Journal of Global Literacies, Technologies, and Emerging Pedagogies

Volume 4, Issue 3, February 2018, pp. 655-674

"It makes us even angrier than we already are": Listening Rhetorically to Students' Responses to an Honor Code Imported to a Transnational University in the Middle East

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Abstract: This article tells the story of a qualitative study conducted by three American teacher-researchers with the purpose of exploring the tensions around the implementation of a Western-based honor code exported from the home campus in the U.S. to a specific transnational space: the International Branch Campus (IBC) of Texas A&M University located in Qatar. After noticing that the written responses to the institutional honor code by first year students revealed strategies often used by marginalized students in the U.S., including behaviors that could be considered as fronting (Richardson, 2003), the researchers began to question the appropriateness of asking their students to be involved in this inquiry. The researchers then began to listen rhetorically (Ratcliffe, 2005) to the silences and hesitancies of students at this IBC: not only to the importation of an honor code based on that of a Western military school ("A cadet does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do"), but also to the non-indigenous methods (Smith, 2012) chosen by the researchers to solicit student perspectives (surveys, in-class writing prompts, and focus groups). Ultimately, the longitudinal part of this research project was abandoned as the teacher-researchers learned to admire the "literacies of survivance" enacted by multilingual students as an extension of the "rhetorical attunements" (Leonard, 2014) made by them as a strategy to succeed in this transnational space.

Keywords: IBC, honor codes, transnational, Qatar, survivance

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ISSN 2168-1333
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Introduction/Background

In 2012, I left my job teaching Navaho students in northern New Mexico to teach composition and technical writing courses at an International Branch Campus (IBC) of an American University, Texas A&M, located in Qatar (TAMUQ). In my faculty orientation for this new role, I was often reminded that the Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) between the State of Qatar and TAMUQ required faculty to teach the same courses with the same content and the same rigor that would be expected on the home campus. As a compositionist trained to uphold NCTE's best practices for teaching English Language Learners (ELLs), I knew that teachers of writing should consider the local contexts in which we teach and then adapt our teaching as we come to know the needs and concerns of our L2 students ("CCCC Statement," 2014). So I was prepared to adjust my teaching as I came to understand this local context that was both exciting and terrifying. What I was less prepared for were the ways in which my choice of teaching at an IBC made me complicit in upholding and enforcing the policies and values of the home campus that had also been exported to this IBC, including the Aggie Honor Code: "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do."

What follows is the story of how I became aware of this complicity as I gradually awoke to the ways in which my teacher-researcher identity was constricted by my use of colonizing methodologies (Smith, 2012) which were also constrained by my own notions of honor and integrity (inculcated in me by a U.S., Midwestern version of the protestant work ethic). I certainly had good intentions—wanting students' voices and views to be heard as I considered them to be key stakeholders in the "forced fit" of the importation of the Aggie Honor Code. But I have since learned that my expectations were less than fair—that asking students to question with me the suitability of an honor code whose origins derive from a U.S. military academy was an example of setting up a "dominated group [English language learners] to make themselves ever more vulnerable for the educational benefit of the privileged" (Gorski, 2008, p. 522). I had not yet fully considered the appropriateness of asking our students—especially our vulnerable first-year students—to join with their teacher-researchers in questioning the policies of our institution and examining its educational culture. After all, many of these incoming students may feel like contingent members of the TAMUQ community, particularly those students whose acceptance is conditional, yet to be determined by their successful completion of developmental English or math courses in their first semester.

I am still learning to uncover the ways in which my teaching, my research, and even my administrating do more to colonize than to liberate. Especially when teaching in a transnational space—which I consider all IBCs to be—I recognize that we as educators must work everyday to decolonize our course content (Cushman, 2013), our

pedagogical practices, and especially our research objectives. In his article "Good Intentions are not Enough: A Decolonizing Intercultural Education," Paul Gorski emphasizes that intercultural educators must move beyond cultural awareness and instead "transcend the dialogic" by listening not only to what is said, but by recognizing the power imbalances between the speakers (2008, p. 522). As I narrate the shifts in my consciousness that accompanied the various stages of this research project, this article may have more in common with the form and content of an "I-search" essay (Macrorie, 1988) than the IMRAD format of a qualitative study.

My revised aim is to stop posing as an objective researcher, and instead to own my biases, declare my positionality, and examine my motivations for conducting this research project. Only then can I fully problematize the practices of teaching and researching in this particular transnational context. To achieve this, I will practice the art of "strategic contemplation" as endorsed in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, and engage in "tacking out" so I might be able to detect "the traces of a stream that may become visible when we stand back, observe, reflect, and meditate about the contours of various practices" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 90). Tacking out allows me to consider the ways in which the Aggie Honor Code has been systematically introduced and taken up by the Aggies in Qatar. The feminist practice of strategic contemplation also involves rhetorical listening, offered by Krista Ratcliffe as "a code for cross-cultural conduct" (2005, p. 1) because it requires practitioners to "acknowledge all our particular and fluid standpoints," allowing "discourses [to] wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics" (1999, p. 205). This essay is the result of my attempts to rhetorically listen to the responses and silences of my students, my colleagues, my research participants, and even myself as we negotiated ideas, attitudes, and practices circulating around the concept of academic integrity in this particular transnational context.

The Transnational Context of an American Branch Campus in the Middle East

Unlike Texas A&M University's home campus located in College Station, Texas, which houses sixteen different colleges and nearly 60,000 students, TAMUQ offers only one college (engineering) in a single building, with an enrollment of around 500 undergraduate and 40 graduate students. Almost every one of TAMUQ's students speaks English as an additional language, their first language most likely being Arabic but potentially Hindi, Urdu, Malay, or Tagalog, among others. Slightly over half of TAMUQ's students are Qatari citizens, while international students from dozens of different countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia make up the remainder of the student population. A remarkable 43% of TAMUQ's engineering majors are female, almost double the home (U.S.) campus average of 20% females per incoming class. A majority (73%) of the female students at TAMUQ are Qatari citizens, while only 41% of

the male students are Qatari.

TAMUQ is located alongside five other branch campuses of U.S. institutions that together form an educational hub known as Education City, or "E.C." According to David Martins (2015, p. 1), this qualifies E.C.as a transnational space. However, I subscribe to Christiane Donahue's view that many of these educational spaces that Westerners label *transnational* might be more accurately described as *international* because they are "largely export-based," indicating a one-way movement from home campus to satellite school rather than a back-and-forth movement of information and decision-making, thus "imped[ing] effective collaboration or [the] 'hearing' of work across borders" (Donahue, 2009, p. 264). Setting up a satellite campus without being interested in developing "deep cultural awareness" of the host country nor inviting this cultural awareness to impact the home campus could be considered a form of "intellectual tourism," as Donahue calls it, with the endeavor doomed as an "a-historical, a-contextual" experiment (2009, p. 236). In my five years of teaching at TAMUQ, I have witnessed a predominantly one-way flow of curriculum, policies, and requirements sent from the home campus to our IBC in the Middle East.

Even though E.C. is located only a dozen kilometers from Qatar's formal ministries in downtown Doha, Qatari students often experience a culture shock when they enter their first E.C. classroom and are exposed to mixed-gender education for the first time, as well as having the language of instruction in all their courses—even math and physics—delivered exclusively in English. Many of TAMUQ's first-year Qatari students have graduated from government high schools where instruction was delivered primarily in Arabic; consequently, some of these Qataris (one to two dozen students—10-15% of each entering class) are required to take foundational courses to improve their reading, speaking, and writing abilities in English before they are allowed to enroll in their major courses or even first-year composition.

Beyond adapting to a new primary language of instruction and becoming accustomed to learning in mixed-gender classrooms, TAMUQ students are also expected to take up and adhere to the traditions of Texas A&M's (U.S.) home institution which is over 150 years old. These traditions not only include such institutional idiosyncracies as learning how to yell the Aggie "whoop," but also memorizing—and pledging to live by—the six "Aggie Core Values" of respect, leadership, loyalty, excellence, selfless service, and integrity. During their time at TAMUQ and even beyond graduation in their future identities as Aggie Alumni, TAMUQ students are expected to revere and live by the Aggie Honor Code. However, violations of the code at TAMUQ's fifteen-year-old campus are more common (adjusted for enrollment size) than on the home campus, with a particularly egregious infraction happening in my first year of teaching in Doha.

In the spring of 2013, a cheating incident involving nearly a dozen TAMUQ students called into question the effectiveness of importing notions of academic integrity

from the home campus to an IBC half a world away. Describing the cheating scandal is not the focus of this article (see Nancy Small's "Risking Our Foundations: Honor, Codes, and Authoritarian Spaces" for a detailed account); however, TAMUQ's response to the scandal served as an exigence for our study. Since I considered myself an advocate for student agency, I was particularly interested in student reaction to institutionally mandated responses to combat future violations of academic integrity, including the requirement that every student take online training on academic integrity before being allowed to register for the subsequent semester. The Aggie Honor Code is drummed into new students repeatedly during their first year at TAMUQ. Administrators, advisors, professors, and even student mentors give presentations during orientation week designed to enculturate newly enrolled students into home campus notions of academic integrity.

This one-size-fits-all response to the cheating incident rankled me as a scholar of teaching and learning because I didn't feel it addressed the ways in which TAMUQ students struggled to make sense of and/or practice this imported code of honor. I wondered how customized these Aggie Honor Code trainings were for our local campus and whether newly matriculated students at TAMUQ found this Western code to be in conflict with either their personal or cultural notions of honor and morality. The cheating scandal in 2013 forced us as an institution to admit that there were problems with the importation and implementation of the Aggie Honor Code, but other than the addition of the mandatory online training, our institution's practices of enculturating students into the code largely stayed the same.

As a compositionist, I was not sure that an institution could—or should—just pick up a program or a curriculum or even a system of justice—and, like a crane, drop it into a transnational space without significantly adjusting it to meet the needs of the new population. After all, the CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers urges teachers and administrators to "understand the characteristics of [second language writers], and to develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs" (2014). However, the MOU between the government of Qatar and Texas A&M University requires that we follow the same curriculum, the same degree plans, and the same institutional practices as the home campus—to the extent of requiring our students to take Texas history and government courses—even if they do not plan to ever live in the U.S.

During my preparation to teach in the Middle East, I had learned that Qatar is a collectivist culture, and therefore I wondered how fair it was to teach—much less enforce—the last part of the Aggie Honor Code that admonished an Aggie not to "tolerate those who [cheat, lie or steal]." It occurred to me that the Aggie Honor Code training could be interpreted by first year students as a request to turn their backs on their friends, their classmates, and/or their traditions. I suspected that there were differences between the ways in which TAMU students on the home campus in College

Station (Texas, U.S.) and TAMUQ students in Qatar interpreted and negotiated the Aggie Honor Code, but I didn't know how to study these differences without dragging my Western methodologies with me. In her response piece, included in the 2008 special issue of *College English* on "Transnational Feminist Rhetorics," Deepika Bahri asks, "Has the field of rhetoric and composition expanded its scope and revised its methodologies sufficiently in response to [transnational] developments? How well has it dealt with the fact of *difference* [emphasis added] (which is, after all, another name for transnationalism)?" (p. 523). Just as TAMUQ students are enculturated into the Aggie Community by being taught to valorize the Aggie Honor Code, Western-trained social science researchers are also enculturated into a set of research designs and methodologies. But at that time, we were not fully attuned to our own enculturation in these traditions, and so two of my TAMUQ colleagues and I designed a qualitative study to gather student responses to the importation of the Aggie Honor Code, relying on typical Western qualitative methodologies including surveys, interviews, class writing prompts, and focus groups.

Applying Western Methodologies in a Transnational Space

The fall after the cheating scandal, three of us who teach first-year composition at TAMUQ decided to make the issue of academic integrity a central component of our writing courses. We received IRB approval to collect our students' reflective essays as well as their written responses to in-class prompts and their oral responses to class discussion topics. Technical writing students were also invited to participate in the research by serving as a test group for our pilot survey and joining a focus group designed to elicit their responses to the implementation of the Aggie Honor Code in general as well as their specific reactions to the imported mandatory online training on academic integrity. Since these students are usually junior and seniors, we reasoned that they might hold hold very different views than first year composition (FYC) students because they have had more years of direct experience with academic integrity issues at TAMUQ; plus they are generally more secure in their positions as full-fledged members of the TAMUQ community. The inspiration for writing this article, in fact, can be pinpointed to a particular day in my technical writing class when a junior electrical engineering major responded to the mandatory online training by proclaiming: "It makes us even angrier than we already are!" What, I wondered, were these students so angry about? And was this something they felt they could—or would—share with me, their Western teacher-researcher?

Original Research Questions

To officially investigate TAMUQ student responses to the importation and administration

of the Aggie Honor Code, my colleagues and I were looking for answers to the following questions:

1. How do students at Texas A&M in Qatar interpret the meaning of an honor code that was imported from the home institution in College Station, Texas?
2. In what ways does following the Aggie Honor Code in the manner sanctioned by administrators, staff, and/or faculty conflict with a student's personal and/or cultural notions of honor?

I now see how biased these questions are as the wording of the first question implies that students would indeed have a problem with interpreting an honor code imported from the West, and the second question assumes that there will necessarily be conflict between a student's own codes and the Aggie Honor Code. Because we had a problem with the unexamined importation of the Aggie Honor Code, we expected our students to have a problem with it too. In short, my co-researchers and I *needed* there to be a problem among local students trying to interpret and adhere to this military code because we wanted to disrupt the one-way traffic of exporting a Western curriculum into a transnational space without any adaptation. As critical pedagogues "blundering for a change" (Thelin & Tassoni, 2000), we wanted to push back against what we perceived as the power imbalance between the home and host institutions. The current status quo was based on the "presumption of a one-way flow maintain[ing] the hierarchical relationship that privileges the position of the *delivering* institution, its pedagogical and curricular ideologies, its administrative structures, and often its labor and workplace practices" (Martins, 2015, p. 4), and we wanted the needs of the local campus in Qatar to be privileged—or at least, be brought more into the equation. The responsiveness required of us as teachers of rhetoric led us to suspect that "simply copy-pasting a curriculum [at TAMUQ would destine us] for failure" (Waterval, Frambach, Driessen, & Scherpbier, 2015, p. 65), and we believed it was also dangerous—and impossible—to ask students to interpret and negotiate issues of academic integrity in this transnational space in the same way that students at the home campus would. At least one member of our research team, Nancy Small, had taught at both TAMU in College Station and TAMUQ in Qatar and realized that if we wanted to succeed in the grand experiment of this IBC, we had to embody a "willingness to adapt home practices to the educational context" (Small, 2017, p. 5).

Even though we recognized the power imbalance between the home and host institutions, we paid far less attention to the power differentials between us as teachers-researchers and our student-participants. I wish we would have asked ourselves back then questions like the ones we ask our students to consider when conducting a rhetorical analysis: "Who speaks? For whom? Who listens? Why? What is being said? What has gone without saying? What has been suppressed?" (Bahri, 2008, p. 523). But we had not yet "transcend[ed] the dialogic surface" as Paul Gorski (2008, p. 523) advises intercultural educators to do in order to decolonize their practices, and so we

"expect[ed] the least powerful participants to teach their privileged counterparts about oppression" (2008, p. 523). We forged ahead with our colonizing research, attempting to "capture" students' words and viewpoints, thinking we had the right to "package" (read: sort and code) these in order to serve them up to administrators to try to change what we perceived as unjust practices and culturally insensitive policies. We had planned to begin our data collection with a survey and then branch out to simulating focus groups in our class discussions and collecting student writing in response to specific in-class writing prompts. However, what we learned by piloting the survey in a single English class caused us to reconsider our methodology.

When I look back at the survey, created four years ago when I was still quite new to TAMUQ and before I had researched indigenous methodologies (Smith, 2012; Chilsa, 2012; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008), it now seems such an obviously unfair instrument—and a prime example of a colonizing methodology—that I had planned to impose upon students. Asking students to estimate the percentage of the student body who cheat at TAMUQ and to admit that they don't follow the part of the code that requires them to report their classmates for cheating seems insensitive at best and authoritarian at worst (see questions 3 and 5 in Appendix A.) In a heated FYC debate about criminalizing violations of the Aggie Honor Code, a junior in the audience jumped out of his seat and shouted to the moderators, "Isn't it enough that we are already against the teachers—and now you want us to be against each other, too?" His words caused me to contemplate how we had created a culture where teachers and students are "against" one another.

In hindsight, it was fortunate that we piloted the survey "Student Perspectives of the Aggie Honor Code" with only a single section of students, since its reception hinted at problems to come in gathering and analyzing student responses to questions posed to them by their white expat teachers from the U.S, myself included. After usability testing the survey with fifteen technical writing students and soliciting suggestions for revisions, it became clear that either we were not asking the right questions—or else *we* weren't the ones to be asking these questions, and/or *this* wasn't the way to ask them. Despite my welcoming introductory paragraph describing the survey's purpose (see Appendix A), students taking the survey offered very few suggestions; instead, there were plenty of awkward silences. This feedback forced us to rhetorically listen to these students' silences, recognizing—as Cheryl Glenn elucidated in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*—that their silences conveyed "a conspicuous and meaningful" message (2004, p. 536). We ultimately scrapped this version of the survey as the students' lack of engagement in improving the pilot convinced us that this method for data gathering would not be an effective way of collecting candid responses from our students regarding the Aggie Honor Code at TAMUQ.

However, we were unwilling to give up on this methodology entirely. Entrenched in Western qualitative research methods, we turned our survey into what we thought

was a more "transnationally aware" questionnaire that asked the following short-answer questions:

1. In your native tongue (Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, English, French, etc.), what are some words that are associated with the concept of "honor"? List three or more.
2. Translate, describe, and explain each of the words you listed in question #1.
3. In your understanding, is "honor" something that you can gain and/or lose? Explain.
4. Do you see the Aggie Honor Code as being connected to the words and ideas you have discussed in answering questions 1,2, and 3 above? Explain.

This questionnaire was given as a homework assignment in a first year seminar course, with nearly fifty responses collected. After reading and coding students' responses to these questions, I felt I had been an intruding researcher, pushing my "subjects" of study to expose their belief systems as they mentioned connections between morality and religious teachings, particularly those described in the Quran.

We also conducted in-class writing prompts as a method of getting at student perceptions of the Aggie Honor Code. Students in FYC at TAMUQ are typically required to respond to a writing prompt on the second day of class as a diagnostic tool for teachers to gauge their students' writing abilities and to serve as a check on our course placement practices. In Fall 2013, students in my two sections of FYC were instructed to write a 45-minute timed response in which they argued for or against the following prompt: "The Aggie Honor Code is easy to understand and uphold." Most of the newly enrolled students at TAMUQ are accustomed to writing five-paragraph "position papers" in high school in response to standardized writing tests, and so they know that they must come up with examples/evidence to strengthen their arguments. Therefore, readers of this diagnostic essay cannot assume that the writer actually believes the statements made as the position may have been chosen based on the perception that it is easier to argue for one side than the other. Another complicating factor in analyzing student responses to this prompt is the timing of the assignment. In the first week of classes, FYC students probably still remember the recent orientation they have sat through with advisors, administrators, and faculty, including a session on the proper interpretation of and adherence to the Aggie Honor Code—complete with the institutionally-sanctioned threats about breaking the code.

In spite of these complicating factors, I thematically coded 45 FYC papers, looking for places where students mentioned the ease of adopting the Aggie Honor Code, conflict with the code, or even modulating between these two extremes. In what now seems like a very predictable result, since these first-year students during the first week of university were still worried about being fully accepted into the Aggie community, most of the FYC students' responses argued that yes, indeed, the Aggie Honor Code was "easy to understand and uphold." Although I should have been prepared for religious references in this particular transnational context inside a nation

that does not separate church and state, I was still taken aback by the extreme claims in the following student excerpt:

> **Student 1**: "A student who attends Texas A&M cannot use his own morality to make decisions anymore, especially if that morality encourages cheating, stealing, and lying. Instead, Aggies should be faithful to the Honor Code and the moral teachings of Texas A&M."

How could I, both as a teacher and as a researcher, make sense of this response when I knew that Islamic principles involve a "cradle-to-grave ethos" (Kamis & Muhammad, 2007, p. 33) and that "Islam is not only a religion but a way of life for Muslims" (Kamis & Muhammad, 2007, p. 21). Nearly all (80-100%) of the students enrolled in a given course at TAMUQ are Muslim, and after reading the student's response above, I wondered if other students believed that they had to give up their own sense of morality in order to become a full-fledged Aggie; I also wondered if this student actually believed his or her own hefty claim. This particular student's response caused me to judge my initial coding of pro/con positions taken or subtopics mentioned to be too superficial, forcing me to go back to the drawing board to try to make sense of student responses by reading them more rhetorically.

Discussion / Reconsideration of Results

Re-coding & Re-reading Student Responses Rhetorically

As I read their words again and again, something about these first year students' assertions in their arguments reminded me of Elaine Richardson's identification of "literacies of survival" as enacted by students in hostile or alien institutions of higher learning (2003, p. 16). I began to see the need to read between the lines, to look for what perhaps had been left unsaid, increasingly relying upon the concept of *rhetorical listening*, introduced by Krista Ratcliffe as "a trope for interpretive invention that signifies a stance of openness that a person may assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" (2005, p. 17). Whereas Ratcliffe primarily employs rhetorical listening "to hear people's intersecting identifications with gender and race," (2005, p. 170), I used her framework to look for my students' intersecting identifications between joining the Aggie community and belonging to other, sometimes more important communities (family, nationality, religion, etc.). Both Richardson's and Ratcliffe's frameworks were integral in helping me "transcend the dialogic surface" (Gorski, 2008, p. 523) and take into consideration the power imbalances not only between teacher and student (the researcher and the researched), but between the student and the various communities to which he or she belonged.

In re-coding students' responses to the ease of understanding and upholding the

Aggie Honor Code, I perceived strategies reminiscent of those used by marginalized students in the U.S. as theorized by Richardson in *African-American Literacies*. Richardson recognized that “students whose language and culture is seen as oppositional to achievement” develop “literacies of survival” (2003, p. 16), including *fronting* which she defines as “adopting supremacist—institutional—discourse against one’s own community or identity” (2003, p.16). This theory could explain why most students claimed that the Aggie Honor Code did not conflict with any other codes that they lived by, because to do so would mark them as an outsider—a “non-survivor”—of the Aggie community. Student 1’s claim from the passage I quoted earlier could be interpreted as a form of fronting as the student re-purposed the rhetoric he or she had heard during orientation about the Aggie Honor Code, passing this institutionally sanctioned message on to me, the teacher, complete with religious overtones as he or she used the word “faithful” when referring to the “moral teachings of Texas A&M.” I wondered to what extent other first year students had perhaps mimicked or adopted the institutional voice “preached” to them at the various Aggie Honor Code training sessions, writing about the code in ways that they believed would be sanctioned by their teachers or simply telling their teachers what they imagined their teachers wanted to hear.

First-year students might also be tempted to oversimplify their interpretation of the Aggie Honor Code due to the declarative structure of its wording which lends itself to the logic of a syllogism: If an Aggie does not do x, and I do x, then I must not be an Aggie. For newly enrolled students who strongly desire acceptance into the Aggie community, this syllogism might be extended to the following: Since I am now an Aggie, and Aggies don’t cheat, then my behavior cannot be labeled as cheating. Acceptance or rejection from the Aggie community and identification as a full status member of this community are the high stakes of the binary implied by the wording of the Aggie Honor Code.

A few first-year student papers revealed a more complicated relationship between the Aggie Honor Code and a student’s other codes of honor, such as the following:

> **Student 2:** “The honor code seems to be vague and generic. Some students exploit its vagueness and use it as a cover for their immoral academic acts. The reason for this is that the honor code uses categorical morality while some students might abide by a vastly utilitarian morality. For instance, a student might let his classmate cheat off him in a test because he believes that sharing information willingly is necessary for the greater good. In this case, the student uses utilitarian morality under the cover of the word sharing.”

I find this excerpt interesting because it vacillates between an institutional voice that

condemns cheating as an “immoral academic act” but then espouses a different morality that would allow cheating when done for the “greater good.” Perhaps this student has successfully compartmentalized these two “codes,” having previously worked out for him or herself when to use which. This tension between the Aggie Honor Code and students’ lived experiences was graphically demonstrated by an anonymous TAMUQ student who crossed out the word *cheat* and graffitied the words *we share* on a poster of the Aggie Honor Code hung in the student lounge. A sophomore who planned to transfer to another U.S. branch in Education City told me confidentially, “Some professors tell us that we can’t do our homework together—but we don’t understand why anyone would ever do homework alone!” However, many professors at TAMUQ might consider this to be a form of cheating. How is a student expected to navigate between these divergent realities?

Yet another student describes the conflict between following the Aggie Honor Code and honoring his family:

> **Student 3:** “Students are forced into performing this violation usually due to pressure of not having studied because they have been kept busy by other assignments, or the more usual ‘I’m afraid of dishonoring my family and ruining my reputation.’ Because of such reasons, people would stoop to cheating just to prevent themselves from being shamed or left out.”

This use of passive voice verb phrases such as “are forced” and “have been kept” suggests a lack of agency experienced by this student when choosing whether or not to cheat at TAMUQ. After all, if the choice is between cheating or being disowned from one’s family, then cheating is probably worth the risk of being caught. Upon reading this student’s excerpt, I wondered how many of the faculty at TAMUQ were aware of the difficult choices that our students face and what choices we ourselves would make if the stakes for us were this great.

Reaching for Another Framework

Whereas it was more common for first year students to pay lip service to the code, wording their responses to the Aggie Honor Code in the literacies of survival that Richardson identified as forms of indirect resistance to a dominant force or authority, junior and senior students at TAMUQ were more likely to exhibit both more sophisticated tactics and sometimes more direct resistance to institutional mandates. To interpret their descriptions of negotiating the Aggie Honor Code, I reviewed indigenous strategies such as the practice of “rhetorics of survivance” (Powell, 2002; Stromberg, 2006) to understand how upperclassmen sometimes subverted mandatory academic integrity training. While perhaps interpreted by others as simply acts of resistance, a rhetoric of survivance employs “immensely creative rhetorical strategies” that enable

survival in a "contested cultural space" (Bizzell, 2006, p. 46). Exhibiting more self-assurance, creativity, and playfulness than first-year students, the juniors and seniors in my technical writing courses at TAMUQ seemed more comfortable and more adept at negotiating the application of this code not only by their actions, but by rhetorically re-framing these actions and re-defining terms such as *cheating* and *tolerating* into *sharing* and *guiding,* respectively. In many ways, these upperclassmen had assumed the role of the "trickster [who] occupies a borderland position that partakes of both cultures without being fixed in either" (Derosa, 2006, p. 182). An example of this might be their approach to taking the mandatory online training on academic integrity: instead of completing the test individually at the end of the training, some members of focus groups reported that they took the test together, and others said that they took the test and then shared the certificate of completion with their classmates, enabling everyone to register for the next semester whether they had actually completed the training or not. This displays "trickster energy" at its finest, as it is "a principle of human rebellion and resistance that exists both within a protagonist/antagonist framework *and* within a totally different context, one in which the unruly—the transgressive—is accepted as part of the community's life" (Ammons, 1994, p.ix). As members with high status in the Aggie Community, the actions of the juniors and seniors at TAMUQ are often eventually emulated by the first and second year students.

To better understand the upperclassmen students' responses to the Aggie Honor Code, I also relied upon rhetorical listening which requires a deep "respect for self and others" and an intention "to receive rather than master" (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 34). My aim was to give these students the benefit of the doubt by following Ratcliffe's lead and "listen not only to [their] claims. . . but also to their cultural logics" which she defines as "belief systems or shared ways of reasoning" (2005, p. 33). Ratcliffe reminds us to pay special attention to the sometimes "competing cultural logics that [their] stories expose" (2005, p. 39). Listening and looking for my students' cultural logics helped me both recognize and appreciate their never-ending negotiations between many competing cultures, including but not limited to the following: home culture vs. school culture; high school vs. university culture; oral vs. written traditions; traditional (Khaleeji) culture vs. cosmopolitan Arab culture; family of origin vs. the "Aggie Family."

In an attempt to understand and respect the difference between the cultural logics of the Aggie Honor Code and students' personal notions of honor, I composed questions that were much more open-ended than my original survey, asking my technical writing students to respond to the following prompts:

1. "What is honor to you?"
2. "How do you _________honor?" (accumulate? earn? get? deserve?)

In analyzing my students' responses, I found myself "schooled" by my students as my second question about honor revealed a decidedly Western bias—or perhaps more

specifically, the result of my rural Minnesotan upbringing that instilled the belief in me that the harder you work, the more honor you deserve. Only one of my thirty technical writing students, however, shared this value with me; most of the others believed that “honor is determined by how others regard you,” and one student even wrote that “honor is something that can potentially be gained by men through their actions but lost by women through theirs.” My students generally believed that *honor is something you are born with*, rather than something that you can *earn*.

I came to realize that by the time they are juniors and seniors, students at TAMUQ are quite capable of simultaneously holding competing notions of honor and have created the ethical frameworks necessary to accommodate this. More than merely surviving as powerless subjects of an IBC system created without them and their values in mind, they have, in effect, mastered a “rhetoric of survivance” (Powell, 2002), defined as “a discourse that enables resistance while attending to survival” (Bizzell, 2006), its formula based on: Survival + Resistance = Survivance. Stromberg points out that the word “*survival* conjures images of a stark minimalist clinging at the edge of existence, [but the word] *survivance* goes beyond mere survival to acknowledge the dynamic and creative nature of Indigenous rhetoric” (2006, p. 1). When students insert the statement “we share” next to the word “cheat” in a poster of the Aggie Honor Code, they are indeed displaying both their agency and creativity.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Transnational students and faculty at a transnational university in a transnational space have to develop not only rhetorical flexibility but also a myriad of literacies to succeed. Although they may be unfamiliar with the term, most students at TAMUQ can’t get through a day at “uni” without practicing *rhetorical attunement*, defined by Rebecca Leonard as the act of calling upon “a range of creative and agentive practices, processes, and communicative moves [that] multilingual writers use to make sense of their worlds” (2014, p. 229). Whereas the Aggie Honor Code may seem to be a straightforward code with unambiguous interpretation and implementation to its exporters at the home campus, the transnational and multilingual students at our IBC in the Middle East have had to develop the ability to “creatively negotiate meaning in context” (Canagarajah, 2001, p. 24). In all of the various language and learning situations that our students at TAMUQ have experienced, the burden has been on them again and again to be flexible and even “pragmatic about the English it takes to get a good grade or gain access to a US university” (Leonard, 2014, p. 241). It should not be surprising then, that students at TAMUQ see the imported Aggie Honor Code and its implementation as another exercise in negotiating meaning and determining behavior, given competing codes of conduct, in a specific transnational context.

Although the home institution would never allow local stakeholders to compose a

new honor code more situated to the context of TAMUQ, our students do not seem to be troubled by this. In fact, from their responses—and their lack of responses—to the pilot survey and the focus groups, we have learned that students here at TAMUQ are tired of talking about the Aggie Honor Code. They are also not interested in being co-researchers with "teacher-action-researchers" who want to investigate the issues surrounding the importation of the code in order to effect changes in institutional practices. As multilingual and adaptable learners, TAMUQ students have developed ways to work in and around the system, calling upon all of their experiences with a variety of languages and communities and institutions to help them progress in their journeys towards earning prestigious engineering degrees from an R1 American IBC located in the Middle East.

However, faculty and administrators at IBCs can learn much about the culture of learning at their respective institutions by rhetorically listening to student responses to imported curriculum and institutional practices, then noting the strategies that students have used to succeed. At TAMUQ, this would include asking ourselves, "Why are many of our students so angry?" Anger can be construed as a symptom of an injustice as explained by Peter Lyman in "The Politics of Anger": "anger begins to become political when it is a specific response to what one feels is an unjustified violation of one's self and that which one cares for" (1981, p. 61). In examining the power disparity between professors and students in her article "When Class Equals Crass: A Working-Class Student's Ways with Anger," Laura Micciche calls for teachers to look for the connections "between anger and guilt in the pedagogical situation" and to ask, "How [can I] work with students whose affective lives are structured by anger and disappointment?" (2000, p. 35). As a faculty member of this branch campus that has imported the Aggie Honor Code to TAMUQ, I am complicit in its culturally insensitive enforcement, and this complicity can lead to a paralyzing feeling of guilt. However, the anger of students in this transnational space has shaken me out of this paralysis, and I believe their collective anger is a phenomenon that deserves further investigation for the benefit of both current and future members of the TAMUQ community.

Ultimately, faculty at IBCs should work towards developing the "deep cultural awareness" (Donahue, 2009, p. 236) required not only to be effective advocates of learning for the students we teach, but also to become ethical transnational teachers and researchers in transnational spaces—which sometimes requires walking away from the studies we have begun, or to re-focus our research on achieving different outcomes. And maybe we are not alone in this, as perhaps nearly all ethnographers at IBCs could be considered "non-indigenous" researchers, for what is considered indigenous in such transnational, multilingual, hybrid spaces? As non-indigenous researchers, it is crucial for us to "pause in the middle of a research project . . . to participate in ongoing reflections on the [many] Indigenous ways of knowing" (Thieme & Makmillen, 2017, p. 466) of the members of our transnational communities. Wendy Hesford has been calling

for “further contempla[tion of] the methodological implications of transnational work” for over a decade (2006, p. 793).

Regarding this research project, my co-colleagues and I let go of the longitudinal aspect of our study after we began rhetorically listening to student responses—including their silences. Although our intentions were to empower our students to push back against the wholesale importation and implementation of the Aggie Honor Code without local adaptations, we still saw our students as victims of this injustice. We have come to realize that our desire to have students join us in questioning the importation of the Aggie Honor Code was a version of a neoliberal narrative where “the teachers (rescuers) and the students (those needing rescue) are simply mouthpieces for the author [read: researcher] in a pre-ordained plot” (Thelin & Tassoni, 2000, p. 5). As we learned more about indigenous methodologies, my colleagues and I began to see the ways in which our methodologies had been both intrusive and culturally insensitive. A professor in grad school once said this to me: “Why are *you* the one to study *this*?” And by the end of this study, I realized that as an expat outsider new to the culture of Qatar and the institutional culture of TAMUQ, I was NOT the one to continue the longitudinal part of this study in which I had planned to track the changes in how students navigated the Aggie Honor Code as they matriculated through TAMUQ.

However, the “principled uncertainty” (Wilson, 2008; Thieme & Makmillan, 2017) that caused me to abandon the longitudinal part of the study ultimately led me to advocacy. After discontinuing our study, I looked for ways to improve the culture of learning at TAMUQ. I took on the significant administrative position of directing the Academic Success Center and collaborated with others who see a need for change to help launch our university’s very first Center for Teaching and Learning. Many of the staff at the Center for Teaching and Learning are currently on a “rhetorical” listening tour, trying to understand the experiences and ascertain the needs of both students and faculty as we seek to strengthen the connections between teaching and learning.

Through sharing the lessons I have learned by rhetorically listening to our students at TAMUQ, I hope to help students, staff, and faculty in this and other transnational institutions learn to recognize the myriad “rhetorical attunements” we make every day and to pause a moment to admire the “literacies of survivance” that we—along with our students—have developed in order to thrive in these spaces.

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Appendix A

Student Perspectives of the Aggie Honor Code

This questionnaire is part of a longitudinal study to ascertain the attitudes and opinions of currently enrolled TAMUQ students towards the Aggie Honor Code. The purpose of this study is to gather student voices on the subject of cheating at TAMUQ in order to help create more locally situated policies and programs.

Gender: M F Class of (year): _______ Home Country: ______________________

Classification: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

1. How effective do you find the current training on the Aggie Honor Code to be? (circle one choice below)

   1 (not at all) 2 (somewhat) 3 (neutral) 4(very) 5(extremely)
   Please explain your choice:

2. Does following the Aggie Honor Code (AHC) conflict with any other codes or morals that guide your behavior? Yes_______ No_______
   Please elaborate:

3. Based on your observations so far as a student at TAMUQ, what do you estimate to be the **percentage** of students who participate in cheating at this institution?________

4. What do you believe to be the number one (most common) reason students participate in cheating at TAMUQ?

5. If you knew that a student at TAMUQ had cheated, would you report that student if he or she were
   a) your brother or sister? _____yes _____no ____maybe
   b) your cousin? _____yes _____no ____maybe
   c) another family member? _____yes _____no ____maybe
   d) a classmate? _____yes _____no ____maybe
   e) someone from a different year? _____yes _____no ____maybe

f) a stranger? _____yes _____no ____maybe

6. How important is it to you that academic integrity violations are decreased at TAMUQ? (circle one choice below)

   1 (not at all) 2 (somewhat) 3 (neutral) 4(very) 5(extremely)
   Please explain your choice:

7. What suggestions can you make in order to decrease academic integrity violations and/or increase the practice of academic integrity at TAMUQ?