A Survey of Professor Reactions to Scenarios of Academic Dishonesty in American Universities

* James Frost, **Alan Hamlin, and *** Casimir Barczyk
Idaho State University, Southern Utah University, and Purdue University

This study investigates the opinions of faculty members on the subject of academic integrity at two state universities in the western United States. Results show strong similarities for both universities. Most faculty members are lenient to first offenders and would counsel students after plagiarism is discovered. However, as a group they do little to promote student awareness on what constitutes academic dishonesty. Further, although most faculty members are more stringent in their reactions to second time offenders, most admit there is no tracking of such activities in their departments or schools. The faculties believe that student academic integrity is a problem at both schools.

Key Words: Plagiarism, Academic dishonesty, Cheating, Community of integrity

Introduction

The authors strongly advocate increasing diligence in the scanning for, and effective management of, student academic dishonesty. Our institutions are not immune to this problem. Yet the authors' initial discussion at a conference in 2005 uncovered many disparate policies and procedures at their respective institutions for dealing with academic dishonesty. The severity of the problem and vehicles used by faculty at each college were examined in an effort to draw comparisons and hopefully come up with an optimal solution which could be used by peer institutions. Both universities (identified as Univ1 and Univ2) participating in this study took actions in the past to reduce student dishonesty. As such, an investigation of this subject from the standpoint of faculty is interesting, relevant, and rich with the potential for institutional improvement. Interest in the question of academic dishonesty was recently piqued by the publication of an article on the subject in the Wall Street Journal. The article described an Ohio university where a failure to attribute the work of others was found in 39 masters' theses (Wall Street Journal, August 15, 2006).

This study can be distinguished from others on dishonesty and plagiarism in that it aims to illuminate the issue from the instructor perspective. Most other studies focus on the student perspective, using data from self reports. Using a set of scenarios involving various dishonest activities in a survey methodology, the authors glean insights into the attitudes of faculty members on issues of academic integrity. Questionnaire items designed to collect ordinal data provide the basis for understanding how instructors deal with student dishonesty and plagiarism. The study allows for comparisons across universities. Future research is planned to content-analyze the open-ended questions included in the survey.

Literature Review

Plagiarism is defined as "intentionally taking the literary property of another without attribution and passing it off as one's own, having failed to add anything of value to the copied material and having reaped from its use an unearned benefit" (Stearns, 1998). Another investigator, Patrick A. Cabe, distinguished different types of plagiarism (Cabe, 2006):

- Direct plagiarism
- Truncation
- Excision
- Insertions
- Reordering
- Inversion
- Substitution
- Change of tense or person or number
- Change of voice
- Grafting
- Undocumented factual information
- Inappropriate use of quotation marks,
- Inappropriate paraphrasing

A 1990 survey indicated that "47 percent of students attending a school with no honor code reported one or more serious incidents of test or exam cheating during the past year, as did 24 percent of students at schools with honor codes" (McCabe, 1993). The 1990 study is consistent with McCabe's 1963 work showing that 63 percent of surveyed students acknowledged serious cheating on written work. The fact that two studies conducted 27 years apart showing high percentages of students acknowledging that they engage in serious acts of cheating suggests that the problem is long standing and requires focused management. McCabe continues to study academic dishonesty using web-based surveys and notes that:

> Many students argue, with some justification, that campus integrity policies are ill-defined, outdated, biased against students, and rarely discussed by faculty. They also fault faculty who look the other way in the face of obvious cheating. They are even more critical of faculty who, taking "the law" into their own hands when they suspect cheating, punish students without affording them their "rights" under the campus integrity policy.

A massive 1993 study of high achievers conducted by Who's Who among High School Students found that "nearly 80 percent admitted to some form of dishonesty, such as copying someone else's homework or cheating on an exam" (Niels, 1993).

Some authors suggest that low performing students are more likely to be involved in academically dishonest activities. A survey of three college and 37 high schools in New York (Finn and Frone, 2004), found that "low school identification represented a risk factor that interacted with poor performance to increase the likelihood of cheating. We found that poorly performing students are less likely to cheat when they have a strong level of identification with school, but are more likely to cheat when they have a low school identification." The term low school identification refers to the student's pride and relationship to their school.

The authors' experience suggests that clever cheats are more difficult to catch and may be hesitant to report their dishonest activities in such a survey. In fact, they may not view their actions as dishonest, and simply feel they are just working the system to their benefit. However, an apparent aspect of the current study is the need to establish a class/school community that expects academic integrity. McCabe and Trevino (McCabe and Trevino, 2003) note that, "Students cheat. But they cheat less often at schools with an honor code and a peer culture that condemns dishonesty." They provide this example of establishing community. "Following an honor code orientation, each first-year student signs a class banner indicating a personal commitment to the Vanderbilt code. The signed banners for each of the four classes currently enrolled at the university hang in a prominent location in Vanderbilt's student center as a constant reminder to students of the commitment they made" (McCabe and Trevino, 2002).

As faculty at both schools surveyed have international students in their classes, it is important to recognize the cultural aspects of the academic integrity issue. An international study (Lupton, Chapman, Weiss, 2000) found that 84 percent of Polish students studied reported that they had cheated in college as compared to 55 percent of students at a US college. Either number is disconcerting. However, the number of Polish students that self-reported cheating in their present class was more than the number at a US college (59 percent versus 2.9 percent). While this does not indicate a need to monitor international students more stringently, it does suggest a need to make clear faculty expectations during exams and in the explanation of assignments.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) conducted a survey on academic integrity over a decade ago (Lipson, 1993). Similarities are noted with the questions posed to respondents in the current study. When given a scenario of academic dishonesty, faculty in the MIT study tended to *discuss it with the student and reduce the grade on that assignment*. The only scenario that that caused faculty members to ask a student to resubmit an assignment occurred when a student submitted a paper from another student as his/her own. These findings can probably be interpreted as being related to the fact that written academic integrity guidelines were provided by only 7 percent of the faculty at MIT, while the current survey shows 80 percent of UNIV1 faculty and 94 percent of UNIV2 faculty include a warning in their syllabi. The MIT researchers found two actions to encourage more honest academic behavior. One was to have students and faculty take academic honesty more seriously (opinion of faculty). The second was for students to recognize that there was an increased probability of being caught by faculty.

Gallant and Drinan looked at academic integrity as an organizational theory issue and combined the theories of Bolman and Deal (1997) and Huntington (1968) into six strategies. The authors view these six points as worth noting as universities plan a stratagem to cope with academic dishonesty. These six strategies are (Gallant and Drinan, 2006):

1. Acknowledging Cheating as Corruption: "Notions of independent thinking, intellectual property, the struggle of original thought, and academic freedom are all at risk should dishonesty prevail over integrity. Acknowledging student cheating as corruption rather than as simple misbehavior will generate strategies that are less about managing cheating and more about institutionalizing academic integrity. This willingness to direct attention to the negative and address student cheating within the current system is the essential precondition to strategic planning" (p. 12). Students that would not take a bribe or embezzle funds from the school may not view plagiarism as corruption. Fostering education and promoting awareness in the academic domain is critical at the institution.

2. Embracing vulnerability: If academic integrity is important to a school, then the leadership must acknowledge that there is a need to minimize the corruption that exists. This may be viewed as lowering the prestige of the institution, however, it is more important to demonstrate and emphasize the change occurring at the institution. An example exists in the actions of the renowned explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton in his advertisement for men to travel to the South Pole. His 1914 advertisement read, "Men Wanted for Hazardous Journey, Small Wages, Bitter Cold, Long Months of Complete Darkness, Constant Danger, Safe Return Doubtful. Honor and Recognition in Case of Success" (Morrell, 2001). He was inundated with applications, even from women. A leader recognizes the vulnerabilities of the organization and does not play ostrich with her/his head buried in the sand. Leadership, not management, is needed to support academic integrity and change management is required.

3. Highlighting expectations and mutual interests: Goals for addressing academic dishonesty must be realistic and all must participate. The expectations must be portrayed in the classroom and supported by the administration at all levels. There needs to be institutional agreement on trade-offs for teaching load, efficiency and productivity in the educational domain to deal with this corruption.

4. Thinking nationally, acting locally: Several national organizations portray codes of conduct for their profession. These are available as guidelines; however, it is important to not only point at the national group, but to also act in a like fashion.

5. Building the presidential platform: The mandate for integrity must be a policy from the highest component of the organization. However, it must be implemented at the lowest levels of the organization.

6. Avoiding blind alleys: One of Deming's 14 points of quality management is to eliminate slogans. Adopting an honor code does not solve the issue of academic integrity. If only lip service is used to address the issue of cheating, the effort is doomed. The honor code is not a silver bullet to kill the werewolf of cheating. There is a need to establish a community of integrity and each department must dedicate their resources to the effort.

Methodology

specific situations involving acts of academic dishonesty. Faculty members at participating universities who were part of the study received an email with *survey access information* for a web-based survey. The access information and survey instrument were approved by the Human Subjects Committee at participating institutions. A research information sheet was distributed with the researchers' names and contact information, a list summarizing the data to be collected by the survey, the purpose of the survey, the procedures followed, a statement of privacy and confidentiality, the WebCT URL and a WebCT ID and password in the email.

This questionnaire consisted of seven multiple choice questions designed to collect demographic data on the subjects, thirteen Yes/No background data questions, twelve multiple choice questions as responses to specific scenarios and four open-ended questions on academic dishonesty.

Survey access information containing an individual ID and password was forwarded to each faculty member at the two participating universities. E-mail messages were distributed in batches of 40 using Microsoft Outlook. The purpose underlying the use of batches was to avoid possible spam filtering software at each university.

WebCT at one of the participating universities hosted the survey instrument and faculty members were able

In spring 2006, the authors developed a battery of questions to investigate the opinions of faculty given to access the survey with their individual ID and password. At the beginning of each week for three weeks, a reminder message was sent to each faculty member at both universities. Faculty that completed the questionnaire also received this reminder. The use of three reminder messages was valuable in that it resulted in additional faculty responding following each reminder. The procedure approved by the Human Subjects Committee required anonymity of input. Filters were employed to determine legitimate survey respondents. To comply with the requirements of the Human Subjects Committee, the researchers did not examine individual responses. The responses are analyzed with Microsoft® Excel using the pivot table feature.

Results

Email messages soliciting participation in the study were sent to 678 faculty members at one of the participating universities. This generated responses from 162 faculty members (24 percent response rate). In a parallel effort, email messages were sent to 226 faculty members at the second university. This generated responses from 49 faculty members (22 percent response rate). There were four blank responses from the larger of the two universities and one blank response from the other.

General demographics of faculty participants

At Univ1 the gender split of participants was fairly even, however male respondents outnumbered the female respondents at Univ2. Employment options for the participants were offered as:

College Position options	Status
Adjunct or Instructor	Tenure-track
Assistant Professor	Tenured
Associate Professor	Researcher or clinical
Professor	Contract full-time
Other	Contract part-time

The responses to their employment level as shown below:

Univ1 EMPLOYMENT	Tenure track	Tenured	Researcher	Contract full-time	Contract part-time	N/R	Grand Total
a) Adjunct or Instructor	3		1	29	1	1	35
b) Assistant Professor	32		5	4			41
c) Associate Professor	5	22	5	2			34
d) Professor	3	29	1				33
e) Other		1	3	10			14
No Response (N/R)		1				4	5
Grand Total	43	53	15	45	1	5	162

Univ2 EMPLOYMENT	Tenure track	Tenured	Contract full-time	N/R	Grand Total
a) Adjunct or Instructor			4		4
b) Assistant Professor	16		3		19
c) Associate Professor	3	11	1		15
d) Professor		8		1	9
e) Other	1	1			2
Grand Total	20	20	8	1	49

At Univ1, 59 percent of the participants taught classes at the graduate level and 20 percent at the senior level classes. At Univ2, 33 percent taught at the graduate level and 59 percent at the senior level.

Background Questions

There were thirteen background questions, all were Yes or No. It was interesting to note responses to the question about assignment of an individual to track student dishonesty (question 10). The authors believe this is an important component of enforcement of faculty actions in monitoring academic dishonesty. Only one college at UNIV1 (engineering) indicated that they do not have an assigned officer to monitor academic dishonesty (100 percent). All other colleges were split in their opinion about whether there is such an individual at their college. UNIV2 is equally split in its opinion about the existence of an individual to track student academic dishonesty. When asked if their college has a published policy on plagiarism/academic dishonesty (question 11), 77 percent of UNIV1 respondents said Yes while 92 percent responded yes at UNIV2. It is unique that nine percent of respondents at UNIV1 did not address this issue. Perhaps they could neither confirm nor deny the existence of a policy statement. There is an overriding policy at both universities on academic dishonesty that should address this issue.

UNIV1 respondents are also split on the question of academic dishonesty appearing on a student's permanent record (question 14). Such an action does happen, however, 45 percent said No. Twenty percent did not respond, indicating they could say neither Yes or No. UNIV2 was also split with 63 percent saying No, 20 percent saying Yes and 16 percent selecting neither Yes or No.

Seventy percent of UNIV1 participants thought there was an academic dishonesty problem in their college while 74 percent thought there was a problem in general at the university. At UNIV2, 63 percent indicated they thought a problem existed in their college while 65 percent thought there is a problem at the school. As a precaution, 80 percent of UNIV1's faculty includes a statement on academic integrity in their syllabus. At UNIV2, 94 percent of the faculty reported that they include a warning in their syllabus. Apparently, many feel this is adequate and further education on the issue of academic dishonesty is not required. Only 23 percent at UNIV1 and 24 percent at UNIV2 indicated they have at least a 30 minute

lecture on the issue of academic dishonesty in their class. Most authors that publish on academic honesty issues (Lipson and McGavern, 1993) say that in-class lectures are important to reduce these activities. Even though 70 percent and 63 percent of the faculty thought there was a problem in their college, only 43 percent (UNIV1) and 47 percent (UNIV2) have ever failed a student due to academic integrity issues.

Mini-case responses

A series of scenarios describing different conditions and potential actions provided multiple choice responses for the faculty in the survey. In the following text the scenarios are highlighted in italics. The choices for each mini-case are:

a) Fail the student
b) Counsel the student
c) Counsel the student and require a re-write
d) Counsel the student and lower the assignment one or more letter grades
e) Lower the assignment one or more letter grades
f) File actions to have the student dismissed from school
g) You don't check for plagiarism/academic dishonesty

When presented with a scenario of *a student submits a writing assignment without citing the paraphrased text*, most faculty at UNIV1 would counsel the student and either lower them a letter grade (29 percent) or require a re-write (46 percent). UNIV2 closely paralleled this opinion as they (51 percent) would counsel the student and require a re-write. Further, 33 percent indicated they would counsel the student and lower the assignment one or more letter grades.

A change in attitude was noted when faced with a situation where: *A student submits a class writing assignment and large contributions are directly from published sources*. In the previous scenario at UNIV1, only two percent reported they would fail the student. In this situation, the *fail the student* was 22 percent. UNIV2 indicated a change of opinion with 22 percent failing the student also where it was only six percent in the previous scenario. The largest percentage still would counsel the student and either require a re-write or lower their grade at least one letter grade.

The response was stronger when respondents were provided with a scenario that a student was found to have cheated previously. At UNIV1, 35 percent would fail the student and 15 percent would file actions to have the student dismissed from school. At UNIV2, 41 percent would fail the student while 12 percent would pursue dismissal from school. There was less support for counseling the student and/or lowering their final grade.

A third scenario portrayed *A student submits a writing assignment in your class. It contains significant portions of a writing assignment submitted for another class*. Again the principle choice was to counsel the student and either lower their grade or require a re-write (UNIV1 – 46/14 percent | UNIV2 – 35/23 percent).

When presented with the statement: *A student turns in a weekly assignment that is obviously plagiarism/academic dishonesty*, most faculty responded with counsel, reduce the grade or require a re-write of the paper. Twenty-five percent of UNIV2 faculty and 17 percent at UNIV1 responded they would fail the student given this scenario. The response from researchers when asked the faculty's position on *a student submits a class writing assignment and large contributions are directly from published sources* was much the same.

The attitude of faculty was decidedly more punitive when a scenario is presented of: *A student plagiarizes or is guilty of plagiarism/academic dishonesty. You find out this student is guilty of plagiarism/academic dishonesty in another course*. Given these circumstances, 35 percent of Univ1 and 41 percent of Univ2 faculty indicate they would fail the student. This attitude returns to *counsel and reduce grade* when a circumstance of: *A student submits a writing assignment in your class. It contains significant portions of a writing assignment submitted for another class* (46 percent and 39 percent respectively).

Many responses followed the action of *counsel and reduce grade/re-write the paper* until the final questions concerning student performance. A scenario of a student submitting a paper that was previously submitted for credit by another student was posed and the majority agreed that they would fail the student. When asked what they would do

with the student that supplied the paper, the faculty indicated they would counsel the student (40 percent and 39 percent). An equal number chose no response for the question (39 percent and 31 percent). The final student based scenario is: Your class is working on a *group* assignment. It is reported (accurately) that one group has a non-participating member. They are proceeding with the assignment and intend to finish their work on time and include all students' as contributing equally. The faculty indicated that none would fail the group. Instead 51 percent (at both schools) indicated they preferred to counsel the group.

Discussion

The data point out that faculty members at both institutions were forgiving for first time offenders. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents at one university and 96 percent at the second university indicated that they have leeway in their treatment of academic integrity violations. There is no universally required punishment for a specific action, and faculty can pursue multiple options. This can provide students with a compelling reason to act in an academically dishonest manner (e.g., knowing if they are caught the worst punishment will be a re-write.) Several remark that students become involved in activities that are academically dishonest because it is worth the chance they will not be caught. Further, faculty note that the pressures for success and obligations to work to support a family (limitation on time) drive students toward committing acts of academic dishonesty. Faculty from the same college at both universities reported that they did and did not have a plagiarism policy. This is counter-intuitive as 74 percent of the faculty surveyed at one university (17 percent provided no response) and 65 percent at the other university felt there was a problem with academic dishonesty at their respective schools.

Conclusion

These authors feel that faculty members must provide stronger plagiarism/academic dishonesty awareness and education for our students. Further, it is critical that students found guilty of academic dishonesty be reported to an individual who tracks such issues. It is also important for faculty to follow up on such activities if they are basing their actions on past student behavior. These activities should boost the

students to the third level in Kohlberg's stages of development in moral reasoning. At this level of post-conventional morality, students could view the contract they have with society and how their actions affect the community as a whole. The authors feel it is pertinent to echo the advice of Gallant and Drinan:

> Notions of independent thinking, intellectual property, the struggle of original thought, and academic freedom are all at risk should dishonesty prevail over integrity. Acknowledging student cheating as corruption rather than as simple misbehavior will generate strategies that are less about managing cheating and more about institutionalizing academic integrity. This willingness to direct attention to the negative and address student cheating within the current system is the essential precondition to strategic planning (p. 12, 2006).

It is important to approach the issue of plagiarism at the institution with a focus on the future and the elimination of the corruption that exists.

The data collected was valuable and future content analysis of the open ended questions will provide additional research insights. We intend to examine combinations of conditions for employment status and other variables. A potential hypothesis would explore any differences between tenured and non-tenured faculty expectations of students. Also, a second research effort as part of a Delphi method will build upon the results of this survey. We intend to take the questions of interest and further examine them with additional exploratory questions of the same schools. Further, one area not surveyed was the actual support for investigating and prosecuting academic dishonesty at a school. The authors note that university administrators may not be willing to support the faculty when deciding on the appropriate action for students found to have engaged in various acts of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. The authors plan to conduct a follow-up survey of the administration of each school to compare their responses against those reported in this study.

James Frost, Ph.D. is an assistant research professor with the Informatics Research Institute at Idaho State University. His publications focus in

computer security and social engineering, ethics and group decision support systems.

**Alan Hamlin, Ph.D. is a Professor of Management at Southern Utah University. He teaches seniors and graduate students in Organizational Behavior, Ethics and International Business. He has published many papers and articles over his 25 years in academia and recently presented a paper at Oxford University.

***Casimir C. Barczyk, Ph.D. is a professor in the school of management at Purdue University. He teaches human resource management and industrial relations, bringing years of professional experience with him into the classroom. He publishes on topics related to organizational culture, symbolic management, and occupational health and safety.

References

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1997). Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cabe, Patrick A., About Plagiarism (from TIPSters). Retrieved June 7, 2006 from http://psych.skidmore.edu/plagiarism.htm.

Ercegovac, Zorana & Richardson, John V. Jr. (July 2004). Academic Dishonesty, Plagiarism Included, in the Digital Age: A Literature Review. College and Research Libraries, 301 - 318.

Finn, Kristin Voelkl, & Frone, Michael R. (2004). Academic Performance and Cheating: Moderating Role of School Identification and Self-Efficacy. The Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 97, No. 3. 115 - 122.

Gallant, Tricia Bertram & Drinan, Patrick. (2006). Organizational Theory and Student Cheating: Explanation, Responses, and Strategies, The Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 77, No. 5. 838 – 860.

Huntington, S. P. (1968). Political order in changing societies. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Leming, J. S. (1980). Cheating behavior, subject variables, and components of internal-external scale under high and low risk conditions. Journal of Educational Research. Vol 74.

Lipson, Alberta, & McGavern, Norma. (1993, Oct.). Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty at MIT, A Report to the MIT Community, paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research - 33rd (pp. 16-19). Chicago, IL.

Lupton, Robert A, Chapman, Robert J., Weiss, & John E. (2000) A Cross-National Exploration of Business Students' Attitudes, Perceptions, and Tendencies Toward Academic Dishonesty, Journal of Business Education, March/April. 231 – 235.

McCabe, Donald L. & Trevino, Linda Klebe. (2002). "Honesty and Honor Codes," Academe V. 88.

McCabe, Donald. (2005) It Takes a Village: Academic Dishonesty and Educational Opportunity. Liberal Education, Summer/Fall. 26 – 31.

Morrell, Margot, & Capparell, Stephanie. (2001). Shackleton's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer, Viking Press.

Niels, Gary, J. (1993). Academic Practices School Culture and Cheating Behavior, retrieved June 7, 2006 from http://winchesterthurston.org/files/cheating.pdf.

Stearns, Laurie. (1998). Copy Wrong: Plagiarism, Process, Property, and the Law, In Lise Buranen, &, Alice M. Roy (Eds), Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World. New York: State Univ. of New York Pr.

Tittle, C. R., & Rowe, A. R. (1973). Moral appeal, sanction threat, and deviance: An experimental test, Social Problems.

Tomsho, Robert. (Aug 15, 2006). Student Plagiarism Stirs Controversy at Ohio University, Wall Street Journal. (Eastern edition). p. A.1.