

CHEATING IN ACADEME

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ABSTRACT

The literature on cheating in academe suggest that cheating is a serious problem in schools. The Carnegie Council Report states that there is a growing "ethical deterioration" in academic life and reports that an increasingly larger percentage of college students feel that "some forms of cheating are necessary to get the grades they want."

One major area of research on academic dishonesty include investigations to understand why cheating occurs. This research approach deals with the (1) personal characteristics of cheaters/noncheaters, (2) situational factors that affect the occurrence of cheating, and (3) reasons for cheating. Other research on the topic of cheating approaches it behaviorally and investigates the effectiveness of various methodologies to prevent cheating from occurring.

Surprisingly, for all the research attention that cheating has received, there has been little research investigating the perception of cheating as an explanatory variable for cheating behaviors. It may well be that the frequency of cheating behavior is related to and can be partially explained by the person's perception of the severity of committing various forms of cheating behaviors. A major purpose of this study was to test the premise that the students' perception of cheating is related to their cheating behavior.

A random sample of 149 students, representing 7% of marketing majors, were selected from seven undergraduate marketing classes offered at a large western university during the spring semester. The students' perception of the severity of various types of cheating behaviors was measured with a 23-item questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. A constant sum scale was used to measure the students' designation of their cheating behaviors for various types of class assignments and examinations. It was hypothesized that the frequency of students' cheating is inversely related to their judgment of the severity of the cheating behavior.

A person's judgment of the severity of various types of cheating behavior reflects his internalization of societal norms and definitions. Scrole's Scale of Anomia was used to obtain a measurement of the degree of the students' internalization of society norms. It was hypothesized that the greater the degree of internalization of societal norms, the less the frequency of the occurrence of cheating behaviors.

Additionally, a measurement of the marketing faculty's perception of cheating was obtained in order to compare the faculty's perception of cheating with that of the students.

The findings support the hypothesis that the more frequently occurring the cheating behaviors, the more lenient the judgment of the severity of the cheating behaviors. A student is less likely to perform cheating behavior to the extent that his judgment of that cheating behavior is severe. However, the direction of the causal arrow is not clear. It may be that the students' judgment of severity of cheating behavior serves as a deterrent to performing cheating behavior, or it may be that once students have cheated their judgment of the severity of the committed, irrevocable behavior becomes more lenient. Certainly, attitude consistency theories would support the latter interpretation. However, support of the hypothesis that students who cheat also possessed lower levels of anomia would suggest that the person's judgment of the severity of the cheating behaviors precedes the occurrence of the cheating behavior.

Given the high percentages of self-reported cheating (49% of the students report that they have cheated at the University), faculty cannot depend upon student internalization of social norms to prevent the occurrence of cheating behavior. The results indicating that there is a congruency between the faculty's and the students' perception of the severity of various types of cheating behaviors, provide a common starting point from which faculty should take proactive measures to prevent the occurrence of cheating.

The problem with cheating in University marketing classes is not that it is creating incompetents, as much as it is producing a generation of individuals who believe that they can be "above the law," and who do not take pride in producing their own best efforts, but who willingly accept credit for the mediocre work of others. Educators cannot lose sight of the fact or abdicate the responsibility that universities serve both an educating and a socializing function.