change or achieving other personal advancement unrelated to meritocratic achievement, running counter to all international best practices as devised from a Western perspective and reflected in Eastern quality assurance frameworks. Olson (2008, p. 27) poses the hypothesis that "Intercessory *wasta* is being used to accommodate western liberal education to traditional authority structures in Gulf". However, in the process the core of good liberal arts educational values are being compromised. As Olson (2008, p. 27) notes, those who should be standard bearers of quality – counselors and instructors– "soon come to realize that they will be besieged by students (if not their *wasta*

intercessors), seeking to negotiate grades if their charges are not passing at acceptable levels. It becomes expedient to devise grading schemes that permit the largest number to pass or overlook plagiarized content in papers". Emphasizing the relevance of looking at institutional as well as AI infractions, Olson's (2008, p. 27) survey indicated that "over twice as many students identified *wasta* issues with registration (35 %) as compared to faculty (15 %) in the survey comments. Some comments about faculty mention instructors exchanging grades for services or being influenced by *wasta*". Again, the relevance of looking beyond student wrongdoing is underscored.

Kendall's article on Kuwaiti students emphasizes the personalized relations that justify cheating and:

... treating grades as negotiable items – even though, this challenges western views of academic propriety. In intimate social formations, particularly in families, people make allowances for each other's personalities and predilections, adjusting their behaviors and discernments to the perceived requirements of the moment. Under such conditions, impartiality is impossible; under such conditions, partiality is demanded. By contrast, where people have few genuine moral obligations, where their interactions are casual or commercial, where they are ignorant of the factors playing upon others, they have little basis for recognizing mitigating circumstances and hence for exercising discretion. Under such conditions appeals to impersonal rules and abstract standards are indicative not so much of peoples' ethical sophistication and advance as they are indicative of their estrangement. (Kendall 1991, p. 101)

Olson (2008) integrates this in his analysis and proposes: "If the *wasta* intercessor becomes the guarantor of student performance outcomes early on and organizational learning is fostered in the context of a system of backward and forward linkages for quality assurance, an organizational structure might be created that would accommodate western liberal arts education in a traditional setting" (Olson 2008 p. 30).

This author sees some potential solutions, or at least remedies, that might be imagined at intraorganizational and extraorganizational venues. Perhaps co-opting those exercising intercessory *wasta*, inducing them to become partners or guardians/guarantors of progress and better behavior, taking a stake in the improvement and correct behavior of the individual who has been found wanting in ethical behavior in an educational setting can be a way to create buy-in and enhance understanding of integrity at the societal level. At the extraorganizational level, accreditation and quality assurance bodies could give more prominence to academic institutional integrity in evaluation of institutions. Some regional coordination and learning from international best practices, for example, from US accreditors, will further bolster integrity awareness. The nascent academic ranking schemes being devised in and for Arab universities might also assign points to an institution's demonstrated focus on and enforcement of good integrity practices, be it through rules and their enforcements, training and awareness sessions, or course content focusing on ethics (e.g., participation in Principles of Responsible Management Education).

Rapid Modernisation: Expansion of HEIs

The Gulf is not the only region where a wide variety of integrity violations are exposed, but rapid expansion has meant that many projects, including the planning, building and opening of many new universities and schools, have come under increasing time pressures, resulting in sloppiness and willingness to accommodate all manner of adventurism. Technology, better practices, international collaboration, and pressure should allow for an almost fail-proof system over time. Meanwhile caveat emptor is the appropriate caution.

The mushrooming of so-called American-style education presents an interesting case study. While a few such institutions are truly exerting great efforts to purvey an American-format, liberal arts education which fosters critical thinking skills, open-mindedness, and curricular breadth and depth, there is a plethora of institutions that convey the same philosophy but that do not stand up to scrutiny. “American” has become a coveted label to pander to a public disenchanted with local, state-provided education and enticed by foreign, particularly American, education. Yet, too many find out only too late that the institution to which they have won admission and paid a hefty tuition price may have nothing to do with America, but is in fact a private, for-profit company owned by local or foreign shareholders whose main goal is to maximize revenue generation and distribution of earnings. In some cases, such institutions serve as a cover for other activities or as a platform for an individual’s political and social ambitions.

What is clearly lacking is greater awareness on the part of purveyors and consumers of education to know the product and to adhere to the promises made in brochures and on websites. Local and international accreditation or absence thereof can serve as somewhat of a litmus test, but is not sufficient to guarantee quality. Knowing the product is important, but equally important is the commitment to doing the work, earning the grades, certificates, and diplomas. Far too many students and parents feel an automatic entitlement to a diploma as soon as the tuition has been paid. For a for-profit institution, the temptation to take the money rather than stand on principle by dismissing a nonperforming student is often too great. Over time, such institutions develop a well-earned reputation for being “easy” schools that are not serious about education. A recent scam at an American-style institution in the UAE landed admissions officers in jail for altering standardized test scores as a deliberate recruitment strategy to get the enrolment numbers up and granting access to academically unworthy and unprepared applicants. This has been widely reported in the local and regional press (Al Almir 2014).

The myriad manifestations of integrity violations, whether bribery or attempting to employ influence to obtain unearned credentials and diplomas, contribute to a culture of corruption, as detailed by Transparency International in their 2013 report, *Global Corruption in Education* (Transparency International 2013). The problem is not exclusive to the Gulf region. The report indicates that education sectors around the world are particularly prone to corruption and targets for manipulation in an area that is inadequately monitored. The report also

presents a welcome suggestion for including and enlisting the youth in fighting corruption. This is a welcome angle which has been underexplored in the West and hardly entertained in the MENA region. Such literature is an example that at least some individuals and organizations are willing to put in writing the malaise observed, while also pointing to potential remedies and fruitful collaboration and dialogue around these issues.

Regulatory Oversight and International Accreditation

The UAE has a national quality framework and a rather stringent quality assurance and monitoring of its HEIs, and those processes are themselves subject to audits by the State Audit Institution (SAI). Such audits often reveal discrepancies between reported facts and figures and the reality on the ground, but at least such exercises have called attention to some of the problems and there is a focus on remedying deficiencies. Most Gulf countries have oversight bodies monitoring the quality of their HEIs, some only monitor the private sector, and some countries have no quality assurance framework or monitoring.

Parents who seek private sector and foreign-model education for their children do so precisely because they are disillusioned with low standards, overcrowded classrooms, and corrupt practices in public schools. There is a perception that the foreign product is of a higher standard. Sometimes that is the case, but not always. Accreditation, mostly from the USA, is usually seen as a stamp of approval that vouches for the quality of the education. Most US regional accrediting bodies have as part of their core requirements and detailed in their standards, a focus on integrity – both academic and institutional integrity. For example, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education details in Standard 6 of its *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*: “In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom” (MSCHE 2006) and the Commission expects candidates and accredited institutions to address both academic and institutional integrity in their self-assessment submitted in support of candidacy or renewal.

From first-hand experience, based on work at more than ten institutions in six MENA countries and a further six institutions in Europe, the USA and Africa, the author can testify to the immense diversity and variance in maturity across institutions in the Gulf region and within a given country. The variance is a natural corollary to the presence or absence of regulatory oversight and of local or international accreditation. Quality assurance in Arab countries vary greatly—from sophisticated to none and from fairly mature to embryonic, as do the institutions embedded in these countries. Egypt and UAE have well developed systems of oversight at the state level, and fairly sophisticated methods of monitoring institutions, and of gathering and presenting data. Lebanon and Qatar are devoid of quality assurance mechanisms at the national level, although some attempts have been

made in these areas in Lebanon. This illustrates that there is not necessarily a correlation between the age of academic institutions, nor the age of a country as an independent unit, and the level of sophistication when it comes to national framework, monitoring, oversight, and accreditation. For detailed overviews of quality assurance in Arab and MENA countries please see Labib Arafeh (2009) and Karma El Hassan (2013).

Despite various regional initiatives, no complete harmonization of HEI standards and practices have been achieved – even where such have been attempted. At national levels, few countries have initiated or implemented legislation defining policies and procedures for handling cases of misconduct. Even with harmonization attempts in Europe, only Sweden has devised such policies (Glendinning 2014a, b; please also see the chapter by Irene Glendinning, “► [European Perspectives of Academic Integrity](#)” (Chap. 5) of this volume). Not surprisingly, the Gulf region lags behind anything attempted in a mature landscape. While learning outcomes may have been stated and metrics may have been devised, AI standards are only vaguely subsumed under guidelines arising out of the Bologna process or embedded in some accreditation standards in the USA. The autonomy of faculty and invocation of academic freedom by faculty means that any common set of AI standards would be all but impossible to enforce. Given that other regions look to Europe and the USA for inspiration/validation, it is not surprising that the Gulf region has not developed a common set of accreditation standards, nor a common framework for good AI practices, to the extent that the topic is even on the radar of practitioners in the region.

Academic Freedom, Freedom of Expressions, Limits, and Off-Limit Topics

Academic freedom is meant to protect the right of a professional academic to investigate and to express opinions on findings within a given field of expertise as far as it is relevant in a certain classroom or research setting. Academic freedom is not meant as a license for rabble rousing. This is particularly important for foreign faculty and staff members to keep in mind as they serve as guest workers on foreign soil. While it stands to reason that faculty are not in the classroom to propagate against a local ruler or ruling form or to speak against religion, the caution can become exaggerated and develop into paranoia, or worse, serve as a tool for dismissing an employee under the pretext that he or she has insulted the ruler of the local culture. There is a fine line between respecting the turf one is on, and abrogating one’s field of expertise to the point where it becomes meaningless to talk of instruction and learning.

This requires a broader definition of integrity – to include that of a scholar/teacher who is obliged to cover the entire field of inquiry within his or her domain of expertise and training. While a chemistry professor would not be expected to express sentiments regarding the local ruling structure in a given country, a professor of political science, sociology, economics, and several other fields is, in

fact, obliged to cover the various ruling forms, and should be able to ask students to define the types of government and identify the ruling form found in their society without fear of being accused of insulting the country, culture, or ruling family. Professors at a university in the UAE were asked to submit any and all publication and conference presentations for vetting by a provost, before being allowed to list the name of the university next to their own name.

This vetting process, which might short-circuit perfectly valid academic inquiry, is just one of the processes that abrogates the very basics of academic freedom, simply because the findings from, for example, an economic perspective might go against the government's plans and programs. This is prevalent throughout the region, where fear of government interference stunts free expression.

The fact that universities in most Arab countries are government institutions and depend on state financial and administrative support is at the heart of the crisis. Governments impose their rigid regimes without analyzing the reality of these scholarly institutions, inevitably creating unsound practices, even so distorted as to make the universities lose much of their academic status. These governmentally superimposed restrictions on the university directly lower the ceiling of academic freedom and prevent faculty from participating in decision-making, voicing their opinions, and publishing freely. Taken together, such limitations restrict scholarly innovation (Al Rashdan 2009).

Likewise, universities and their libraries may be required to remove or sequester certain material that may be considered offensive to some. For example, Zayed University in the UAE has a procedure regarding "challenging material" and students or faculty may object to the material being in the library. Subsequent to complaint and review the material may be retained on the shelf, redacted, sequestered, or removed (Wand 2010). It is interesting to note that Zayed University has achieved full accreditation status from Middle States (MSCHE), although it could be argued that the facts stated above do not comply with Standard 6 as regards integrity and academic freedom. This further points to some accommodation within the context even on the part of respected accrediting bodies.

How can instructors claim to have covered the span of their fields – preserving the integrity of that field of knowledge – if certain topics are off limits and have to be left off the syllabus and out of the classroom? Another example from a Gulf country saw an art professor being taken to task for teaching nude art. She had been assigned a survey course in art history from ancient Greek and Roman to contemporary art. The presumably innocent act of assigning students to read text-book chapters that contained pictures of nude statues from ancient Greece and Rome suddenly became offensive to some students, after they had seen their midterm grades and wanted to complain about the instructor. The higher administration sided with the students and the instructor declined to teach the course again in the future. This is an example of lack of integrity on the part of the institution and the students (although it could be argued that they may lack the sophistication to appreciate this). Had the instructor agreed to abridge the course material, such would have constituted a breach of professional integrity in terms of being true to one's field of training.

These are a few examples of how integrity is so much more than students behaving ethically. It encompasses an instructor's professional integrity and the duty to cover one's field of training and expertise.

Potential Solutions, Practical Suggestions

While the task seems daunting, there are several ways in which universities can move integrity forward, globally and regionally. Many universities have found value in creating honor codes to which students, and sometimes faculty and staff, pledge their commitment at the beginning of their tenure. Good AI practices are introduced to students during orientation programs in their 1st year of studies and the values are emphasized throughout their time as students and included in each course and activity. For those who engage in integrity violations there is a consequence, whether a failing grade, repetition of the course, extra work and remedial sessions on integrity, or ultimately suspension and dismissal from university. Some institutions have integrity pledges or even a small test, which all faculty and staff must pass periodically in order to retain access to their university email. Such innovative tactics serve as reminders not only to students but to all community members. Sharing best practices not only expands our knowledge but creates a sense of camaraderie among colleagues who often feel like lone voices or who become the target of ridicule for being too idealistic rather than realistic. International cooperation, voluntary agreements, oversight, regulation, audits, accreditation, and rankings can all serve as ancillary tools to induce good behavior.

It is crucial to set guidelines, rules and expectations upfront and ensure uniformity in enforcement. It should be mandatory for all instructors to clearly state AI expectations on all syllabi, and indeed many universities do demand this. What also helps in many settings is a written contract between the instructor and each student, in which the student acknowledges having received, read, and understood certain material about AI. Keeping a copy while giving one to the student comes in handy, especially if/when at the end of a semester a student shows up to complain and plead for leniency, often accompanied by a parent or a friend, after having earned a low or failing grade due to integrity violation. It pays to spend part of the first few class sessions explaining AI and giving ample opportunity for students to practice and demonstrate that they have understood the concepts and the consequences of infractions.

Students must be given ample opportunity to practice and display good AI habits, such as proper citation and doing their own work. While most will understand that it is wrong to cheat, copy from a friend or from other published material, it usually takes some time to train the students to cite appropriately. Here the faculty members may do well to show some patience, understanding that this is new for most students. As long as the good intention is there, to give credit and attribute the source, the instructor might be forgiving in terms of the exact manner of citation. This might be one of the gray areas, at the perimeter of the baseline expectations when it comes to integrity practice. Another area that is sometimes difficult for

students to grasp is that of multiple submissions or serial submissions of their own work, or parts thereof, without indicating that it was previously used in fulfillment of course requirements elsewhere. This is also new to many students so initially some leniency and patience might be warranted. Enlisting the students in compiling and sharing the “tricks of the cheating trade” can also get students to buy into the quest for busting the bad practices. An instructor can invite students to volunteer information on cheating, whether undertaken by themselves or heard about through others. This could result in a “Student Insider Guide to Cheating” which can be shared among faculty members near and far. Students could also be invited to grade each other’s work anonymously while giving bonus points for spotting infractions.

One thing that is crucial is clarity in rules and regulations and uniformity in enforcement. Collaboration among faculty members and administrators to ensure uniformity in policy and regulations and consistency in application of penalties would go a long way in terms of setting clear expectations, especially where several faculty members teach the same course. It can also help prevent inadvertent popularity contests where some instructors become the good guys who do not catch and report violations, while others are seen as mean and unfriendly if they follow procedure and have a moral compass. Universities and faculty members can also encourage students to join the *International Center for Academic Integrity* and other societies focused on good academic practices, and encourage them to participate in essay competitions, and to share their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Making integrity something “cool” while ridiculing violations and shortcuts can inspire many students to get on the right track. Universities could also include as part of their admissions process a short essay on academic integrity, and most importantly institutions must create an environment that supports those faculty members who are dedicated to and vigilant about enforcing the regulations and good practices, rather than castigating them and asking them to bend the rules to keep a customer or family happy.

Ways Forward

While technology, the Internet, rapid information sharing and transmission has facilitated cheating and lifting of information, that very same technology could hold the promise of early detection, exposure, and suggestions for correction of wrongdoing, whether accidental or unintentional or devious and malicious. It is well known that technology on its own is not enough. Text matching software and search engines detect false positives and lead to a certain detached, robotic attempt at fixing a problem. With refinement and engagement, technology has great promise. Yet, personal interaction, constant exploration, nurturing of best practices, continuous vigilance at the group, individual, and societal level is required to sustain any progress.

Regional and international associations that work to promote integrity and prevent infractions are needed to keep the pressure on everyone to do the right thing all the time. Until integrity has become part of personal and societal DNA

worldwide, organizations such as Transparency International, the *International Center for Academic Integrity*, PRME, and other like-minded groups of professionals can help by keeping a spotlight on the topics of corruption and integrity by reporting trends and by serving as repositories of knowledge, and, in effect, by naming and shaming. Such associations can also create international repositories of cases, provide guidelines for resolutions, develop a common vocabulary/terminology and they could perhaps develop an academic integrity “driver’s license” that might be subject to periodic renewal.

There needs to be a much more holistic approach to academic and institutional integrity and understanding the ecology of education in various settings and more linkage to the “real world”. Both ICAI and PRME are focused on this area. There is a need to focus on developing an understanding of integrity in its broadest sense, and then applying this to the educative aspect, while the punitive and negative aspects should be seen as the last resort. While a focus on peculiarities of national/regional/cultural specificity is needed to understand nuances, it should not serve as a “fig leaf” for actual infractions. There are also vast untapped resources and lack of cross-functional and interdisciplinary collaboration that can be utilized. Many fine librarians lament the failure to incorporate information literacy sufficiently into the college/university experience and stand ready to cooperate with faculty and administrators in this regard. This would also lead to optimisation in resource allocation and good stewardship of university funds – another point of integrity in action through professional endeavors.

Regulatory bodies and voluntary audits, accreditation bodies and inspection agencies should serve as incentives for institutions and individuals to do the right thing; however, they can only be partial enforcers by virtue of their role in identifying and mandating ethical behavior in order for institutions to uphold certain rights and privileges that come with accreditation and licensing. In the long run, the positive impact is only as good as the intentions and capabilities of the leaders, administrators, faculty members, and students in any given institution. This is true in the Gulf, the MENA region, and globally.

Summary

Can a set of universal norms of academic and institutional integrity be derived from cross-cultural dialogue? This chapter has traced a few historical antecedents and regional cultural penchants from the Arabian/Persian Gulf Region, which may explain differing approaches to and conceptualizations of what constitutes integrity and what can be seen as collaboration and friendly facilitation as opposed to cheating and corrupt practices. Some of the ingredients to be mindful of are a culture of oral transmission of knowledge, a respect and veneration for memorisation and recitation, a norm of respect for authority and limitation on critical thinking, an affluent culture with a penchant for outsourcing, sometimes combined with lax institutional oversight and absence of national policies, guidelines, and enforcement. Enhanced dialogue and sharing of best practices,

workshops, and a certain regime creation amongst actors in the area of academic integrity can go a long way towards standardizing expectations and arriving at a better understanding and acceptance of minimal thresholds below which scholars, their students, and fellow researchers will not fall in their research and learning behavior.

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