

Home, Gender, and the Social Scene: Factors Influencing and Pedagogies Discouraging Cheating Among College Students

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Abstract

Factors influencing cheating are examined through a survey administered to 200 senior business students enrolled at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. This population does not report a significant difference from students in other geographic areas. Variables showing significance in a lower incidence of cheating are religious-meeting attendance and high GPA; conversely, the fraternity-sorority membership variable shows a significantly higher level of cheating and vulnerability to external influences. Educators can combat the problem through implementing specific classroom procedures, assigning ethical-issue problems, and encouraging students to live by honor codes and follow good role models.

Introduction

Numerous surveys from various parts of the United States and Great Britain continue to show a rise in the percentage of college students who admit to cheating on exams and to a general disregard for adhering to strict standards of choosing right over wrong. Even as long ago as 1992, Davis et al. (1992) found the growth in reported cheating in the previous 20 years to be an alarming trend. Articles written in 2003 indicate that the problem is still prevalent (Penn, Fall 2003, Grebe, 2003).

Some evidence supports the theory that those who cheat are highly motivated to get good grades (Perry, Kane, Bernesser, & Spicker, 1990). However, there is also evidence that the better students with higher GPAs do not cheat as much as the students with lower GPAs (Weiss, Gilbert, Giordano, & Davis, 1993).

Key words and Concepts: Influences related to college-student cheating, Cheating on the increase, Pedagogies which discourage student cheating, and Pedagogies discouraging cheating.

Another issue that has been studied is the effect of membership in fraternities and sororities on cheating. Evidence suggests that members of sororities and fraternities cheat more than those students who are not so affiliated (Stannard & Bowers, 1982).

Such information brought forth the following questions: 1) Is there a relationship between dishonesty or cheating and discussion of honesty in the home, GPA, and religious attendance? 2) Is there a difference in the amount of dishonesty between males and females? 3) Is there a relationship between membership in a fraternity or a sorority and cheating? An additional area of research looked at ways that educators can discourage unethical behavior.

Procedures and Methods

Sample. The respondents for this study consisted of 200 senior business students enrolled in the Texas Tech University, Jerry S. Rawls College of Business Administration. The students were given the questionnaire described below during a course on Managerial Communications. Participation was voluntary and did not include incentives such as pay or extra credit. Of the 200 students who completed the questionnaire, 191 were from Texas, 4 from New Mexico, and 5 were from areas outside these two states. There were 127 males and 73 females. In the survey sample, 31 percent of the students were members of a fraternity or sorority while 69 percent were not. When answering the question about GPA, 19 percent of the students had an A average, 67 percent had a B average, and 14 percent had a C average. Of the students surveyed, 15 percent attended religious meetings weekly, 28 percent attended religious meetings monthly, 39 percent attended religious meetings yearly, and 18 percent never attended religious meetings.

Questionnaire design. Many of the studies of cheating in Higher Education were done at universities on either coast or in the Northern part of the United States. The question could be asked, "Are

students from the "Bible Belt" less inclined to be dishonest than those from other geographical areas?" There is some evidence that recruiters seek graduates from specific institutions, such as religious universities, with the expectation that their graduates will be more honest (Alsop, 2003).

A 34-item instrument, using a forced choice, Likert-type format, was used to gather information. This questionnaire, modeled after one used by Newstead et al. (1996), included background items such as gender and home state as well as independent variables that might influence cheating such as grade point average, membership in a fraternity or sorority, religiosity, and prior discussion of ethics in the home. The dependent variables included two scales measuring different aspects of cheating. One scale, made up of four items, was called Exterior Influences and measured whether the student had been influenced to cheat because of a large work load, insufficient study time, competition from other students, or the need to get a job or go to graduate school. The Chronbach's Alpha measuring the internal consistency (reliability) of the Exterior Influences scale was .75.

A higher score on the Exterior Influences scale indicates less cheating. The second dependent measure, or Honesty Scale, consisted of 14 items measuring different types of cheating such as cheating on a unit test, cheating on a final exam, copying another's work, plagiarizing, and allowing others to copy an individual's work. On this scale, a higher score indicates more honesty. The Chronbach's Alpha measuring the internal consistency (reliability) of the Honesty scale was .83. In this section, we discuss questionnaire design, consider previous findings, and analyze our results. A table showing answers to specific questions is also included.

Questionnaire Design

Many of the studies of cheating in Higher Education were done at universities on either coast or in the Northern part of the United States. We were interested to know if students from the "Bible Belt" would be less inclined to be dishonest. We included questions designed to give us information regarding this question.

We constructed a 34-item instrument that used a forced choice, Likert-type format (Appendix A). This questionnaire was modeled after one used by Newstead et al. (1996) with changes and additions related to our specific needs. Of the 200 students who completed the questionnaire, 191 were from Texas, four from New Mexico, and five from areas outside these two states.

Previous Studies

Some evidence supports the theory that those who cheat are highly motivated to get good grades (Perry, Kane, Bernesser, & Spicker, 1990). However, there is also evidence that the better students with higher GPAs do not cheat as much as the students with lower GPAs (Weiss, Gilbert, Giordano, & Davis, 1993). We used items in our questionnaire related to this issue to see if our sample would show similar results.

Another issue that has been studied is the effect of membership in fraternities and sororities on cheating. Evidence suggests that members of sororities and fraternities cheat more than those students who are not so affiliated (Stannard & Bowers, 1982). We added a question about this merely to see if our sample would show the same results.

Results

The survey showed that 45 percent of the students reported that they had cheated in the last year, with 6 percent reporting that they had cheated six to ten times, 7 percent reporting that they cheated three to five times, and 32 percent reporting that they cheated one to two times. When evaluating other questions concerned with types of cheating such as cheating on a quiz, copying others work, or plagiarizing, the percentage of students cheating ranged from a low of 30 percent on final exams to a high of 48 percent on quizzes.

To evaluate the relationship between dishonesty, external influences on cheating, discussion of honesty in the home, and religious attendance, a correlation matrix was produced in the SPSS program. The results are listed in Table A1 (Appendix). As is evident from Table A1, there is a strong relationship between the Honesty Scale and external pressures to cheat. Also evident from Table A1 is that the more

often a person attends religious services, the less he or she is dishonest. However, there appears to be no relationship between the frequency of discussing honesty in the home and the level of dishonesty in college students. There is a relationship between the discussion of honesty in the home and the attendance of religious meetings. There is a significant relationship between GPA, dishonesty, external influences, and religion.

To evaluate whether or not gender or membership in a fraternity or sorority influences the result of the Honesty Scale or the External Influences Scale, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted. The multivariate F-values for gender and membership in a fraternity or sorority were 5.94 ($p < .01$) and 4.74 ($p < .01$). The F-value for the interaction between gender and membership in a fraternity/sorority was not significant. The means for males and females and those who were members of a sorority or fraternity on Honesty and External Influence Scales are listed in Table A2 (Appendix). The results in Table A2 indicate that males scored significantly lower than females on the Honesty Scale but not significantly lower on the External Influences Scale. Membership in a Fraternity/Sorority resulted in lower levels of honesty and more dishonesty as a result of external influences.

Table A1.

Correlations between the Honesty Scale, External Influences Scale, Discussions of Honesty in the Home, Religious Attendance, and GPA.

Scale	Honesty	External Influences	Discussions	Religion	GPA
Honesty	1				
External Influences	.62**	1			
Discussions	.12	.01	1		
Religion	.15*	.03	.18*	1	
GPA	.20**	.14*	.04	.23**	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

The results from this study indicate that there is a significant relationship between dishonesty, religious attendance, and GPA. The higher the attendance at religious meetings, the lower the levels of dishonesty. As the students' GPAs increase, the level of cheating decreases. Although the level of religious attendance is related to the discussion of honesty in the home, there does not seem to be a relationship between the discussions of honesty in the home and the level of cheating. This may suggest that religious attendance is more significant than discussions in the home in encouraging honest behavior. Further study could clarify this.

The results also show that males report higher rates of cheating than females. However, there is no significant difference between males and females in their reports of cheating due to external influences. As also shown in other studies, our results indicate that membership in a fraternity or sorority causes a significant rise in the levels of cheating and cheating due to external forces.

Because our questionnaire results mirrored those reported from other geographical areas, cheating appears to be as much a problem in our area in the Bible Belt as it is in other locations.

In addition to simply recognizing the cheating problem, those who have studied cheating in the Higher Education community identify business-major students as the group most likely to cheat and report that instructors of business subjects have been found to condone cheating (Baird, 1980; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, & Armstead, 1996; McCabe & Trevine, 1995). These findings indicate that instructors in business subjects should be looking for ways to reduce instances of cheating. A study cited by The New York Times indicates that although "ethical conduct in the workplace has become increasingly important to students at leading business schools," students don't feel these issues are addressed. In fact, students were "worried that their study programs might teach questionable values that may later contribute to mismanagement or corporate fraud" (Browning, 2003). What can be done?

Implications for Educators

Many question an educator's ability, at this stage in students' lives, to make changes in something so ingrained as a personal moral code. However, research has shown that the study and emphasis of moral issues in a classroom situation will have an impact (Knapp and Huber, 2002). There are notable odds. Nevertheless, progress could be made through at least four offensives.

Honor Codes

A first, and perhaps easiest, course is to use established honor codes to emphasize the importance of ethics and honesty in our classrooms. Most colleges and universities have an honor code or honor pledge that students receive at the time of their registration. In the Student Handbook at Notre Dame College, students are told "All students, full time and part time, who enroll in Notre Dame College are assumed to be adults who understand the necessity to conduct themselves in a manner that is compatible with the College's mission as an educational institution. Each student is expected to become familiar with all published policies, rules and regulations of the College and will be held responsible for following them." (Notre Dame Student Handbook, 2003) Instructors can remind their students of the promise they made when they enrolled.

At Texas Tech University, the Office of the Ombudsman suggests quoting the university's statement on academic integrity and including the descriptions of Cheating and Plagiarism found in the Texas Tech University Catalog (Quilliam, 2002). A search of an institution's website or catalog may produce similar statements that can be used in class. Including these quotations in the class syllabus and going over them at the start of the semester will clarify for the students what is and what is not acceptable. If a specific honor code is unavailable at an institution, a list of sample honor codes can be found at http://www.academicintegrity.org/samp_honor_codes.asp. Often, the students' definitions of cheating will vary from the instructor's. Including a statement such as the following will help students to understand what is meant in each course.

Cheating: Dishonesty on examinations and quizzes or on written assignments, illegal possession of examinations; the use of unauthorized notes during an examination or quiz; obtaining information during an examination from the examination paper, the Internet, or another student; assisting others to cheat; alteration of grade records; and illegal entry to or unauthorized presence in an office are instances of cheating (Jones, ed., 2003-2004, p. 49).

Reproducing a copy of applicable definitions with each assignment so that the students are very clear on what they can and cannot do may also be helpful. A verbal warning at the beginning of each test or quiz will remind students of the honor system that they have agreed to follow. There may also be places on campus that offer students tips for avoiding cheating and plagiarism, such as those found at the Texas Tech University Office of the Ombudsman at http://www.depts.ttu.edu/ombudsman/tip_cheatplag.html.

Class Procedures and Requirements

A second suggestion deals with managing class procedures and requirements to make cheating more difficult. Most unit or semester tests are proctored. Some teachers give alternating tests to students sitting close together; others design special seating arrangements to separate friends and make copying from another's test more difficult. Instructors might require students to turn in copies of Internet sources they use in their papers.

Internet plagiarism is often difficult to detect. Students can copy complete research papers from the Internet. In the Responses from Readers section of the May 2, 2000 Bovee and Thill newsletter delivered via e-mail to subscribers, Stuart M. Kurland, associate professor of English at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, wrote:

I'd fight student plagiarism by using the Internet. And I don't think doing so would undermine the trust between students and faculty—any more than radar undermines the trust between law-abiding motorists and the police (who tend

not to set up the radar in locations where everyone obeys the speed limit).

Cheating, like speeding, involves a calculation that one won't get caught, or that the violation is worth the risk; if there's no meaningful enforcement, or threat of enforcement, the rules would soon become meaningless. A colleague introduced me to an excellent free resource for monitoring student work: the Northern Light search engine

(<http://www.northernlight.com>)

which only takes a few distinctive key words to find matches in public domain sources (p.8).

While Northern Light no longer has a free web search engine (Priscilla@northernlight.com, personal communication, August 13, 2003), other sources are available. David Grebe (2003) discusses A&M University's success with identifying plagiarism through Turnitin.com. Grebe reports that other institutions such as Dartmouth College, Georgetown University, and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point have also contracted with Turnitin.com.

Ethical-Issue Assignments

A third area for encouraging ethical behavior is to incorporate ethical issues into the classroom assignments and discussions. Olson (1995) suggests that "...students do not have to learn new information so much as deepen and clarify their understanding of what they already do and know" (p. 2). Although teaching an entire unit that explores business ethics may be beyond the scope and time allowance of our courses, ethical situations can be built into the course assignments. Giving assignments that cause students to examine their own values will allow them to formulate their own set of what is and is not acceptable.

For example, a discussion in the classroom, when assigning a persuasive letter or speech, can be held about what to include in the information that is conveyed to the audience. Is some information harmful to the argument? How much can/should be withheld? These types of discussions, couched in a natural business context, will guide the students to important critical thinking. Kienszler (2001)

mentions four important aspects of critical thinking which encourage ethical thought and behavior: identifying and questioning assumptions, seeking a multiplicity of voices and alternatives on the subject, making connections, and fostering active involvement (p. 1). Requiring students to use these skills as they complete assignments for the course will promote an identification of ethical communication and behavior. Questioning of assumptions generally leads to a quick realization of the difference between what is and what ought to be. This questioning is hard for college-age students to do on their own. Teaching students to seek out and weigh multiple voices (audiences) will encourage them to consider what they---rather than their instructors or society---think is ethical. It will give a new meaning to the question, "Is it honest?"

Selected case studies can be valuable in encouraging student thinking. Some students will have sufficient experience to enable them to contribute to the case approach themselves. For example, one student wrote of his ethical dilemma in which loyalty to a friendship was pitted against his pledge of confidentiality. The student related that a close friend and former colleague had called him at work to ask him for an internal, controlled document. The caller, a former colleague (referred to as Jim), had worked for the company for 15 years before leaving to pursue a position with one of the company's competitors. Jim's reputation for honesty and integrity had caused the student to seek Jim out as a mentor when the student joined the company two years ago. Jim proved to be of great help; the student developed a strong sense of trust, perhaps even obligation, for Jim before Jim left to work for the competing company. The student found it hard to believe that Jim would ask him to violate his pledge of confidentiality by delivering the document. How should he handle this situation? This case might be used for class discussion, for thought papers, or for letter-writing or oral-communication assignments.

The Internet offers a real-life connection to companies and other business organizations that can provide students with a current, relevant perspective on ethics in the business world. In his article, Frank Urbancic (1998) suggests that the Internet be used for case studies, reading assignments, and research. Referring students to appropriate websites or

requiring them to seek out pertinent websites on their own will add to the legitimacy of the assignments they are asked to do. They will see how the assignment relates to an actual business situation. A recent search, using the inquiry "business ethics" on the search engine at google.com, brought up over two million sites that deal with business ethics. These resources can be used by instructors to plan assignments and by students to complete the assignments.

Personal Examples of Integrity

The fourth offensive, another excellent method of providing relevance to ethics, is to use the examples of modern men and women in the business world who have been very successful while maintaining high ethical standards. Using daily news, the Internet, current periodicals/books, and personal observation, teachers or, better yet, students can identify individuals who model integrity. Through a review of the above-mentioned sources, the authors identified nine individuals whose lives merit further study in the search for persons to serve as worthy role models for ethical behavior.

Randy Pennington and Marc Bockmon (1995) in their book *On my honor, I will* identify several business leaders known for their integrity. Among those they discuss are business founders Sam Walton, James C. Penney, and Mary Kay Ash.

Those identified by tributes made to individuals for their integrity include Jon Huntsman (Vice President Cheney, 2002) and John Willard Marriott (Statement on the Death of John Willard Marriott, 1985).

For their roles in trying to correct wrongdoing within their respective organizations, Cynthia Cooper, Coleen Rowley, and Sherron Watkins were honored as persons of the year in the December 22, 2002 issue of *Time Magazine* (Lacayo & Ripley, 2002).

An article published September 29, 2003 by *Fortune Magazine* reports an interview with Bill George, whose career included top-management positions at Honeywell, Litton Industries, and Medtronic. He describes his struggles and success in remaining ethical amidst the pressures of being a top executive. His successful record in the business

world shows students that ethics and success are compatible.

Conclusions

The results of studies in various geographical areas between 1972 and 2003 report that student cheating in Higher Education is a serious problem. However, educators can effectively reduce student violations by emphasizing honor codes-pledges established by the University, employing classroom procedures to inhibit cheating, assigning projects dealing with ethical questions (including case studies), and helping identify worthy role models.

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Appendix

Table A2. The means for males and females and those who were members of a sorority or fraternity on Honesty and External Influence Scales.

	Honesty Mean(SD)	External Influences Mean(SD)
Males	9.40(.46) ^a	2.77(.17)
Females	10.55(.53)	2.39(.19)
Sorority/Fraternity-yes	9.24(.60) ^b	2.30(.22) ^c
Sorority/Fraternity-no	10.70(.37)	2.85(.13)

a= males' mean is significantly different than the females' mean ($p < .05$)

b= the mean for those in a sorority/fraternity is significantly different than those not in a sorority/fraternity ($p < .01$)

c= the mean for those in a sorority/fraternity is significantly different than those not in a sorority/fraternity ($< .05$)