INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ATTITUDES CONCERNING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY SITUATIONS

A. James Frost, PhD ¹, B. Alan Hamlin, PhD ²
¹ Informatics Research Institute, Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho, USA
² Management & Marketing, Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah, USA

Abstract - Incidents of academic dishonesty continue to affect every college and university in the nation, at undergraduate and graduate levels. This is also true at colleges and universities around the world. At some point during their academic careers, estimates are that 50-70% of all college students engage in cheating, plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty. The need for action to minimize this problem is evident, especially given the need of employers for highly-skilled and ethical workers in a global economy, and the recent spate of business scandals related to ethical misconduct in many nations. This paper describes the perceptions of business students from 20 different nations on 5 continents regarding what specifically they think constitutes academic dishonesty, and what they perceive should be done when infractions occur. The results could provide guidance to college professors and administrators as they evaluate incidents of dishonesty involving students from different cultures and backgrounds.

Keywords: Academic integrity, international, cheating, student attitudes, instructor actions

1 Introduction

Frederick Douglass [1](April 1885) viewed integrity highly and stated, “The life of the nation is secure only while the nation is honest, truthful, and virtuous.” The authors of this article embrace this concept and have extensive, long-term experience as both college professors and management consultants. Over the past several years, they have collected information from business students attending both domestic and foreign colleges and universities on their attitudes toward academic dishonesty and what they do when infractions occur [2] (Frost, Hamlin & Barczyk, 2007). This paper provides a review of the literature about existing student attitudes towards academic integrity, and an analysis of a survey given to over 200 students in 20 nations about their perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in an academic setting. These perceptions are based on different scenarios given to the students on the survey instrument, and also provides input regarding whether the students themselves have engaged in unethical behavior. It is hoped that, with the results of this paper, faculty and administrators who are involved in adjudicating cases of academic dishonesty will be provided helpful information regarding cultural differences which might impact their decision about how best to discipline those who break the rules.

This paper is organized into four parts. The first describes why the problem of academic dishonesty is important, examining the extent of the problem and describing approaches to control it. The second is a review of the literature, covering current research and findings about how colleges are dealing with the problem in a multi-national setting. The third is an analysis of our primary research and the tool used to conduct it. The last section provides concluding remarks based on the research, and assesses the implications for further study in the field.

2 WHY THIS PROBLEM IS IMPORTANT

While the root cause of academic dishonesty is subject to much debate, anecdotal evidence suggests multiple factors, including media influence, lack of family training, peer pressure, and changing societal norms. Many undergraduate students in colleges and universities either engage in dishonest behavior themselves; refuse to turn in fellow students who they see cheating; think it is permissible to cheat if the rewards are high enough; or have some other type of unhealthy or unrealistic attitude. These attitudes result in more dishonest behavior, which in the long run, hurts the cheater and honest students that do not engage in dishonest acts [3](ibid).

When considered in tandem with the public perception of increased corporate dishonesty (which has evolved over the past decade as a result of lax ethical practices) and employers’ requirements for educated business graduates with a thorough grounding in integrity, the need has never been greater for a solution to the problem of academic dishonesty. Six points highlight the urgency of this issue. First, academic dishonesty occurs frequently in every discipline, as discussed in the next section. Second, there is often no uniform method for dealing with the problem even within the same department, much less between different universities in different countries. Further, administrators are often more concerned with increasing enrollment than with reducing unethical behavior. Thus, individual faculty members can be left to fend for themselves, and most instructors, regardless of tenure status, do not wish...
to increase their workload by becoming “enforcement officers” in
the classroom. Third, non-tenured faculty members have
even less incentive to deal with this problem, since student
retaliation on end-of-semester evaluations can interfere with
the instructor’s goal to attain tenure. Fourth, discrepancies in
either policy or implementation can result in legal problems.

Fifth, honest students are disadvantaged when dishonest
students are not charged and punished, especially if the
instructor grades on a curve. Sixth, how the issue is handled
is of paramount importance in getting a positive outcome from
this very negative experience. Academic instructors must
foster the perception for the benefit of faculty and students,
that integrity policies and enforcement mechanisms are fair
and consistently applied. Even if these points are addressed,
dishonesty will remain a problem for colleges and universities.
The scope of the issue is so massive that the authors strongly
believe that it is their responsibility to at least make an effort
to minimize it [4](Hamlin & Powell, 2008).

Most research projects and studies of academic dishonesty in
the past compare student behavior and/or attitudes from two
or three different countries. This report seeks to expand the
scope of the comparison, by using the same survey instrument
to compare student attitudes in many nations about the same
academic scenarios. Given the fact that many college classes
today contain students from many different nations, such
information might help faculty and administrators in their
efforts to both communicate expectations, and handle with
empathy and fairness any infractions in the classroom.

2.1 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the U.S., academic dishonesty permeates all levels of
the educational system. A study by Bushway and Nash [5]
(1977) reported that American students cheat as early as the
first grade. Similar studies show that 56% of middle school
students and 70% of high school students have cheated in the
course of their studies [6](Decoo, 2002). The first scholarly
studies of academic dishonesty at the college level were
conducted in the 1960s [7](Bowers, 1964). This researcher
found that in US colleges and universities, 50-70% of students
had cheated at least once. In a major study in 1990, rates of
cheating remained stable, but differed between institutions,
depending on their size, selectivity, and anti-cheating
policies[8] (LaBeff, et al., 1990). Generally, smaller and more
selective schools had less cheating. Small, elite liberal arts
colleges had cheating rates of 15-20%, while large public
universities had rates as high as 75% [9](LaBeff, 1990). Klein
and others [10](2007) surveyed 268 professional students and
found that the business students did not report cheating more
than the other students. However they were more lenient in
their attitude toward cheating.

In Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, dishonesty is
also prevalent at all levels. Not only that, but perceptions
about what actually constitutes dishonesty also differ. In one
study, significant differences were found between American
and Polish students regarding attitudes, perceptions and
tendencies toward academic dishonesty [11](Lupton, et.al.,
2011). Donald McCabe, a very well-known authority on
academic dishonesty in the U.S., did a study comparing
student attitudes and norms from the Middle East (specifically
Lebanon) to those of Americans. His results support the view
that Lebanese university students are strongly influenced by
the norms of the collectivist society in which they were raised,
and therefore differ in their attitudes about what constitutes
academic dishonesty from their American counterparts, who
were raised in a more individualistic society [12](McCabe, et.
al., 2008).

The impact of culture on a student’s perception of what
constitutes dishonesty is illustrated in a paper that appeared in
the College Student Journal in 1998. This research compared
cheating trends of American versus Japanese students, and
also what determinants, techniques and deterrents contributed
to these trends [13](Miller, et. al. 1998). Another study by
Hajime Yasukawa analyzed how cross-cultural differences
affected both the quantity of cheating, and the attitudes about
whether cheating was actually dishonest. He compared U.S.
and Japanese students over time, and found that Japanese
students reported a higher incidence rate of cheating on
exams, a greater tendency to justify the cheating, and also
greater passivity in their reactions to observing other students
who cheat [14](Yasukawa, et.al., 1999).

In Russia, there is a heavy focus on group assignments in
education from a young age. This “muddies the water” about
what is or is not permissible when students are expected to do
their own work. One study of college business students in the
U.S. and Russia found major differences in attitudes,
perceptions and tendencies towards academic behavior and
dishonesty [15](Lupton and Chapman, 2002). Similarly,
research about cheating patterns between college students in
India and the U.S. showed not only that the impact of growing
up in a collectivist culture affects perceptions about what
constitutes dishonesty, but even illustrates the differences
between the sexes of such perceptions. For example, the data
revealed that Indian and U.S. men were more likely to cheat
than women of both cultures [16](Taylor-Bianco, 2007).

It is also important to note the motivators for cheating.
Simkin and McLeod [17](2010) noted six cheating motivators
in business students. First, they noted the issue of new
opportunities that did not exist twenty years ago. The ability
to quickly copy materials verbatim from the internet is very
tempting to time-strapped students. This is often coupled with
a “winning is everything” attitude in some cultures that can
justify doing anything that will give one a competitive
advantage. There is also the issue linked to the previous
motivator that the reward for excellence may exceed the
punishment if caught breaking an academic integrity rule. In
fact, these are sometimes only guidelines and these are open
for personal interpretation. There is also a major concern for
the faculty member’s career and/or the classroom environment
when noting an issue of academic integrity. Some schools foster an environment that accepts issues in academic integrity and any faculty member that takes a student to task on integrity issues may find their career sidetracked. Not many schools include vigilance in academic integrity in their promotion and tenure guideline. This links to the attitude in some schools to redefine what is cheating. Again, there is often an opportunity to apply personal interpretation. Finally it is interesting that students may operate under a different “moral code” and not view cheating as a serious problem at all, especially in collectivist countries when the culture embeds its citizens an attitude that “one cannot let one’s countryman fail.”

2.2 ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY RESEARCH

2.2.1 DATA ANALYSIS

Forty three international undergraduate business students participated in a study concerning academic integrity. The survey was conducted in hard copy with the students circling their correct response. The data was then entered into an Excel worksheet for summary and analysis. Pivot tables were constructed to compare responses for each question posed. Data was also collected to address nationality and gender issues when a larger sample is aggregated. The students were posed fourteen questions in this survey involving mild to serious issues of academic integrity. After the academic integrity question was posed it was followed up with concerning the student’s personal attitude to the situation and a question on what should the instructor do in response to the situation.

The international composition of the students is shown in Table One with a 63% representation from the female gender. We did not analyze individual countries due to the limited sample size from each country.

Table One: Student Survey Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first question dealt with copying another student’s homework. 58% of the students had copied another students homework NO more than a couple of times. There was not a difference between the genders in resisting the temptation to copy another student’s homework. The first sub-question dealt with the student’s personal viewpoint on the “acceptability” of this action. Three of the students (all male) viewed it as acceptable to copy another student’s homework. 72% of the students viewed copying homework as rarely acceptable or unacceptable. The second sub-question on the topic of copying another student’s homework had to do with the instructor’s response. Nearly one-fifth of the students (19%) felt the instructor should ignore the activity. At the other end of the spectrum, two students (both female) felt the student should be expelled from school for copying homework.

The second question asked if the student being surveyed ever provided homework to another student. Forty-two percent of the students reported that they had shared homework many times (more than six-ten times). Even though 42% of the students have shared homework many times, 47% of the students view this as rarely okay or unacceptable. This may be surprising since 28% of the students reported that they had shared homework less than twice. There appears to be different viewpoints on what they have done in the past and what they now view as acceptable. Further, in the final sub-question, 30% of the students feel the instructor should ignore the issue of sharing homework.

The third question looked at students that would collaborate with another student on an individual assignment. This was an assignment to be completed individually; however the student received assistance from another student. Nearly half of the students reported that they participated in this dishonest activity rarely (either never or a couple of times). Nine percent reported participating in this action more than six times (probably frequently). Although the majority did not participate in this action frequently, 70% of those surveyed thought it was acceptable behavior or okay occasionally. 50% of the students reported that the instructor should ignore the action and another 35% felt that the instructor could lower the grade on the assignment and require a redo of the assignment.

The following questions dealt with more “serious” violations of academic integrity. Instead of looking at homework issues that constitute a small portion of the student’s grade, an exam usually represents much more of the performance and measure for the class. When asked if they worked with another student on a take-home exam instead of working alone, half said never
and another 28% reported only once or twice. The students appear serious about their take-home exams. As we often see from personal experience, half of the group viewed this as a student activity that should not be conducted or participated in for gain. However, 18% thought this was an acceptable behavior. So, we see at least one in five that do not view collaboration on a take-home exam as a problem. This is paralleled in the response as 19% had done this action three to many times. The question did identify that this exam was to be completed individually. Three-fourths of the class indicated the instructor should ignore the activity or require a re-take of the exam beginning with a lower grade. This promotes an attitude of “worth the risk” for the students considering academic dishonesty.

When asked if the student had used a cheat sheet hidden in an ink pen, or on my body, etc., during an exam, nearly 70% responded that they did this less than twice (42% never). However, 30% used cheat sheets more than three times (5% many times). Seventy seven percent of those responding viewed this as unacceptable behavior. The students viewed this action as a serious infraction as 35% selected an F for the assignment and another 33% felt the student should be failed in the class for using a cheat sheet. Again though, 7% reported no action should be taken.

The sixth question explored the international student’s exposure to using technology to gain an advantage by storing exam answers electronically via a cell phone or similar device. Eighty four percent had never used technology like this; however 15% received exam questions via a cell phone. Ten percent of the students viewed this as acceptable behavior while 77% viewed it as unacceptable. Also, ten percent felt nothing should be done to the offender while 40% felt an F on the assignment was appropriate and another 35% selected an F in the class.

The seventh question of the set dealt with the students collaborating with another individual to receive answers on the exam. Nearly two-thirds reported they had never done this action. However, seven percent reported they had done this action more than six times. Three fourths of the students viewed this as an unacceptable behavior however seven percent viewed it as acceptable. Two thirds of the students felt the student should be given an F in the class or for the assignment (equally split on the consequences).

When asked if the student had ever reviewed an actual copy of the exam before test time 63% indicated they had not, however the remainder had looked at an exam at least once. Two students reported seeing exams prior to test time over six times in their academic history. Interestingly, three students viewed this as acceptable behavior; however two of these students did not report they had participated previously. So, perhaps, some had access and participated however they did not believe it to be appropriate behavior while others would have participated if they would have had a chance as they did not view it as anything they should not do. Nearly half of the students indicated that the students should be failed in the class. Ten percent indicated expulsion from school was appropriate and fourteen percent reported nothing should be done.

The ninth question asked if the student had ever provided test questions to another student before that student took the exam. Although forty percent said never, the remainder had provided test questions to other students, 25% reported six different occasions or more. A little more than forty percent viewed this activity as unacceptable, however one third thought it was okay to do occasionally. Only one of the students thought the student should be expelled while one third thought it should be ignored.

The following question had the students addressing if they had ever written a mnemonic on an area behind the instructor to recall answers. Two of three students indicated they had never used hidden mnemonics to assist there work during an exam. However, one in four had used the technique many times. Also, half of the students viewed this as an unacceptable action; however 15% viewed it as acceptable behavior. The two predominate responses were to ignore the action or fail the student on the assignment.

When queried about the issue of copying articles from the internet without any citation, forty percent indicated they had never done this action and another 38% selected only once or twice. However, ten percent indicated they had done this many times. Further, fifteen percent viewed this as acceptable behavior although 42 percent viewed it as unacceptable. Two thirds of the students felt an appropriate action was to lower the grade on the assignment or award an F in the class. Fifteen percent felt it should be ignored and two felt expulsion from school was appropriate.

The next question dealt with the student obtaining a term/research paper from a paper mill on the internet and turning it in for a class assignment. Interestingly, there were two answers to this question with this group. Eighty percent had never done this while the remainder did it once or twice. Sixty five percent viewed it as unacceptable behavior and another fifteen percent thought it was rarely acceptable. Seven percent felt it was an acceptable action. Based on this response, we believe even if they had only done one or two research papers, they regarded it as unacceptable behavior. Slightly over forty percent indicated they felt an F for the assignment was appropriate while twenty five percent opted for retaking the assignment beginning at a lower maximum grade. Only one student selected expulsion from school.

College and high school students often turn to youtube.com services for assistance in many activities or a giggle as humorous stunts are acted out. The viral actions can provide instructions dealing with how to tie a tie to a proper technique to disassemble a firearm. We posed the question on students
using youtube.com to discover new techniques for cheating. Only one student admitted to seeing cheating techniques on youtube.com. The linked question on using these techniques for assistance on exams or reports was equal with almost all of the students indicating they didn’t use the techniques from youtube, probably because they didn’t look at them. There is an interesting video done by a young lady showing her cheating techniques by hiding notes in her skirt. When asked about the implications of what she was showing, she didn’t see a problem with it. One student did write on the survey, “Thanks for the hints” with a smiley face.

2.3 REVIEW

2.3.1 Academic Dishonesty

We see a small fraction of the students involved in activities that would be considered some form of academic dishonesty. Our previous research confirms this in both of our schools as well. Generally few students participating in this survey were involved in issues of dishonesty and the size of this group decreased as the severity of the offense increased. Still, there is always someone that affects the integrity of the group by cheating. The following list identifies the thirteen question areas posed to the students:

1=copy homework
2=Provide homework
3=Worked with another student
4=Collaborate on take-home exam
5=Used a cheat sheet
6=Stored answers electronically
7=Collaborated during exam
8=Received copy of exam
9=Provided exam answers
10=Received answers electronically
11=Wrote mnemonic behind instructor
12=Copied material with no citation
13=Used paper from paper mill (19% used a paper mill 1 - 2 times)

There are two extremes of participation in academic dishonesty and several items are noteworthy. The second question had a high number of students providing their homework to other students. Also, in questions one, three, nine and twelve, more students participated in a specific action than in other questions (greater than ten percent). In questions two and nine, the student was the expert providing expertise to other students, perhaps in a sharing effort of community. It is difficult to not extend the hand of assistance when called on by someone that is struggling. However, the blame is equally shared when acts of academic dishonesty are conducted.

Also, question six indicated very few students stored exam answers in electronic devices (cell phones, calculators, etc.). Finally, question 13 could be interpreted in several fashions. First, 79% of the students have never participated and 19% have turned in a research paper from an internet source only once or twice while one individual has done it many times. We are also concerned about the one in five students that purchased a research paper from the internet once or twice. How many research papers are they required to submit in their undergraduate career? Is this the sum total of all research papers they have done in their undergraduate career? This definitely is a cause for concern as we review the results of our survey.

Another point is that in almost all of the questions, there was someone heavily involved in the action of academic dishonesty. It is interesting that only the question on using an electronic device to store answers received 96% of the students reporting they had never done that action. Perhaps calculators are not as universally available to international students in business classes to store text messages with answers during exams.

2.3.2 Student’s View on Action

The questions on the student’s personal view on issues of academic dishonesty displayed a variance from their actions on the same issues. A large percentage indicated it was acceptable behavior to provide homework, collaborate on take-home exams, and provide exam answers. Each of these responses approached the 50% of those surveyed answering acceptable or acceptable occasionally. Interestingly, more than ten percent of the students indicated it was acceptable to receive answers via electronic devices (14%), write a mnemonic assistance behind the instructor (14%) or copy material from the internet without citation (16%).

2.3.3 Instructor Actions

The final subset of the survey involved the student’s view of what action was appropriate for the instructor to invoke. They ranged from do nothing to expulsion from school. The greatest forgiveness from the students was when the action was working with another student on homework and collaborating on a take-home exam. This was followed by one-third of the students suggesting light punishment for providing exam answers and writing mnemonics behind the instructor. Half of the students selected a harsh punishment (fail the class or expulsion from school) when a student receives a copy of the exam.

3 Conclusions

Our initial research suggests that instructors in university and college classrooms should be aware that international students are also susceptible to the lure of academic dishonesty. Most international students resist the temptation to gain advantage during exams or when assigned research papers. However, a small percentage (at least one in ten) will use various techniques to gain an advantage on other students. Also, as a
counterpoint, they indicate they like to assist others, even if they potentially could suffer the consequences.

We feel it is important to level the playing field in academia and not provide an advantage to a student attempting to use auxiliary methods to score higher in a class. It is not an issue of being a cop and policing the exam and homework. To fairly judge the performance of each student, a small set of students should not be rewarded for their deceit. This group of international students as a whole did not participate in rampant academic dishonesty. However, it is a small set that does not see a problem with specific actions or indicate they would take advantage given certain conditions.

Our data gathering efforts are continuing as the sample set is now nearly tripled in size with this summer’s data collection in France by one of the authors. We are encouraged by these initial indications and intend to begin cross-gender and cross-culture analysis with larger sample sets. Also, we plan to conduct a longitudinal study if we are fortunate enough to have the ability to collect international data annually.

4 References
Number in square brackets (“[ ]”) should cite references to the literature in the main text. List the cited references in numerical order at the very end of your paper (under the heading `References`). Start each referenced paper on a new line (by its number in square brackets).


