

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: ARE MORE STUDENTS CHEATING?

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ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, with Internet plagiarism as one of the most common forms, is a concern on college and university campuses more than ever before. A review of the literature validates these concerns. According to a 2003 nationwide research study of 23 public and private colleges and universities, conducted by Donald L. McCabe, Internet plagiarism is on the rise. Thirty-eight percent of the undergraduate students surveyed indicated that they had engaged in Internet plagiarism (as cited in Rimer, 2003). Brown, Weible, and Olmosk (2010) found that 49% of students in undergraduate marketing classes admitted cheating in 1988 versus 100% of the students in an undergraduate management class in 2008; a national survey published in *Education Week* found that 54% of the students surveyed admitted to Internet plagiarism and 76% admitted to cheating; and the Center for Academic Integrity found almost 80% of the college students surveyed admitted to cheating at least once (“Facts About Plagiarism,” 2011). In May 2006, Ohio University’s Department of Mechanical Engineering plagiarism scandal garnered national attention when a review panel found “rampant and flagrant” forms of plagiarism in 34 master’s theses (Grose, 2006); and in November 2010, more than 200 of the 600 students in a University of Central Florida business class confessed that they benefited from accessing online test questions prior to taking their mid-term exam (The Ticker, 2010). These findings help corroborate the assertion that academic dishonesty—cheating and Internet plagiarism—is on the rise; consequently, these concerns have sparked numerous debates about academic dishonesty at institutions of higher education throughout the United States.

Many institutions of higher education have adopted academic honesty policies, instituted academic integrity tutorial completion prerequisites

Business Communication Quarterly, Volume 74, Number 2, June 2011 141-150

DOI: 10.1177/1080569911404059

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for next term registration, and acquired plagiarism software detection tools; however, the research overwhelmingly confirms that the Internet provides an array of opportunities for students to cheat—whether intentionally or not.

Internet usage has grown 151.6% (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2011) since 2000, and access to information on any topic is only a click away. *A fortiori*, “The Internet has made plagiarism more common due to the ease of copying and pasting the work of others and claiming it as one’s own” (Lehman & DuFrene, 2011, p. 328).

According to McCabe, many students believe that they do not need to cite information found on the Internet because the information is public knowledge (as cited in Rimer, 2003), and Fishman, director of the Center for Academic Integrity at Clemson University, South Carolina, indicated that some believe that there is no need for attribution for information that does not have an author (as cited in Gabriel, 2010). Students tend to overlook the boundaries between what they actually produce and what they cut and paste because copying text from the Internet is so easy (Howard & Davies, 2009).

Within the past few years, high-tech cheating is gradually replacing the simple cut-and-paste cheating. Students have become more tech savvy, and online instructional cheating videos, detailing clever methods to cheat, are populating the Internet daily. Cheating methods have gone viral (Netter, 2010). To this end, educators must be proactive and develop instructional strategies that integrate all facets of appropriate digital citizenship, that is, digital ethics (Ribble, 2011), in all course offerings in an effort to reduce cheating and Internet plagiarism because plagiarism and falsifying data are two unethical practices troubling both the academic and workplace environment (Lesikar, Flatley, & Rentz, 2008). Landrau, Druen, and Arcuri (2002) found that simply educating students about plagiarism helped reduce it.

METHOD

The alignment between academic honesty and workplace ethics is unquestionable. Therefore, in an effort to reinforce appropriate digital citizenship, a study about academic dishonesty was conducted with a group of 48 students enrolled in an online business communication course during Fall semester, 2010. This article presents the findings of

that study and recommends 10 instructional strategies to reinforce academic integrity and assist students with avoiding cheating, especially Internet plagiarism and high-tech cheating.

The survey was designed to answer six questions:

1. What percentage of students engages in cheating?
2. What percentage of students engages in Internet plagiarism?
3. What are the reasons for students to engage in academic dishonesty—cheating and Internet plagiarism?
4. What do students perceive to be plagiarism/cheating?
5. How was information about academic dishonesty—cheating and plagiarism—previously disseminated?
6. Did the students at the University of Central Florida cheat?

FINDINGS

Study findings provided a basis to redesign the online business communication course and enhance the current infused plagiarism instructional strategies. The 10 recommended strategies will be implemented Spring semester, 2011.

What Percentage of Students Engages in Cheating?

Findings were consistent with those published on the plagiarism.org website. Of the students surveyed, 92% indicated that they had or they knew someone who had cheated. The 12 point difference (92% instead of 80% on the plagiarism.org website) may be attributed to students not only identifying themselves as having cheated but someone they knew who also cheated. When asked specifically if they would cheat, only 41% indicated that, because of ethics, they would never cheat. Thus, 59% indicated they would intentionally cheat.

What Percentage of Students Engages in Internet Plagiarism?

As with the national studies, students rated Internet plagiarism lower than cheating, but Internet plagiarism was definitely a form of cheating commonly used. In all, 50% of the students surveyed for this study indicated that they had or knew someone who had engaged in Internet plagiarism. When asked specifically if they would plagiarize an assignment, only 33% indicated that, because of ethics, they would never

Table 1. Reasons Students Engage in Academic Dishonesty

<i>Why Do Students Engage in Academic Dishonesty—Cheating and Internet Plagiarism?</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Grades—want or need to make better grades	92
Procrastination	83
Too busy, not enough time to complete assignment or study for test	75
Lack of understanding or unable to comprehend information	58
No interest in the subject or assignment	50
Workload/schedule: too many classes	33
Everyone does it and get away with it	25
No big deal; does not matter to professor	17
Peer pressure	17

plagiarize an assignment. Thus, 67% would intentionally plagiarize an assignment.

What Are the Reasons for Students to Engage in Academic Dishonesty: Cheating and Internet Plagiarism?

The reasons students engaged in academic dishonesty—cheating and Internet plagiarism—varied, but as commonly understood, the overriding reason was performance. As Table 1 shows, the top three responses from a list of nine items were grades (92%), procrastination (83%), and too busy, not enough time to complete assignment or study for test (75%). Synder and Cannoy's (2010) review of the literature showed that students cited very similar reasons for engaging in plagiarizing.

What Do Students Perceive to Be Plagiarism/Cheating?

Several students had difficulty identifying what was and what was not plagiarism/cheating. Overall, only 50% or more of the students correctly identified nine of the scenarios correctly. The top scenarios identified were (a) turning in another person's assignment as your own assignment (100%), (b) cutting and pasting a paper together using online materials without appropriate citations (92%), (c) purchasing a paper from a research service or downloading one from the Internet (75%), and (d) delivering an oral/digital presentation based on information copied directly from the Internet without appropriate citations (75%).

Table 2. Plagiarism Scenarios

<i>What Do Students Consider to Be Plagiarism/Cheating?</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Turning in another person's assignment as your own assignment	100
Cutting and pasting a paper together using online materials without appropriate citations	92
Purchasing a paper from a research service or downloading one from the Internet	75
Delivering an oral/digital presentation based on information copied directly from the Internet without appropriate citations	75
Changing the words around in a quote and using them without documentation	67
Copying information directly from a source document, documenting the source but leaving out the quotation marks or indenting five spaces to indicate the information is a direct quote	67
Taking ideas from someone's writings and citing it without appropriate citations	58
Paraphrasing the ideas of others without documentation	50
Lifting more than 10 consecutive words from a document without proper acknowledgment	50
Taking media from the Internet, including images, pictures, music, videos, and so on	25
Using information that you consider common knowledge without citation	17
Turning in an assignment previously submitted for another class	17

A majority of the students did not perceive turning in an assignment previously submitted for another class (17%) and taking media from the Internet, including images, pictures, music, videos, and so on (25%) as plagiarism/cheating (see Table 2 for the comprehensive list).

How Was Information About Academic Dishonesty—Cheating and Plagiarism—Previously Disseminated?

As reflected in Table 3, many professors at the university were indeed involved in disseminating information about academic integrity to their students. They are working to make a difference. These professors realize that teaching students about academic integrity is everybody's business, involving all stakeholders.

According to the students surveyed, the primary ways information about academic integrity was being disseminated at the university were (a) informally from professors' lectures or talks (75%), (b) discussions of current events involving ethical issues (67%), and (c) the university

Table 3. Dissemination of Academic Dishonesty Information: Cheating and Plagiarism

<i>How Is Information About Academic Dishonesty— Cheating and Plagiarism—Disseminated?</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Informally from professors' lectures or talks	75
Discussion of current events involving ethical issues	67
UNI 101 Introduction to College Life	67
Integrated activity as part of course syllabus	58
Required unit/assignment in enrolled course	42
Course lesson/activity	42
Integrated in bibliographic instruction conducted by the library staff	25
Cocurricula forums sponsored by the Division of Student Affairs	25
Activities sponsored by student organizations	25
Supplemental computer tutorials	17
Integrated case studies	17
Do not see the need for this type of instruction	8

Introduction to College Life class (67%). Only 8% of the students surveyed indicated that they did not see the need for having information about academic honesty disseminated in any form.

Did the Students at the University of Central Florida Cheat?

Student opinions about whether or not the students at the University of Central Florida cheated were evenly mixed. Fifty percent of the students thought the students cheated, and 50% thought the students did not. Comments from students who agreed the students cheated include the following:

The students had access to the test without the professor's permission and that is a violation of the code of ethics. Even though the internet [*sic*] provides you with access to multiple things does not mean you should not do the right thing. The fact that one student had a guilty conscience. I know more than one person felt that same way and knew that they were committing a crime.

Comments from students who disagreed include the following:

The students did not cheat because the professor generated the test from a test bank, which could have been obtained by anyone who had access

to the Internet. The students simply studied the test they accessed from online to help them pass the test. Cheating is doing something unethically wrong, and the students did not do anything unethical by using their resources to prepare for the test. The students who used the online test question still have to know the information. The online test was used as an online supplement.

In general, study findings were consistent with those published in the research. Too many students believed that it was okay to cheat. As a professor, it is my responsibility to do what I can to alter such a belief. Academic integrity is a learned skill that faculty members can teach and model. We must infuse ethics in everything we do. Ethics are “the principles that define the boundary between right and wrong” (Thill & Bovée, 2011, p. 24) and “personal choices and standards of conduct, whether on an individual basis or collectively in an organization” (as cited in Kramer, 2001, p. 411). According to Linda Mahin (1998), “If we as teachers acknowledge and make manifest the moral component of our pedagogy, we can help our students grow not only as business communicators but as morally contextualized human beings” (p. 77). Business communication courses offer golden opportunities for students to define, research, and wrestle with moral issues directly related to their proposed professions, and they are excellent courses for reinforcing academic integrity and workplace ethics (Johnston, 1998).

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Students will be confronted with numerous ethical decisions throughout their academic careers, and, as employees, these types of decisions will continue throughout their lifetime. As educators, we can help equip them by providing them with essential tools to help reduce academic dishonesty—cheating and Internet plagiarism. As a result of the survey findings, the following instructional strategies are recommended, and they will be incorporated in the redesign of my online business communication course:

1. Include a copy of the written academic integrity policy or honor code as part of the course syllabus, with links to the student handbook highlighting the detailed steps for how the university will address academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty policies should be explicitly written, and the student must know how each professor will handle the issue.

- Online students must know everything a specific professor considers cheating because work will be completed in a virtual environment.
2. Review the academic integrity policy during initial course orientation. As part of “Meet the Class” introductions, ask students to write a paragraph that includes their philosophy about academic dishonesty issues, especially cheating and Internet plagiarism.
 3. Give students a quiz, such as a treasure hunt, on the university’s academic integrity policy.
 4. Include an interactive, entertaining learning activity or game. Software tools such as SoftChalk or PowerPoint make this easy to do so. Games, such as the Lockheed Martin’s Ethics Challenge Game (Gray Matters Ethics Game) provide an effective “means for introducing workplace and applied ethics” (Dyrud, 1998, p. 118) and “The Cite Is Right: A Mock Game Show About Academic Integrity,” developed by Dartmouth University discourages cheating (Braunstein, Chaney, Gocsik, & Knauff, 2009).
 5. Incorporate hyperlinks to some of the popular Internet tutorials. For example, “How to Recognize Plagiarism,” Indiana University Bloomington, School of Education at <https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/>; “Plagiarism Court: You Be the Judge,” Fairfield University at http://www.fairfield.edu/library/lib_plagiarismcourt.html; or “You Quote It: You Note It,” Vaughan Memorial Library, Acadia University at <http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/>, offer some type of incentive, such as bonus points, for students to complete.
 6. Use plagiarism detection software, such as SafeAssign, Turnitin, PlagiarismDetect, and so on. SafeAssign is free for Blackboard users. These online resources enable users to compare their documents against other stored databases for plagiarism.
 7. Require students to cite sources for digital and oral presentations, as they would for written research projects. Also, require students to submit a written copy of their oral presentation, which can also be submitted to SafeAssign.
 8. Use the Internet to teach about plagiarism and how to avoid it. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of using Internet sites such as Wikipedia.
 9. Teach students how to use citation tools such as Easybib, Son of Citation Machine, or The Citation Generator. These tools enable users to automatically generate a reference or bibliography list based on the information provided.
 10. Encourage students to always consider ethics by adding a “Do the Right Thing” scenario to each of the course learning modules. Mark

Twain said it best: “Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest” (ThinkExist.com, 2010).

SUMMARY

Although academic dishonesty—cheating and Internet plagiarism—is on the rise, there is hope. With proper instructions and role modeling, students can learn the difference between right and wrong. Students will appreciate that which is INspected as well as EXpected by teachers (Murphy, 2011). When appropriate digital citizenship is stressed in all academic areas, teachers will begin to make a difference. This difference will also carry over to the workplace.

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