

A PERCEPTUAL GAP BETWEEN STUDENTS AND FACULTY: A REVIEW OF IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESEARCH ON STUDENT ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

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ABSTRACT

Controlling academic misconduct may be becoming a more difficult challenge for marketing faculty as class sizes increase due to resource limitations at many institutions. Some research has stressed the need for faculty to become more aggressive with reactive measures and techniques to address the problem of student cheating. This paper, however, argues that it may also be useful for faculty to more clearly understand student attitudes and motivations toward academic dishonesty so that more proactive cheating prevention strategies can be considered.

The task for marketing educators to maintain academic integrity in their classrooms may be growing. As resources for our institutions shrink, while student enrollments maintain, marketing class sizes have often grown larger. As the student/instructor ratio in a class increases, so too it would appear, do student attempts to compromise academic integrity. As such, a review and analysis of the academic integrity literature might shed additional insight as to why such problems are occurring and lead to recommendations for reducing student cheating behaviors.

An appraisal of specific measures and techniques used to help control student academic misconduct might be helpful. Experience, however, suggests that more complete understanding of student attitudes and motivations associated with cheating might also be useful in designing proactive strategies to deal with these problems.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has even a modicum of experience in teaching and evaluation of marketing students in higher education has faced difficult pedagogical challenges. Not the least of these challenges is the maintenance of academic integrity among one's students. Student cheating presents several obvious problems to any educational process. First, it poses a threat to the equity of instructional measurement. That is, a student's relative abilities are inaccurately evaluated. Also, the student who engages in dishonest academic behavior likely reduces their level of self-enrichment and is therefore less prepared for more advanced study or application of the material presented in a course.

There are certainly, however, some positive incentives for students attempting to engage in cheating behaviors. Higher grades, in whatever fashion they might be achieved, may lead to such positive benefits as: prestigious academic awards and recognition, superior financial aid options, and/or enhanced employment opportunities. Faculty themselves may have some incentive to see that their students are earning reasonably high grades. These higher grades may sometimes be viewed as a measure of how well a course was taught by an instructor. In addition, higher student grades may also lead to improved levels of student placement in employment or advanced study opportunities. These outcomes may also result in granting recognition for the faculty in the process.

Given the role of colleges and universities to help prepare students to better deal with the society that they live in, many contemporary academicians agree that a key pedagogical

issue today in any class is the reduction or elimination of threats to academic integrity. But educators have seemingly not always responded to this call. The Carnegie Council Report (1979), for example, condemned higher education for serious neglect of ethical standards and indicated that increasingly, students are resorting to unethical practices to achieve the grades they want. Based on review of extant literature in the academic integrity domain, however, it seems as if several levels of challenge exist for concerned faculty. No doubt, design of effective measures and techniques to help maintain high levels of academic integrity among one's students is an important issue. Yet traditional methods used to discourage dishonest academic behavior seem to focus on measures that are based upon the faculty's reaction to blatant incidents. Previous research appears to be suggesting that one perceptual gap between faculty and their students is an understanding of what is regarded as academic misconduct by the other. Perhaps better and more complete understanding of student attitudes toward cheating behavior may lead to a different perspective. Such an alternative viewpoint may lead faculty to consider the design of cheating prevention measures as opposed to just cheating response measures.

With this view in mind, this paper begins with presenting a short description of the scope of the paper by defining what academic misconduct typically entails. Next, previous work in student attitudes and behaviors associated with academic misconduct is examined. Also, when appropriate, related perspectives from faculty are presented. Finally, implications for faculty of the extant work in this field is discussed and several recommendations for improving academic integrity in our classrooms are presented.

THE SCOPE OF THIS RESEARCH

Academic dishonesty can take numerous forms. In fact, a research effort designed merely to identify all of those forms would be a difficult task. It should be noted in defining the scope of this paper that there is some debate in the literature with regard to exactly

what range of behaviors constitute violations of academic integrity. For this paper, the term academic misconduct describes using materials during an exam that are unauthorized by the instructor, viewing another person's exam during the exam period, communicating with other students in a manner that is not authorized, possessing materials that are not authorized, taking an examination for another person or having someone else take an exam for oneself, or violating any procedures designed to protect the integrity of the exam. Also, we will use a number of terms such as academic integrity, misconduct, academic dishonesty, and cheating to be different terms which describe or define the same construct.

STUDENT ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT: ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

The Nature of Student Threats to Academic Integrity

Researchers have some disagreement as to the magnitude and nature of the threats to academic integrity posed by their students. Perhaps the most pervasive finding, however, is that a great deal of students do participate in at least some sort of academic dishonesty. Several studies report that between 75.5% and 82% of college undergraduate students engaged in at least some form of cheating behavior during the college careers (Baird, 1980; Stern and Havlicek, 1986). Even more advanced students are suspect, as Zastrow (1970) reported that 40% of graduate students were found to have participated in dishonest academic activities. With behavioral frequencies this high, one question must immediately come to mind: What sort of activities or behaviors are considered to be violations of academic integrity? Clearly some activities may be considered dishonest to some groups while not by others. In addition, it may be possible for there to be different levels or magnitudes of cheating behavior. That is, some forms of dishonesty might be considered more "criminal" by faculty and institutions than others.

While the focus of some of the key research on this topic reflects primarily on issues regarding

cheating on in-class examinations, we recognize that is by no means the only form of academic dishonesty that is considered inappropriate by either students or faculty. Not surprisingly, there is often great divergence of opinions between faculty and students as to what constitutes cheating. Stern and Havlicek (1986) compare faculty and student attitudes on this topic and help point out that each group has difficulties understanding the other's position in regards to cheating behaviors.

A more detailed discussion of the Stern and Havlicek (1986) results here is clearly warranted to help develop some perspective on what academic dishonesty really means to both groups, students and faculty. Copying from another student during an examination was viewed as misconduct by 96% of students and 99% of faculty surveyed. An incidence rate of 71% strongly suggests that even though students know they are doing wrong, they are still willing to engage in such behavior. It would appear that most students do not perceive the negative consequences of academic misconduct to be strong or severe enough to alter their behavior.

What seem to be somewhat more subtle ways of cheating are also problematic for faculty, according to Stern and Havlicek (1986). Previewing an examination from some sort of "test file" when the teacher does not permit the students to keep copies of exams and does not know such a file exists was seen as dishonest by only 57% of students but by 94% of faculty. The reported incidence rate of 41% reveals that this is also a problem that warrants significant concern. Asking another student for the questions to an examination which he/she had taken and you were about to take was seen as a violation of academic integrity by only 45% of students yet by 87% of faculty. Again a high incidence rate of 76%, shows that a majority of students have engaged in this sort of behavior during their college careers. As defined earlier in this paper, academic dishonesty or cheating, refer to any inappropriate or unacceptable student conduct as perceived by the faculty member, not the student. Certainly a challenge emerges here for all of us as faculty members. That is,

making our students understand what specifically it is that we view as academic misconduct.

On the surface, these findings suggest that in many cases students are just confused as to what actually constitutes academic dishonesty in the mind of their faculty members. Yet are we being naive in accepting the response from students that they didn't always know what constitutes cheating behavior? Looked at more callously then, these findings beg some additional questions with regard to student academic misconduct. First, why do students have such a high propensity to engage in academic misconduct? It seems that before we can effectively begin to develop measures to control or reduce cheating we must develop a better understanding of what seem to be the causes or motivations in students that lead them to cheat. If we had more insight into why a student would be prone to cheat, perhaps we could do a better job with prevention. Secondly, we obviously need to examine the role that consequences of cheating play in demotivating students. It may be that our students are given motivation to cheat since they do not perceive a great deal of risk in such behavior.

Some Reasons That Students Cheat

Identifying causes and motivations of student cheating behavior may be a key step in devising a strategy to improve measures for detection and prevention. Several studies have examined the issues of motivations and causes of cheating in students.

Gilligan (1963) and Hill and Kochendorfer (1969) both posit that increases in cheating behavior for most students is a function of "achievement motivation." Although the rewards may be public, the instigation of deviant achievement responses can typically be kept relatively private and thus can be based on motivation for positive achievement. In other words, since cheating can be instrumental to the appearance of success, it can help in the sense of providing social approval.

In two other related findings, Hill and Kochendorfer (1969) further reinforce the notion of social approval as a driving force behind the motivation to cheat. They found support for the hypothesis that more subjects will cheat with knowledge of peers scores than without such knowledge. Thus, a student's perception of his/her own relative failure is more than academic. That student's status in his immediate peer group can also be affected by low scores. In essence, this finding calls into question whether or not students should be given their position or rank in a class relative to others after each exam or assignment is graded. The provision of information about successful peer performance may be raising the negative incentive value of failure.

In addition, Hill and Kochendorfer (1969) also confirmed that the level of risk of detection influenced the level of cheating behavior engaged in by students. Not surprisingly, they found that cues signalling the possibility of detection served to inhibit cheating. The absence of strong risk perceptions for students in regard to punishments for academic misconduct seems to encourage cheating behaviors.

Insofar as that notion may seem obvious and almost trivial, it is interesting to note that Gardner, et al.(1988) report that cheating may not always entail risk. They argue that a permissive instructor may invite cheating by ignoring violations of course rules. Instructors may also set standards that are flexible and allow the instructor to be as pragmatic as they wish when dealing with student conduct issues.

Some researchers have tried to suggest that a cause of cheating behavior may be based in the nature or traits of the students. In other words, certain student types or groups might be more prone to engage in misconduct than others. Certainly, as discussed by Bunn, Caudill, and Gropper (1992), there could be an analogy between deviant or criminal behavior in society and that in the classroom in that some individuals have a greater propensity than others to commit such acts. The support for this notion, however, is mixed at best. Gardner

et al. (1988) report that very few students could be classified as either chronic cheaters or chronically honest. Several studies (Kelly and Worrell, 1978; Johnson and Gormley, 1972) indicate that students of lower intelligence will cheat more than students of higher intelligence. This is ostensibly because those students of lower ability have more to gain with regard to grades.

Gender differences have also been hypothesized to be related to cheating behavior but the findings again yielded mixed results. It has been inferred that at the very least women do not cheat more than men. One gender difference that seems to be supported in several studies, however, is that the threat of sanctions has the greatest impact in reducing cheating behaviors among women and among students of high academic ability (Tittle and Rowe, 1973).

It would appear that stress is also a key factor in student motivation to cheat. Barnett and Dalton (1981) in a survey at one major university posed the item: "Students are able to keep up with reading, homework, and assignments." Fifty-nine percent of the faculty respondents said this was "very descriptive," while only 29% of student respondents concurred. This disparity in response is not entirely surprising given the expected roles of the two groups. However, it also suggests that faculty should be aware that as the workload, and subsequent stress level of students in a particular course increases, so apparently might the student's propensity to cheat. Evidence does suggest that one of the coping mechanisms for stress is cheating (Barnett and Dalton; 1981).

Of particular concern to marketing faculty is the predisposition of their business students to cheat. While some anecdotal stories about the unethical nature of business students may circulate amongst faculty, the empirical evidence gives very little support for this assertion. In fact, O'Clock and Okleshen (1993) present findings that report business students to self perceive higher ethical standards than their peer students in other disciplines.

Houston (1976;1986) suggests, in several related studies, that part of the cause of student cheating on exams is simply a function of how close students are allowed to be seated near to one another and whether or not the students are acquaintances. In his experiments, he found support for the hypothesis that student spacing in the classroom during exams did impact cheating behavior. Students seated more closely to one another of in such a position to have clear views of other students exam papers engaged in cheating more frequently. Additionally, he found that assigned seating reduced cheating behavior over free seating. It is proposed that the mechanism accounting for the free seating difference has more to do with acquaintances collaborating with one another than it does with subjects choosing more safe seating positions in which to copy answers.

In summary, it appears untenable to argue that certain groups or types of students are at the root of our problems regarding cheating behavior. All student types engage in academic misconduct and a focus on a particular subgroup of students when presenting sanctions or designing prevention techniques would seem to be a mistake. In addition, it would appear that the ethics of our business students do not make our job as business faculty any easier or more difficult than that of our colleagues in other disciplines. Also, faculty may be contributing to students motivation to cheat by not being more diligent in spacing students or attempting to separate acquaintances.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Close examination of research in this domain indicates that no single measure or issue is, by itself, an answer to concerns about academic integrity in the classroom today. Rather, a series of coordinated steps or actions is necessary.

As noted earlier, one of the first difficulties for faculty in controlling for academic integrity is to clarify for the students what faculty perceives as dishonest behavior. The reported divergence of opinions in this domain suggest

the need for faculty to be more explicit to their students in identifying inappropriate behaviors to them. If the students are clearly appraised of the rules, following them likely becomes easier for them. Therefore, step one is to be certain that students are presented with rules and standards.

Evidence has also been presented which argues that even when there is convergence of faculty and students opinions as to what constitutes cheating, there are still high reported incidence rates. This would suggest that for most students, the risk of cheating is seen as low. That is, the penalties and sanctions associated with being caught are not sufficiently harsh as to adequately discourage the academic misconduct. This means that step two requires that faculty make clear to students that violations of the rules will be met with consequences. Making certain that students understand potential retribution is one way to lower cheating incidents by raising the perception of risk for such students.

Still, the research reviewed suggests that there are different levels or degrees of cheating behavior. Essentially, what seems to be necessary is some sort of schedule of behaviors and their related sanctions that is understood by both parties involved. For example, the penalty for plagiarism on a short paper might be one thing, the penalty for copying from another during an exam might be something different. While each faculty member and institution may have different attitudes about how harshly certain violations should be treated, step three must surely be to develop and then explain to students a schedule of sanctions or penalties that they can expect if they are found to be engaging in academic misconduct.

As stated earlier, students who do not perceive the risk of cheating to be high are often then implicitly encouraged to violate academic integrity. While not all students will respond to low risk conditions in that fashion, it is clear that more students will cheat if the risk of detection is low versus the risk of detection being high. As such, step four must be to increase the risk of detection.

In summary, the problem of cheating is pervasive in higher education. To effectively halt cheating will require that faculty awareness increases, detection methods be implemented, and consequences be given. Efforts of educators to control cheating behaviors must also include attention to the root causes of such behaviors. We must raise the level of risk perception in the minds of our students such that the risk will outweigh the reward.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While much of the research in the domain of academic integrity has looked at the student and their position toward cheating, more work needs to be done to explore faculty attitudes and behaviors associated with this problem. No one would question that students are the major source and benefactor of the problem of academic dishonesty. Yet it appears from the extant work in this domain, that the role of faculty in the problem is more complex than one might think. In some cases, faculty are contributing, almost unwittingly, to the students decision process regarding cheating behavior by not making the risk of detection intolerable to the students or by setting workload expectations that are not reasonable.

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