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 position revisions and greater awareness of normative academic behavior.

### Method

#### Survey Sample:

- Stratified random sample of students (n=3,000) and all faculty and administrators who teach (n=858). 758 students and 363 faculty responded; 656 students and 303 faculty completed usable surveys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Students (%)</th>
<th>Faculty (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Beh Sci</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Survey Content:**

- Familiarity with ethics policy
- Perceptions of which actions violate policy/represent cheating
- Perceptions of how wrong each action is
- Perceptions of how common action is
- Whether or not respondents have done (students) or observed (faculty) each item

### 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 their perceptions that these are probably the most 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 0.30 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 believed them to be. The largest difference was on making up data, a difference of 0.54 (faculty at 91 vs. students at 4.37).
- Interestingly, there were only four items where faculty had a complete or near consensus that an action was a policy violation/cheating (scored as 3.90-4.00) - copied on exam, used prohibited materials during exam, presented another’s work as your own, took exam for someone, made up research data, and cheating on a thesis/dissertation/article. In a few cases, such as turning in the same paper in more than one class, the mean for both samples was between 2 (may be) and 3 (probably cheating).
- While the cheating and wrongness results were parallel, many of the items asking how common these behaviors were trended in the opposite direction. While the differences were not large, it is interesting that the students perceived about half of the violations to be more common than the faculty believed them to be. Also, overall, faculty believed plagiarism to be more common than the students did, while students perceived higher frequency for items related to cheating on exams.

### 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


