

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: A REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

A review of academic integrity research reveals a considerable amount of effort has been expended to understand the ethical behavior of our future business practitioners. The focus of this research generally is on some form of student cheating. The results indicate that a large number of individual characteristics and contextual situations are associated with academic dishonesty among college students. Implications of student dishonesty are reviewed.

INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty has been demonstrated to be a problem reflected in student course work and linked to later on-the-job behavior (Nonnis and Swift, 2001). Not surprisingly, the ongoing, highly publicized court trials and revelations of corporate scandals have increased the discussion regarding academic integrity in colleges of business (Enron, World Com, etc.). While the overwhelming majority of research efforts focus on the level and type of academic dishonesty among college students, student agreement with statements such as "Cheating is not really considered a bad thing by students" (Chapman, Davis & Wright, 2004) gives cause for alarms to sound. The reviewed research is part of an ongoing process to document and understand the academic environment underlying the education and potential behavior of future business practitioners. This review of research summarizes the discussion and findings in the areas of individual differences, personality, education characteristics, situational influences, and cultural values. The measures of academic integrity used in these research studies are explored. Finally, implications, including a need for including faculty behaviors and perceptions in future research efforts, are discussed.

Individual Differences

The focus of individual differences is comparing demographic characteristics and self reported cheating behavior or predicting cheating behavior. The majority of studies indicate a significant influence from gender and age. Females are reportedly more ethical or honest than male counterparts (McCabe and Trevino, 1997; Storch and Storch, 2002). In addition, the older an individual is, the more likely he or she is ethical or honest. One explanation for age effect is Kohlberg's (1984) theory of cognitive development. Basically, Larry

Kohlberg indicates that people progress through several stages of moral development and ideally learn to use higher levels of moral standards over time.

Personality

Several personality traits have been examined but, in general, there are an insufficient number of studies and a lack of consistent results to generalize as to their influence on academic integrity. For example, self-esteem can be viewed as one's positive or negative image of themselves. Based on cognitive consistency theory (Graf, 1971), unethical behavior is consistent with a perception of low self-worth. High self-esteem persons perceive themselves as possessing desirable qualities. The contention is that persons with high self-esteem would not engage in dishonest acts more frequently than low self-esteem individuals. While Graf (1971) found support for this premise, studies by Ward (1986) and Buckley, Weis, and Harvey (1998) found no relationship between one's self-esteem and measures of academic integrity.

Inconsistent results are also reported for the influence of Type A personality, which can be viewed as a strong desire to achieve more than others. Students scoring high in Type A personalities show a need to achieve high grades, a greater number of hours devoted to classes and extracurricular activities (Johnson, 1981). The inference is that individuals with a Type A personality would be more likely to commit acts of academic dishonesty.

As stated, however, personality variables alone fail to explain the likelihood of academic integrity.

Education characteristics

An educational characteristic that influences academic integrity is a student's academic major. A consistent research finding is that business students have a higher rate of academic dishonesty than non-business majors (McCabe and Trevino, 1995; Nonis and Swift, 1998). This suggests a relationship between the business school environment and academic dishonesty. A number of variables however mediate this relationship. For example, a higher grade point average and awareness of the respective university's honor code school are linked with higher standards of academic integrity.

Situational Influences

Cheating and unethical practices may also be taking place because more students may have little fear of detection or punishment. Deterrence theory states that a particular (unethical) action is inhibited in direct proportion to (a) the perceived probability of being caught and (b) the severity of punishment for the action (Leming, 1980). Enforcement of school policies and academic norms becomes a critical link in understanding the trends in academic integrity among college students. For example, in addition to the probability of academic dishonesty detection, Michaels and Miethe (1989) report the existence of academic dishonesty when there was a low perceived severity of punishment. Students must weigh rewards and punishments when academic honesty-dishonesty decisions are presented.

Another variable receiving attention in the academic literature on integrity is peer behavior. Students seem to believe that that everyone is somewhat dishonest and thus, cheating becomes a somewhat acceptable norm. This view of peer behavior may be the result of a self-justification process to rationalize one's behavior. Or, it may be a realistic view of one's peer or reference group. Research supports the finding that student belief in the statement that "everyone is doing it" is generally overestimated by those students who are regularly engaged in the dishonest behavior – a false consensus effect (Ross et al. 1977; Chapman, Davis and Wright, 2004). The false consensus effect can be conceptualized as the perception of students to identify their own behavior as relatively typical within the overall population. As a result, students who are regularly engaged in cheating behavior are more likely to overestimate that their peers are also engaged in dishonest behavior.

Cultural Values

Academic integrity concerns are not unique to the United States. With global competition comes an international perspective for understanding the academic integrity from a cross-cultural point of view. Rawwas, Al-Khatib and Vitell (2004) provide a literature review of several personal values. The authors contrasted these personal values as reported in their studies in the United States and China. Dimensions such as positivism/negativism, tolerance/intolerance, achievement/experience, and theism/humanism are some examples that can influence academic integrity based on one's nationality. Yoo and Donthu (2002) examined cultural values from an individual level (one's cultural orientation). They found values such as collectivism and Confucian dynamism relate positively to the level of ethics whereas masculinity and power distance are negatively related.

Measures of Academic Integrity

The most popular method for measuring academic integrity is the self-report survey instrument. These instruments generally focus on the type and amount of cheating among college students. For example, survey statements directly assess how frequently students copied other students' materials, misrepresented their work or situation for personal gain or committed acts of plagiarism over a specific time period. Another approach is to develop scales to describe possible beliefs and values with which a respondent might identify when making a decision about an ethical situation. Two examples of the types of statements used in ethical scaling are "You can cheat on an exam as long as you don't get caught" and "I will do anything to win" (Siva and Bui, 2003). A third type of integrity measurement is "intention to cheat" data based on situation specific scenarios. Measurement is an important methodology issue because results will vary considerably based on the type of measurement. For example, research has found academic dishonesty rates to range broadly such as 3% (Karlins, 1988), 20.5% (Stearns, 2001) and 87% (McCabe, 1992).

CONCLUSION

The existence of academic dishonesty is well supported by the reviewed literature. An academic integrity problem exists among college students. Not surprisingly, educators are called upon to teach more ethics in the classroom. When teaching students how to make a business decision, faculty is encouraged to make clear that the decision-making

process needs to include the ethical implications and consequences for the company as well as its customers, stakeholders and society.

No one variable is able to explain the complex relationships involved in academic integrity decisions. The interaction among many variables is what predicts behavior. However, just as some criminals do not take responsibility for their actions, neither do some cheating students take responsibility for their actions. Not all human behavior may be rationally explained.

Implications for future research

Students that cheat should not be able to survive in an academic environment that has academic integrity. Faculty behavior and administrative processes, in and outside the classroom, are important areas to be investigated as they relate to academic integrity. As one student related in a recent study (Batory and Batory, 2005), students may not cheat but, they may also not care about the quality of their work. However, in submitting low quality efforts, some students have become accustomed to receiving high marks for their low quality work in the classroom. This is part of the complex equation of academic integrity and the ethical-unethical actions of faculty members.

One aspect of faculty cheating from a student perspective may be teachers who care more about their popularity than about the quality of the learning environment that the educator facilitates. Being late and unprepared for class, accepting any work no matter what the quality, and giving high grades to students who did not earn them are characteristics of an unethical faculty member. An educator's actions influence the expectations, ideas and actions of students. Academic integrity may be becoming a problem for teachers with high academic standards because students may be less willing to work hard. This will lead them to be less willing to work hard in their professional lives. The amount of unethical behavior may vary from community colleges to four-year universities but it also occurs at the faculty level and this merits further research consideration.

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Figure 1: Factors Influencing Academic Integrity

| Review article: | Chapman, Davis & Wright (2004) | Sankaran & Bui (2003) | Dawkins (2004) | Yoo & Donthu (2002) | McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield (2002) | Kerkvliet & Sigmund (1999) | Storch (1997) & Storch (2002) | Stearns (2001) |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Research areas and issues | | | | | | | | |
| (1) Demographics | | | | | | | | |
| (a) Age | N | P | P | P | | | | |
| (b) Gender | I | P | P | | | P | P, P | |
| (2) Personality | | | | | | | | |
| (a) Competitiveness | | N | | | | | | |
| (b) Personality Type A | | N | | | | | | |
| (c) Personality Type B | | P | | | | | | |
| (d) Self Esteem | | | | | | | | |
| (3) Education | | | | | | | | |
| (a) Academic Major | P | I | | I | | | | |
| (b) Class standing (Fr-Soph-Jr-Sr) | | | P | P | | P | | |
| (c) GPA | P | | | | | P | | |
| (d) Honor Code | | | | | P | | | |
| (4) Extracurricular Activities | | | | | | | | |
| (a) Fraternity- Sorority Membership | | | | | | | P | |
| (b) Athletic Participation | | | | | | | P | |
| (c) Employment | | | | | | | | |
| (d) Alcohol Use | | | | | | N | | |
| (5) Situational Factors | | | | | | | | |
| (a) Peer Behavior | I | | P | | | | | |
| (b) Detection Probability | P | | | | P | | | |
| (c) Punishment Severity | | | | | P | | | |
| (6) Cultural Values | | | | P,I,N | | | | |
| (7) Evaluation of Instructor Behavior | | | | | | | | P |
| (a) Teacher is unfair | | | | | | | | N |

P – Positive impact on ethical measures. Ex. As age increases, academic integrity increases.

N = Negative impact on ethical measures

I = Inconclusive or no impact on ethical measures

P-N Statistical significance = .05

Figure 1(continued): Factors Influencing Academic Integrity

| Review Article: | Rawwas & Isakson (2000) | Buckley, Weis, & Harvey (1998) | McCabe & Trevino (1997) | Nonis & Swift (1998, 2001) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Research areas and issues: | | | | |
| (1) Demographics | | | | |
| (a) Age | P | | I | |
| (b) Gender | P | | P | |
| (2) Personality | | | | |
| (a) Competitiveness | | | | |
| (b) Personality Type A | | I | | |
| (c) Personality Type B | | | | |
| (d) Self-Esteem | | I | | |
| (3) Education | | | | |
| (a) Academic Major | P | | | |
| (b) Class standing (Fr-Soph-Jr-Sr) | | | | |
| (c) GPA | | I | | P |
| (d) Honor Code | | | | |
| (4) Extracurricular Activities | | | | |
| (a) Fraternity-Sorority Membership | | | P | |
| (b) Athletic Participation | | | P | |
| (c) Employment | P | | | P |
| (d) Alcohol Use | | | | |
| (5) Situational Factors | | | | |
| (a) Peer Behavior | | | P | |
| (b) Detection Probability | | P | | |
| (c) Punishment Severity | | | | |
| (6) Cultural Values | | | | |
| (7) Evaluation of Instructor Behavior | | | | |
| (a) Teacher is unfair | | | | |

P – Positive impact on ethical measures. Ex. As age increases, academic integrity increases.

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