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Faculty and student perceptions of cheating

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Faculty and Student Perceptions of Cheating

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Abstract

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 potential policy revisions and greater awareness of normative academic behavior.

Introduction

University students do not necessarily plan to engage in cheating behaviors. However, 65% of students reported often having the opportunity to cheat (Stone, Jawahar, & Kisamore, 2009). Approximately 90% of faculty have witnessed cheating in their courses, but less than half of them report this behavior to the proper authorities (McCabe, 1993, 2005). Of the students who reported the absence of cheating, only 23% abstain due to fear of punishment (Stone, et.al., 2009). These findings support the notion that Integrity Culture, the perceived adherence to institutional policies, plays a role in students' participation in academic dishonesty. Low integrity culture has been linked with higher rates of cheating intentions, and with low likelihoods of reporting cheating (Stone, Kisamore, & Jawahar, 2008). This study sought to examine the actual and perceived levels of student cheating across one university campus, and how that might relate to perceptions of the current academic ethics policy and its implementation.

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.

College	Students (%)	Faculty (%)	Classification	Students (%)	Position	Faculty (%)
Business	17.8	12.4	First Year	20.6	Adjunct	11.1
Education	26.8	22.5	Sophomore	20.1	Instructor	8.9
Arts & Sciences	34.7	43.4	Junior	25.8	Asst Prof	16.7
Social & Beh Sci	20.7	21.7	Senior	16.6	Assoc Prof	31.1
			Graduate	15	Professor	31.5
			Other	1.8	Other	.7

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

Table 1. Student and faculty perceptions of cheating

Survey Item	% Who have done it (students) or observed it (faculty) at this university		1=Definitely not cheating to 4=Definitely cheating			1=Not at all wrong to 4=Definitely wrong			1=Very uncommon to 4=Very common		
	Students	Faculty	Students	Faculty	Effect	Students	Faculty	Effect	Students	Faculty	Effect
	% Yes	% Yes	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Cohen's d	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Cohen's d	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Cohen's d
Failed to properly cite something at least one time in a paper	56.0	84.4	2.76 (1.03)	2.70 (0.96)	0.06	2.93 (0.92)	2.95 (0.88)	-0.02	3.14 (0.86)	3.45 (0.72)	-0.39
Worked with another student on assignment/lab report	51.4	57.5	2.52 (1.06)	2.61 (1.05)	-0.08	2.48 (1.04)	2.65 (0.98)	-0.17	3.13 (0.92)	3.17 (0.76)	-0.04
Paraphrased source without citing/ referencing it	38.0	83.3	3.17 (0.91)	3.04 (0.86)	0.14	3.23 (0.86)	3.17 (0.82)	0.07	2.90 (0.89)	3.25 (0.77)	-0.41
Made up a source or cited a source that you did not use	18.6	39.1	3.36 (0.83)	3.65 (0.60)	-0.38	3.46 (0.75)	3.76 (0.51)	-0.43	2.43 (0.88)	2.40 (0.84)	0.04
Gave/received questions or answers to test w/out permission	17.4	29.3	3.62 (0.72)	3.86 (0.42)	-0.37	3.57 (0.71)	3.82 (0.52)	-0.38	2.41 (0.95)	2.33 (0.83)	0.09
Turned in same paper/assignment for more than one course	15.6	39.6	2.93 (1.04)	3.08 (0.93)	-0.15	3.01 (1.00)	3.03 (0.90)	-0.03	2.55 (0.88)	2.63 (0.77)	-0.09
Copied someone else's answers during an exam	14.2	54.8	3.90 (0.41)	3.99 (0.12)	-0.24	3.84 (0.46)	3.97 (0.17)	-0.34	2.52 (0.97)	2.49 (0.82)	0.03
Used a direct quote without indicating that it was a quote	12.4	74.8	3.35 (0.85)	3.29 (0.86)	0.07	3.47 (0.75)	3.43 (0.76)	0.05	2.58 (0.88)	3.08 (0.83)	-0.58
Used prohibited materials during an exam	12.4	35.9	3.81 (0.51)	3.91 (0.30)	-0.22	3.75 (0.53)	3.92 (0.31)	-0.37	2.41 (0.90)	2.23 (0.76)	0.21
Gave unauthorized help to someone else during an exam	10.7	33.2	3.71 (0.60)	3.78 (0.53)	-0.13	3.68 (0.62)	3.79 (0.50)	-0.19	2.25 (0.88)	2.18 (0.70)	0.09
Made up research or lab data when you weren't supposed to	9.1	13.8	3.47 (0.77)	3.91 (0.32)	-0.67	3.60 (0.66)	3.94 (0.28)	-0.59	2.19 (0.85)	1.91 (0.71)	0.34
Made up data/didn't cite sources in a thesis/dissertation/article	3.7	21.9	3.70 (0.63)	3.92 (0.34)	-0.39	3.75 (0.52)	3.96 (0.22)	-0.47	2.05 (0.88)	1.88 (0.74)	0.20
Presented the work of another person as your own	3.2	53.2	3.85 (0.49)	3.96 (0.24)	-0.26	3.85 (0.41)	3.96 (0.24)	-0.31	2.16 (0.85)	2.29 (0.81)	-0.15
Willfully violated the ethical code for your profession	2.4	29.4	3.62 (0.72)	3.55 (0.79)	0.09	3.78 (0.50)	3.84 (0.45)	-0.13	1.99 (0.77)	1.98 (0.72)	0.01
Changed things on exam/assignment, submitted it for re-grading	2.3	11.7	3.36 (0.86)	3.57 (0.74)	-0.25	3.45 (0.77)	3.64 (0.72)	-0.24	1.99 (0.79)	1.88 (0.69)	0.15
Interfered with other students' access to course materials	1.5	4.0	3.01 (1.03)	3.03 (0.94)	-0.02	3.54 (0.73)	3.63 (0.64)	-0.13	1.72 (0.77)	1.54 (0.57)	0.25
Took exam for someone/had someone else take exam for you	1.5	3.6	3.90 (0.46)	4.00 (0.00)	-0.27	3.88 (0.42)	3.98 (0.22)	-0.27	1.69 (0.78)	1.54 (0.66)	0.21

t tests signif at * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

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 scoring them at 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 $p \leq .05$), faculty were more likely to perceive the action as a policy violation/cheating than students were. The largest difference was on *making up data*, a difference of .54 (faculty at 3.91 vs. students at 3.47).
- 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.

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