# Dominant Scholarship:
# White Neocolonialism and Academic Integrity

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*Academic integrity policy sets scholarly guidelines for the style and quality of original work expected in academic pursuits. This policy derives from intellectual property laws, which aim to protect authors, but these guidelines and policies exclude and disadvantage certain students based on the preconceived notion that all authors come from a context where individual work is prized above the collective. Academic integrity is founded on dominant White ideas of rugged individualism. As a result, academic integrity policies with narrow definitions of plagiarism collude in assimilating students of color and international students into an educational environment that excludes their stories and alternative forms of expression. By integrating post-colonial theories with post-modern technological discourses of authorship, this article deconstructs the limitations of traditional institutional policies stressing academic integrity and explore the experiences of the students who are systematically disempowered in the practical implementation of this policy in the classroom.*

Academic integrity policies at colleges and universities have faced massive evolution in recent years due to increasing conflict over how to define intellectual property in the digital age and over how best to assist students in learning. In forming academic integrity policies, colleges and universities model their policies on existing intellectual property laws and educational precedents. These very policies and precedents, as well as the universities themselves, are based on White European systems of property ownership and education and continue to be formulated in a way to further a corporate, neoliberal economic agenda worldwide. White cultural values have worked their way into these laws and practices (Sunder, 2006), and these values moderate the way students of a variety of identities interact with their course material and define scholarship. Current manifestations of academic integrity policies and intellectual property on university campuses narrow the access points for learning and create an environment that places individual, non-

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collaborative work above work that utilizes new technologies, universal design, group work-shopping, and dual-authorship in the classroom. This environment naturally benefits White, dominant identity students coming from a paradigm of individual, competitive learning and disadvantages students of color and international students who may come from more collective cultures, where work and storytelling are done more collaboratively.

## Methodology

Using the University of Vermont's academic integrity policy as a case study, I aim to analyze the limitations of current academic integrity policies and whom, and what kind of work, these policies exclude. I utilize postcolonial theory as a framework to analyze how these academic integrity policies impact historically colonized and displaced people by incorporating the current manifestation of neocolonial education and intellectual property. An analysis of White culture and how academic integrity policies emphasize values inherent in White culture, reveals how issues of individual authorship, and the written word as property, subvert the possibilities for creative and revolutionary multicultural, multidisciplinary work. Critical race theory and writings on Web 2.0 culture provide guides to alternative forms of learning and policy making that emphasize collective work and storytelling over a traditional emphasis on individual intellectual property ownership. Grounded in the language of UVM's academic integrity policy, these theoretical frameworks aim to critically examine which voices canonized academic methods ignore.

## Academic Integrity Policy, Definitions, and an Overview of the Issues

Much like most universities, the University of Vermont has an explicit code regulating the creation of academic work within the classroom. This academic integrity policy lays out institutional expectations for students around plagiarism, collusion, fabrication, and cheating, and sets proper standards for accepted forms of academic work (University of Vermont Dean of Students, 2009).

The academic work supported by codes of academic integrity translates almost exclusively into work by individual authors. The University of Vermont's code clearly states that collaborative work will only be acceptable if the professor explicitly specifies that partnerships or group work are preferred for a certain project (University of Vermont Dean of Students, 2009). Any other form of collaborative work is labeled collusion, and both authors can be held responsible for violation of the University's policies. The almost exclusive focus on individual work, unless otherwise mandated, upholds a one-dimensional form of scholarship that, as discussed later, promotes a dominant perspective that alienates people with subordinate identities and often pushes students into cheating and plagiarizing. Group work, in essence, is tacked on as a method to promote teamwork in an

individualistic structure. In the few times I have personally engaged in collaborative work for a class, the presentations have largely benefited from the diversity of voices at the table. When it came to writing papers however, they turned out disjointed and awkward because, as a student, my group mates and I were not taught how to write as a collective. We were too busy writing as individuals to find a communal voice. Academic integrity policies that promote only one kind of learning and writing limit forms of expression that promote diversity and provide access points for people who work well individually or come from a more collective culture. The pressure to perform and produce original, individual work has an impact on students of both dominant and subordinated identities.

Under this academic integrity policy, any work not cited properly as the product of another author is assumed to be original work by the student. Any violation of this assumption is considered plagiarism (University of Vermont Dean of Students, 2009). If a student borrows from another work, from a paper to a piece of music, even to create something new out of the individual pieces, this must be acknowledged in the newly created work. There are limitations and benefits to this policy. The rights of the individual author are protected and the system maintains a certain standard of academic excellence and consistency of citation allowing more consistent student assessment. Papers become more unified, identical products, rather than fluctuating, imperfect, and compositional experiments for students. Storytelling is not the focus, but instead a brand of professional writing is forwarded that is scholarly and respected, and promotes an argument of the head that is separate from the heart. Innovation in this system is limited, since proper form must always be upheld. Proper citation is constructed as normal in White American culture, but there are other cultures, China is one of them, where quoting a famous academic without giving proper citation is a sign of respect (Redden, 2010). On an individual university level the implications of academic assimilation are minimal, since students attending the university have agreed to embrace the values of that institution merely by attending. On a system wide scale, though, the global standardization of the definition and prioritization of plagiarism as a value has a much more devious history, which has promoted a Western-centric brand of educational expression.

One of the most alarming things about plagiarism is how often students practice it. Sixty-eight percent of students openly admit to having committed at least one academic offense in their college career (Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009). Cheating and incidences of self-plagiarism, where the student copies bits of their own previous work verbatim, are also increasing. Faculty and researchers are also engaging in this behavior, not just students (Zirkel, 2010). The current academic integrity policies are not working. Research has shown that educating students on plagiarism and cheating, and working with students to update these policies are the most effective mechanisms for solving these issues (Redden, 2010). Policy change

that creates a more culturally conscious view of how different communities regulate and value intellectual property is critical in academic integrity policies.  This process has begun in the wider scope of intellectual property law through the advocacy of lawyers and through the creation of communities like Creative Commons (2010), but has not trickled down to academics in creating policies that support collective, innovative, and expressive work.  Universities themselves are only just beginning to join the movement towards Open Education Resources (OER).

<center>White Culture and "Rugged Individualism"</center>

In order to examine how policy change must occur, a look at the underpinnings of White cultural values within current policy is vital.  The connections between the values of White culture, as defined by psychologist Judith Katz (1985), and the values promoted by academic integrity policies align in several ways.

Current policy upholds a traditional Cartesian pedagogy, based on hierarchy and individual learning, where students do not work together and discuss material, and individual authorship is sanctified (Tapscott & Williams, 2010).

> In these constructions of authorship, the writer is represented as an autonomous individual who creates fictions with an imagination free of all constraint.  For such an author, everything in the world must be made available and accessible as an idea that can be transformed into his expression which thus becomes his work.  Through his labour, he makes these ideas his own; his possession and control over the work is justified by his expressive activity. (Coombe, 1993, p. 9)

The Cartesian method of authorship is extremely troubling, not just because of its constraints on pedagogy, but because of its foundations in White culture's emphasis on rugged individualism, which focuses on individual control and responsibility and rewards independence and autonomy (Katz, 1985).  Hsu (1972), an early social scientist, pointed to White America's emphasis on self-reliance as a deep-seated root to many of its social problems, and pointed out how laws and policies protect White interests and values such as autonomy and competition.  Ironically, the pressure to succeed or win as an individual often leads students to violate these academic integrity policies.  Students are caught between two contrasting requirements of White culture – the need to be self-reliant, and the fact that in order to succeed sometimes help from peers is required.

As mentioned above, current policies uphold a set of concrete requirements for scholarly work requiring adequate citations.  Academic integrity policies do not specify what kind of citation.  But these policies promote a paper format supported by logical arguments, where outside work is paramount to substantiate any arguments or assertions made by the author.  A focus on rational thought, separated

from emotion, fits within Katz's (1985) observation that White culture values objective, linear thinking, and stringently controls emotion. By promoting the need for logic, emotional and reflective writing has taken on a secondary, trivialized place in academics. Students that excel in relating their ideas through emotions and personal story do not receive praise or support for their personal writing.

Policies rooted in White culture define "normative assumptions from which a particular group is seen to deviate" (Carter, Gushue, & Weitzman, 1994, p. 186), and the academic integrity policy is not an exception. Academic integrity policies exemplify how colleges and universities have institutionalized dominant White values about what property is and have limited access to higher education by perpetuating a dominant view of acceptable work.

Promoting Neocolonialism: Assimilation of Academic Integrity Policies

Under the current system, academic integrity policies disenfranchise students of color and international students operating from a different paradigm. They do so by perpetuating a narrow formula of the type of work accepted at the academy. In practice and in theory, the current code is limiting for many students. People of color entering the university setting from outside the rugged individual paradigm do not find a place at the table. In many cases, people of color must assimilate their work to the expectations laid out, or they find their collaborative or collective cultural works unprotected and unacknowledged. There are many documented incidents of governmental entities, in some cases universities, co-opting indigenous cultural work as their own. For instance, in Canada in the early nineties, First Na-tion peoples lobbied for state and governmental bodies to give them collective intellectual property rights over their representation in public settings, including in university scholarship (Coombe, 1993). Since many of these oral traditions, art pieces, and writings have collective authorship, without a properly documented single author, indigenous peoples have had no legal recourse under traditional intellectual property laws (Coombe, 1993). Since the 1990s when the flaws of this system were pointed out, intellectual property has expanded to address identity politics, but university academic integrity policies have not adapted along with the law to include collective work (Sunder, 2006). Many policies continue to be devoted to the traditional conception of what makes a legitimate text.

Outside of the United States (US), a form of cultural colonialism is taking place. Rodney (2006), a postcolonial scholar, writes extensively about how European nations used colonial education in Africa to promote a stratified society to further capitalistic enterprise. He points out that the European focus on individualism promoted the justification of an individual property holder's rights to exploit Africans, those without rights (Rodney, 2006). What Rodney wrote in the 1960s still resonates today. Rather than Western nations having political control over

colonial education though, today's educational neocolonialism is about economics and culture (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). Thomas and Postlethwaite (1984) define neocolonialism as "politically independent people of a developing nation continuing to be bound, though voluntarily and perhaps through necessity, to a European or American society" (p.13). Education still is a tool for capitalism and neocolonialism. The monolithic idea of individualism continues the discourse of colonial expansion by institutionalizing individualism in the way the US and other nation's teachers educate (Kussurow, 1999). Neocolonialist education has stakeholders with their own economic interests in play around education and intellectual property. WorldBank now coordinates most literacy education in developing nations in exchange for neoliberal economic policies (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). In forming trade agreements with other nations, the US has mandated that these countries must implement traditional intellectual property rights laws (Maskus, 2000). Policies like this one enforce traditional academic integrity laws, and uphold traditional scholarship and intellectual property interchange within a new discourse of economic and cultural exploitation.

Western higher education also spreads its values of individualism and academic integrity globally through satellite colleges in countries around the world. Arms of liberal arts colleges and research institutions emerge around the globe, from New York University's branch in Abu Dhabi, to Bard College's expansion into Russia, South Africa, and Jerusalem (Redden, 2009). Even universities from other countries are instituting traditional Western education on a global scale, with universities from South Korea and Saudi Arabia also erecting new branches in other nations (Jascik, 2010). Only one university across the world comes from a tradition outside of Western education: Al-Ahzar in Egypt founds its principles on Islamic scriptures and serves as both a place of spiritual and higher education learning (Amin, 2007). Almost all other universities are founded on a Western formation of the university.

This trend becomes problematic when thinking about academic integrity, scholarship, and student expression. Cultures that are traditionally collective in nature, such as the Japanese, are adopting more aspects of White American values, often through coercion (Temin, 1997). Students who traditionally view collective work as paramount now work in a system where the individual is the only form of measurement. Under Western education, only one form of intellectual property protection is exercised and "virtually all cultures have their own knowledge-protection protocols or conventions" (Oguamanam, 2003, p. 136). Current systems of academic integrity do not take into account indigenous values and cultural differences from place to place when it comes to knowledge-protection. The globalization of academic integrity means that local communities no longer monitor and mediate their own disputes around intellectual property. This not only affects the indigenous people, but it has a significant impact on the college's own economic

success. Centenary College's satellite M.B.A. program in China had to shut down following a series of plagiarism by students (Redden, 2010). Centenary could not adequately follow up with the students and hold them accountable to its academic integrity policies because it was coming from a completely different paradigm of ownership and encountered a cultural dissonance. If colleges do not adapt academic integrity policies to be more culturally relevant to their clients, then these institutions run the risk of being financially unsuccessful, as well as silencing the voices and values of the populations they serve. Rigid academic integrity policies promoting the supremacy of individual work continue the tradition of colonialism into institutions of higher education, which damages all entities involved. This does particular disservice to students who should be given a place to voice their stories, learn from their classmates, and form academic communities. Ultimately, change is vital to be inclusive of all student voices.

<center>Critical Race Theory and Web 2.0</center>

Change to academic integrity policies must emphasize the potential for collective work and alternative authorship and storytelling. Storytelling is one of the key tenets to Critical Race Theory (CRT), a form of scholarship that comments on how race is constructed and analyzes how a dominant White narrative marginalizes people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT "utilizes storytelling to analyze myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up common culture about race," and believes storytelling provides a place to voice alternative narratives, which are systematically silenced (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). By utilizing collective storytelling in an academic setting, dominant values of White culture inherent in traditional academic integrity policies will hopefully slowly disintegrate.

The only currently acknowledged challenge to traditional academic integrity policy that does involve collective storytelling and work is new technology (which comes with its own issues of access), but the limited use of web forms in the classroom have not pressured significant changes. Most millennial students are literate collective authors in the Web 2.0 generation, and this interest convergence could pressure policy change that would allow more access to people hoping to express their cultural background more freely (Gray, Sheard, & Hamilton, 2010). From Facebook to Twitter, social networking online has given rise to new forms of collaboration and authorship (Gray, Sheard, & Hamilton, 2010). Professors are the ones hesitating to join this trend. Many professors do not know how to assess online collaborative work, and 65% of current faculty fear that they do not know how to enforce academic integrity policies in a digital age and therefore do not utilize online teaching techniques (Gray, Sheard, & Hamilton, 2010; Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009). Training is necessary for these professionals, but so is a clarification and re-framing of current policy.

The current system stressing individual original work puts undue strain, not only on students of color and international students, but also on White students, particularly of the technological generation. Access to the Internet limits who can participate in online learning, but the forms of cultural expression open up greatly in this medium. For instance, under digital technologies, music has become much more liberated. Musicians sample from other people's work, and entire mash-ups of derivative work become popular without any original content (Gunkel, 2008). Imagine if this was the case at places of higher education. Students would sample each other's work, add to it, and create new, more innovative forms of writing. Rather than each article and author existing in a separate universe, a community of writers creating texts together might form. This is the goal of Creative Commons (2010), a community of artists, authors, and policy makers who actively share their work and allow others to sample pieces in their own work. Creative Commons currently advocates for the principle of Open Educational Resources (OER) in higher education, which has only been taken up by a few institutions, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). OER is a growing collective group of work, including textbooks, lesson plans, and articles, shared by universities that are "freely available to use, remix, and redistribute" the work as they see fit (Creative Commons, 2010). However, this vision of collective scholarship and shared knowledge will only get off the ground if institutions look critically at their academic integrity policies, and institutionalize a dedication to open scholarship.

## Conclusion

In practice, academic integrity, as it currently stands, alienates students of color and some international students who may come from more collective societies and limits the possibilities of collaboration between student authors. This dominant White paradigm, established based on rugged individualism and competition, compels students and teachers within academics to hold rigid standards for who can participate in the writing process and what the final product can look like. Writing a reformed policy liberating authorship and form from traditional intellectual property laws will aid greatly in creating inclusive classroom communities. Using CRT as a guide toward collective authorship and storytelling, and utilizing technology as a medium for building a community of open scholarship and scholars, educators must reexamine how their institutions construct and enforce academic integrity policies in a neocolonialist world.

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