RATEYOURSTUDENTSETHICS.COM: PIRACY, PLAGIARISM OR CHEATING?

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ABSTRACT

This Special Session, chaired by Katrin R. Harich, focuses on issues relating to students' ethical behavior, including plagiarism, cheating with use of technology, and piracy. The presenters will address questions such as: has the spread of computing changed general ethics/student ethics (i.e. made some previously unethical acts seem less unethical), why and how does Internet plagiarism occur, why and how does Internet piracy occur, why and how does Internet cheating occur, what is the effect of these behaviors on learning, for the students, are these three areas (plagiarism, cheating, piracy) related, how can the transgression of ethics in these areas be explained from a theoretical perspective, and what are the different approaches to curb unethical Internet behavior and to whom and which of these areas do these approaches apply (or work best).

SPECIFIC SESSION CONTENT

Specifically, Neil Granitz discusses the growth of internet plagiarism, possible reasons for this "explosion," as well as solutions to the challenge. According to surveys, 41 percent of undergraduate students admit that they have engaged in one or more instances of "cut and paste" plagiarism involving the Internet. Curiously, according to extant research, more than 30 percent of instructors did nothing to pursue cheating, although they knew it was going on in their classes. Complicating matters further, not even college professors always agree on what constitutes plagiarism. Suggested solutions include contract honor, define plagiarism as wrong, teach proper citation and documentation techniques, act as a role model, avoid standardized, general assignments, explain and emphasize surveillance, institute and enforce clear, severe penalties.

Jerry Kirkpatrick focuses on ethical theory, pointing to the fact that various theories do not agree whether lying is always wrong or, if it is sometimes justified, under what conditions it might be justified. Deontologists argue that we should act according to duty, regardless of consequences. Utilitarians always look at consequences to discover acts that lead to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Advocates of rational or enlightened self-interest theory look at consequences in relation to the principle of self-defense. Relativists say that right and wrong depend on some perspective, such as one's culture, language, nation, historical era, ethnic group, or self. Finally, situationalists look at the specific situation, guided by an overarching principle, such as love or growth and progress, to judge right from wrong.

Lauren Wright and Dan Toy emphasize the role of technology with respect to cheating. Cheating behavior can be facilitated by information technology, including chat rooms, plagiarism from the Internet, sharing of test questions via email between classes, the use of cell phones to dial multiple choice answers into numeric pagers, and crib note cheating with cutting edge calculators. Some of the most popular choices for e-cheating are the web-based "term paper mill sites." In a recent exchange of emails on ELMAR, marketing professors discussed the problems of posting solutions to business cases on Web sites. These solutions were being retrieved by students and used as a shortcut for preparing case assignments.

While technological tools provide additional avenues for cheating, they also offer new methods for preventing, identifying and verifying cheating. Faculty now have access to search engines such as turnitin.com, paperbin.com, howoriginal.com, and plagiserv.com to help combat online plagiarism. These sites use word mining tools to check

documents against published work on the web. Securexam and SofTest are the equivalent tools for use in e-testing environments. A more traditional approach to combating cheating involves developing a "relationship" type of environment in the classroom. Other options include: affirming the importance of academic integrity, promoting an environment of trust in the classroom, clarifying expectations for students, reducing opportunities to engage in cheating, challenging dishonesty when it occurs, and helping define and support campus-wide academic integrity standards.

Brian Jorgensen discusses Internet piracy of music, video, and other digital products. Internet piracy of music, video, and other digital products is the offspring of two previously common practices among students. The first of these was the analog copying of music and movies onto audio and video cassettes. The second was the free installation of software products from disks purchased by someone else. The gray area legality in the first case coupled with the ability to create an identical duplicate in the second case converged to create an "I can and, therefore, I will" mentality among otherwise would-be purchasers of entertainment and software products. When Napster arrived on the scene, many students and other music lovers viewed it as a gift and a goldmine, particularly in light of the beliefs of most that file sharing was not illegal. Part of the research on which this presentation is based was collected through interviews with students during the heyday of free file sharing using Napster, specifically in the fall of 2001.
A second set of interviews was conducted in early 2005, following a time period during which some individuals who had downloaded free music over the internet had been prosecuted and fined. As a result these prosecutions, most consumers today believe that free file sharing is, indeed, illegal. Further, the emergence of online music stores that sell downloads for a price, such as itunes, has created an alternative to having to buy a whole CD for one or two desired songs. Nevertheless, many students continue to download music for free and to burn copies of friends' CDs without giving much thought to the ethics of these practices. A not uncommon, though somewhat surprising, view is that while illegal, free file sharing is not unethical. In some senses, music is viewed like oxygen, a highly-valued substance that is, nevertheless, all around and free for the taking.

Generally, even those who are concerned about the ethics of file sharing feel that the people they know who engage in the practice are good, ethical people. This belief can lead some individuals to the viewpoint that even if a particular practice is unethical, it can still be okay if enough people are engaging in it. This perspective could, in turn, have dangerous implications if it were extended to unethical student practices such as plagiarism or cheating.

Lastly, David Folsom addresses "phishing," the fraudulent attempt by Internet criminals to get consumers to provide personal financial information via response to an e-mail. Phishing has replaced privacy as a major Internet consumer concern, harming legitimate Internet marketers. MailFrontier, a leading Internet email software company, designed a survey to test consumer awareness and recognition of phishing. With the permission of MailFrontier, Folsom and his co-authors surveyed business students to determine how knowledgeable and accepting they are of this type of Internet scam.

REFERENCES

Please contact the authors for specific references.