

ACADEMIC HONESTY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: ASSESSING CHEATING IN A BUSINESS SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The incidence of academic dishonesty has been increasing over the past several decades. In one of the most comprehensive studies of college cheating, McCabe (2001) found that 33% of students admitted to cheating on exams and 50% said they had cheated on written assignments. Business students in general, and marketing majors in particular, have been shown to cheat more than their peers in other disciplines across the university (Nonis and Swift 1998, Tom and Borin 1988).

This paper reports the results of a study that examines cheating on both traditional and web-based exams, and the situational and behavioral variables surrounding this behavior. In particular, the research addresses the influence that friends may have on cheating behaviors and the attributions that students make to their peers about cheating behaviors. The data collection included two focus groups and a survey. The questionnaire included questions about cheating in different situations and scenarios. The questions addressed (a) whether the student would engage in the behavior if the other students involved in the activity were either friends or just acquaintances, and (b) what the student perceived others would do in the same situations. The questionnaire was administered in 14 different graduate and undergraduate business. The final sample consisted of 824 completed questionnaires.

The research indicates that 74.9 percent of the students have cheated in some way. Nearly 11 percent of the students classified themselves as cheating "a lot" in at least one of the situations

presented in the survey. And, when making attributions to other students, the respondents consistently and significantly believed that other students cheated a great deal more than themselves. Consistent with the findings of Allen, Fuller and Lockett (1998) students greatly overestimated the amount their peers would cheat compared to their own behavior. For example, while 74% of the students said they have never used copies of stolen exams, these same students believe that 92% of their peers have used a stolen exam.

Students were much more likely to cheat with a friend versus an acquaintance. Across four cheating scenarios, the likelihood of cheating increased dramatically if a friend was a part of the action. Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data indicates that students appear to decrease the magnitude of perceived risks and wrongdoing when cheating invitations are extended from a friend.

Allen, J., D. Fuller, and M. Lockett. 1998. Academic integrity: Behaviors, rates, and attitudes of business students toward cheating. *Journal of Marketing Education* 20 (1): 41-52.

McCabe, D. 2001. While cheating helps some, it's harder to stop others. *Newsday* (November 25).

Nonis, S., and C. Swift. 1998. Detering cheating behavior in the marketing classroom: An analysis of the effects of demographics, attitudes, and in-class deterrent strategies. *Journal of Marketing Education* 20 (3): 188-199.

Tom, G., and N. Borin. 1988. Cheating in academe. *Journal of Education in Business* (January): 153-157.