Faculty and student perceptions of cheating

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Students and faculty at a mid-sized masters comprehensive university completed a survey regarding their perceptions of student cheating and other academic misbehavior. A total of 656 student surveys (22%) and 303 faculty surveys (35%) were analyzed to determine the perceived prevalence of cheating across campus, which behaviors are considered cheating, and how wrong they are perceived to be. Results demonstrated less consensus among faculty than expected on which misbehaviors violate the academic ethics policy as well as considerable variation in the perceived frequency that the policy violations occur, for both students and faculty. Increased education about plagiarism and cheating is needed across campus as well as policy revisions and greater awareness of normative academic behavior.

Results

- Collaboration and proper citation appear to be the two primary problem areas at this institution. Still, 10-15% of students admitted to cheating on exams or assignments, in spite of what is considered to be the least probably wrong.
- Mean scores on whether an item is cheating and whether it is wrong tended to parallel each other, with faculty scoring both sets of items on average higher than the students did. None of the Wrongness items were strikingly different, but some did have up to a .30 mean difference. In 13 of the 17 Cheating items (10 of which were statistically significant at p<.05), faculty were more likely to perceive the action as a policy violation/cheating than students were. The largest difference was on making up data / didn't cite sources in a thesis/dissertation/article (3.7 vs. 2.1). Presented the work of another person as your own (3.2 vs. 2.5), gave unauthorized help to someone else during an exam (2.4 vs. 2.9), and used prohibited materials during an exam (2.2 vs. 2.7) were also significantly different.

Discussion

Having a clear consensus and understanding across campus of what academic integrity entails is critical to facilitating student adherence to high ethical standards. Whether those details are outlined in a policy document or otherwise, the results suggest that more efforts are needed at this university to broaden awareness among both faculty and students on what actions are considered to be violations of academic ethics. Further education for students in particular is needed on appropriate methods of collaboration and citation. Consideration must also be given to student willingness to follow these standards, as well as their perceptions of whether these actions are wrong and how common they perceive them to be. Building a strong culture of integrity means not only promoting ethical behavior but also communicating the extent to which ethical actions are normative. Thus, a multi-pronged approach is needed that goes beyond sanctions to broad-based education, awareness of ethical standards, and the promotion of positive social norm perceptions among the students.

References


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