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International Institute of Research and Action on Fraud and Plagiarism in Academia (IRAFPA)

Editorial

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Academic integrity is recognized as a fundamental element of quality and trust in higher education. Recent research shows that promoting integrity is not only about preventing misconduct but about creating environments in which ethical behaviour is understood, supported and encouraged. To achieve this, institutions need coordinated actions that involve policies, teaching practices, assessment design and a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities across the institution, especially as the widespread use of digital tools and generative AI (GenAI) introduces new challenges, making it even more necessary for universities to implement strategies that promote responsible academic practices.

In this context, it becomes clear that existing approaches to integrity are still far from sufficient. Universities often lack dedicated staff to monitor ethical practices and ethics committees frequently have limited capacity to address complex cases. External supervision mechanisms are rare, and institutional policies are differently applied across departments and faculties. As a result, ethical principles are often disconnected from day-to-day academic practices, highlighting the need for more coherent and comprehensive strategies that embed integrity as a core aspect of institutional culture rather than treating it as a set of isolated rules.

Given these challenges, the *4th International Colloquium for Research and Action on Academic Integrity*, hosted online by the University of Coimbra on 19-20 June 2025, offered an opportunity to reflect on how higher education institutions can implement and sustain cultures of integrity. The two-day programme brought together contributions on ethical academic promotion, sociocultural drivers of fraud, decolonial perspectives on integrity, behavioural interventions, students' perceptions of responsibility, and the emerging challenges posed by AI. These discussions show both the urgency of the problem and the diverse strategies that universities can adopt to strengthen integrity as a core academic value.

Among the contributions, Pedro Urbano and Marie-Frédérique Bacque remind us in their historically grounded essay that academic fraud is not a new phenomenon though recent technological developments such as GenAI amplify and create new challenges. They point out that honesty in science is not only morally virtuous, but it is a "practical necessity" of the scientific process. One would expect then that academic institutions would be exceptions of integrity, yet we are faced with a "pandemic" of academic fraud. By tracing the evolution of what they understand to be a social phenomenon, they argue that the causes of academic fraud are technological, social, cultural, epistemological, but most importantly psychological. Dishonesty begins with dishonest individuals. They argue that institutional level phenomena, such as the "Taylorisation of research", act as catalysts that lead individuals with certain predispositions to engage in fraud that they otherwise would not have.

Taking a philosophical perspective, Helen Titilola Olojede asks whether GenAI and research ethics are a contradiction in terms that no institutional policy can overcome. She first examines the definition and nature of research integrity before exploring frameworks and guidelines on AI use in research and writing from a range of academic institutions including UNESCO, universities, academic journals and scientific associations. She argues that while these institutions provide guidance on how to use these tools responsibly, they do not address the ethical concerns behind their creation or how they work. Given the lack of ethics embedded in these tools, she suggests that it is perhaps impossible to use them in a way that fully upholds integrity, but by following institutional guidelines, we may attempt to 'integritise' their use to the extent possible. The remaining articles, however, note that such policies are currently undeveloped or unclear.

Bassem Kandil and Estelle Rached's empirical study explores the practices and perceptions of both master's students and educators on the use of GenAI in thesis research and writing. Through qualitative interviews and a focus group, they examine how graduate students construct their own understanding of academic integrity given a lack of comprehensive university policies. They show how students self-regulate and often rely on less official guidance from supervisors and peers. On the one hand, they find that students are deeply concerned with ethics and the responsible use of GenAI use, especially around plagiarism and authorship. On the other hand, the lack of clear guidelines sometimes enables students to rationalize otherwise ethically questionable uses. Based on these findings, they recommend not only that institutions provide updated and clear policies but also that academic integrity should be redefined in the digital age of AI. Finally, they argue that policies alone are not enough and add that AI ethics must be taught to students.

Ana Pedro's review of the literature on plagiarism and academic integrity in Portuguese higher education likewise highlights how GenAI and other technological developments necessitates renewed research into this phenomenon. In particular, she notes that most studies focus on student perceptions of plagiarism and decries a lack of research on teacher perspectives and institutional policies. She highlights that the issue is not only having comprehensive ethical codes and policies, but students' awareness of them. Similar to Kandil and Rached, she argues for a pedagogical strategy in which students are taught integrity using practical approaches such as proper citing techniques to avoid plagiarism. To this end, she criticizes that institutional policies often lack a preventative approach. To address the gaps in current research, she calls for greater participation from the academic community in the form of hosting colloquiums or conferences to explore these issues and to develop better practices.

In conclusion, the work presented at the *4th International Colloquium for Research and Action on Academic Integrity* shows how challenging it is to promote academic integrity in the digital age. It explains how technology, social and cultural factors, and human behaviour influence academic practices and how current rules and procedures often do not address these issues. These findings show the importance of ongoing reflection, dialogue and renewed approaches to support integrity as a living value within higher education.