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College Students' Understanding of Academic Dishonesty

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COLLEGE STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Heidi Johnston

May 2009

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**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTERS THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Heidi Johnston

entitled

College Students' Understanding of Academic Dishonesty

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the
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ABSTRACT

Do college students understand what academic dishonesty is? To determine how students perceive cheating behaviors, 96 students from a small, mid-western, faith-based university were surveyed about their own cheating behaviors and their peers' cheating behaviors, while they were also presented with ethical dilemmas involving academic dishonesty. Approximately 91% of participants believed that 40% or fewer of their peers cheated. The actual cheating rate was 78%. Results indicate that students can often identify academic dishonesty, but they frequently rationalize cheating behaviors. Other results show that many students have narrow definitions of academic dishonesty or that they only consider obvious forms of cheating to be wrong.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have established that college students behave in academically dishonest ways, or more simply, they cheat (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001; Moberg, Sojka, & Gupta, 2008; Whitley, 1998). In a review of the literature between 1970 and 1996, Whitley stated that studies on academic dishonesty reported that an average of 70.4% of students had cheated. However, rates of total cheating ranged from 9% to 95% (Whitley). This vast discrepancy begs the question of why such a gap exists in the literature. The spectrum of cheating includes blatant plagiarism of whole papers to copying homework to incorrectly citing a source. In addition, opportunities to cheat are increasing every year because of the internet and other advanced technology. Sometimes students might not even be aware of their dishonest behaviors, which is the primary question of this study.

Very low rates of academic dishonesty were self-reported from a study conducted at one small mid-western, faith-based university during the spring semester of 2008 (Institutional Survey, 2008). The present study sought to examine what students at this same university understand cheating to be. If students do not understand what cheating is, how can college personnel expect them to refrain from such behavior? Enrolled students

at this university completed a survey that determined their comprehension of academic dishonesty.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Cheating is inherently wrong, so why do so many students continue to cheat their way through college? In a 2008 survey sponsored by the Student Development Office at the university at which this study takes place, 7.9% of students reported they occasionally cheated academically (Institutional Survey, 2008). No students reported cheating frequently. Are these numbers extremely low because students at this particular school have high levels of academic integrity? Or were students lying? Perhaps students were unintentionally lying because they do not understand what behaviors constitute academic dishonesty. This final possibility informed the primary research question of this study, which is “What do college students understand academic dishonesty to be?”

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today's college students have grown up surrounded by cheating, and "business scandals like those at WorldCom and Enron demonstrate that many people have little problem with breaking rules and telling lies in an attempt to make more money" (Twenge, 2006, p. 27). In *Generation Me*, Twenge discusses how young people in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s are more likely to cut corners and cheat, including in the classroom. Twenge adds that technology has facilitated this cheating, from using cell phones to transmit exam information to downloading papers from the internet. Academic dishonesty, though an exact definition is elusive, encompasses many different actions and inactions. These behaviors include using notes on a test, copying on a test or an assignment, improperly citing sources or not citing sources at all, unauthorized collaboration, and fraudulent excuse making.

This review will first discuss the definition and prevalence of academic dishonesty. Then, similar to Whitley's (1998) review of college student cheating, this review will focus on five categories which include possible correlates of academic dishonesty. These categories include individual student factors or characteristics and personality variables, student attitudes toward cheating, situational or contextual

characteristics, and factors that did not fit into another category. Finally, an overview of current literature on students' understanding of academic dishonesty will be provided.

Definition and Prevalence of Cheating

Schmelkin, Gilbert, Spencer, Pincus, and Silva (2008) assert that “there is no commonly accepted, standard definition of what constitutes academic dishonesty” (p. 588). Some behaviors clearly constitute academic dishonesty, such as plagiarizing whole papers and using a crib sheet on a test, but other behaviors are more ambiguous and controversial. For example, using the same paper for more than one class and studying from someone else's notes are often considered cheating, but faculty and students find themselves on both sides of this issue and other vague cheating behaviors (Schmelkin et al.). Pincus and Schmelkin (2003) investigated faculty understanding of academic dishonesty, and they found that “faculty do not perceive academic dishonesty dichotomously as an all or nothing situation. Rather, faculty view the various potential indicators of academic dishonesty on a continuum of severity, which for faculty is related to the clarity of the definition” (p. 206).

It is apparent that academic dishonesty is not a black and white issue. This complication has not stopped researchers from attempting to define cheating (McCabe & Treviño, 1993; Pincus & Schmelkin, 2003; Schmelkin et al., 2008), and in one of the most thorough efforts that exists in the literature, Schmelkin et al. compiled a list of 30 academic behaviors related to academic honesty, which can be found in Appendix A. Some of the controversial behaviors in their inventory are delaying taking an exam or turning in a paper due to a false excuse, failing to report a grading error, not contributing a fair share in a group project, obtaining a test from a previous semester, sabotaging

someone else's work, submitting the same paper to multiple classes, and studying from someone else's notes (Schmelkin et al.).

These cheating behaviors are not new problems on American college campuses. McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2001) report that cheating is prevalent on college campuses and that some forms of cheating have proliferated over the past 30 years. In a study done by Perrin (2000), 68% of college students in his study cheated. McCabe et al. report that overall there was a modest increase in cheating in the 1990s, but there have been "disturbing increases" in specific types of cheating, specifically collaboration and cheating among female students. This study also reports that "significant increases were found in the most explicit forms of test or exam cheating" (McCabe et al., p. 221). Whitley (1998) reported the prevalence of cheating from 46 studies that were published between 1970 and 1996. The amount of total cheating ranged from 9% to 95% of students, while the mean of these studies was 70.4% (Whitley).

Individual Student Characteristics and Personality Variables

While a significant portion of students cheat, some individual student factors have been found to correlate with academic dishonesty. Individual student factors include elements such as age, gender, parents' education, academic ability, grade point average, college major, involvement in intercollegiate athletics, and involvement in extracurricular activities (McCabe & Treviño, 1997; Rettinger & Jordan, 2005). The individual student characteristics that McCabe and Treviño found to be significantly correlated with academic dishonesty were age, gender, GPA, and involvement in intercollegiate athletics and extracurricular activities. In this study, students who are older, who are women, and who have higher GPAs self-reported fewer academically dishonest behaviors (McCabe &

Treviño). Other studies found no significant differences between male and female students, but a negative correlation between age and academic dishonesty has been consistent throughout research, with younger students cheating more frequently than their older peers (Whitley, 1998). Students who were more involved in extracurricular activities self-reported more instances of cheating because of pressure to succeed and time constraints (McCabe & Treviño).

Personality variables have also been studied in relation to cheating. Examples of personality variables include religiosity, morality, locus of control, procrastination, type A behavior pattern, self-esteem, and test anxiety. Many researchers (Rettinger & Jordan, 2005; Perrin, 2000; Vohs & Schooler, 2008) have shown the importance of personality variables in terms of academic dishonesty. Rettinger and Jordan found a negative correlation between religiosity and academic dishonesty at a Jewish-related university. Perrin's innovative study of the academic honesty of Christian versus non-Christian college students supports the negative correlation between religiosity and cheating. This study found that 13% of students who never or rarely attend church behaved honestly while 44% of students who attend church nearly every week behaved honestly (Perrin). Perrin's study was different than others because the dependent variable was the observed behavior of people (cheating or not cheating), whereas many other studies focus on self-reported attitudes and behaviors. This study is a poignant reminder that even though religiosity is a factor in determining whether a student cheats, the majority of students were not honest, even among the highly religious.

Kohlberg's moral development theory, which focuses on justice, could provide insight into the lives of cheating students. Kohlberg stated, "Justice, the primary regard

for the value and equality of all human beings, and for reciprocity in human relations, is a basic and human standard” (as cited in Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 174). Some students try to rationalize or justify their cheating behavior by claiming, “everyone else is doing it.” According to Kohlberg, ethical behavior is influenced by moral reasoning. A student in Kohlberg’s Preconventional Individualism stage might use this logic. The Preconventional level, in which individuals perceive rules and social expectations to be external to the self, describes most children under age nine, some adolescents, and most adolescent and criminal offenders (Kohlberg, 1984). According to Kohlberg, the Preconventional Individualism stage is characterized by someone “acting to meet one’s own interests and needs and letting others do the same” (p. 174) and that “right is also what’s fair, what’s an equal exchange, a deal, an agreement (p. 174). Adults and children at this stage follow rules only when it benefits them or suits their immediate interests. From Kohlberg’s perspective, students at this level would cheat as often as they need to in order to succeed.

Student Attitudes Toward Cheating

In addition to individual student characteristics, student attitudes toward cheating have also been widely studied. Whitley (1998) analyzed data from studies on college student cheating between 1970 and 1996. In his research, Whitley identified that the students who perceive social norms to allow cheating were more likely to cheat. This behavior was found to influence college student cheating in a study by McCabe et al. (2001). The researchers in this study found that peer-related forces had the most significant impact on student cheating. Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory examines modeling and its impact on other students.

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do.

Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (p. 22)

According to this theory, if a student sees another student cheating, he or she will perceive this behavior to be acceptable. In his meta analysis, Whitley discovered that the two of the nine largest effects on cheating included holding favorable attitudes toward cheating and perceiving that social norms allow cheating. However, in addition to the factor of students' attitudes toward cheating, situational characteristics also play a significant role in whether a student decides to cheat.

Situational Characteristics

Situational characteristics have been found to correlate with academic dishonesty (Whitley, 1998). Examples of situational or contextual factors are peer cheating, peer disapproval of cheating, the perceived certainty that other students will report cheating, the perceived severity for academic dishonesty, the degree of faculty support for campus academic integrity, and the existence of an honor code (McCabe & Treviño, 1993).

McCabe et al. (2001) closely examined the effects of having an honor code at universities. In the 1995-96 school year, 71% of students at schools without honor codes were involved in serious cheating, while 54% of students at schools with honor codes were involved in serious cheating (McCabe et al.). However,

It is not the mere existence of an honor code that is important in deterring college cheating. An effective honor code must be more than mere window dressing; a

truly effective code must be well implemented and strongly embedded in the student culture. (McCabe et al., p. 224)

Therefore, a culture of academic integrity is the underlying theme that distinguishes between campuses with more or less academic dishonesty. In addition, Simon et al. (2004) assert that “organizational culture is largely a function of perspectives on institutional loyalty and membership” (p. 76). Their research supports the proposition that academic integrity is a result of students’ sense of commitment to their education, the institution, and their professors. Therefore, the culture of the school a student attends could have a positive or a negative influence on his or her decision to cheat.

Other Factors

Other factors that did not fit into the previous three categories are correlated with academic dishonesty. Some additional factors that affect college student cheating are reward for task success, victim visibility, self-awareness, and equity. Of these variables, Whitley (1998) reports that the amount of reward expected for success has the most importance. If students expected to succeed on an exam, a paper, or a project, they were more likely to cheat so that they could meet their own expectations (Whitley). Students in one study were more likely to cheat when they could not see the professor, which is called victim visibility (Whitley). Students who were less self-aware and students who perceived their professor to be unfair were more likely to cheat (Whitley).

Covey, Saladin, and Killen (1989) studied how incentives affect cheating. Their research revealed that “performance incentives significantly increased dishonesty for low self-monitors,” (Covey et al., p. 677) where low self-monitors are students who are less concerned with how they appear to others. Students cheat because of many factors and in

spite of other factors, but the first step to curbing academic dishonesty is for students to recognize unacceptable behaviors such as cheating. In order for students to know that they are cheating, they must first understand what academic dishonesty is.

Students' Understanding of Academic Dishonesty

Contrary to the plethora of studies concerning individual student factors, student attitudes, and situational characteristics, few studies have focused on what students understand academic dishonesty to be. Robinson-Zañartu et al. (2005) report that “actual causes of this behavior [plagiarism] seem to range widely from the ill-intent of the intentional plagiarist to the ignorance of students ill-equipped to paraphrase adequately” (pp. 319-320). This ignorance is not an excuse for students to cheat, but it indicates that learning needs to occur. Indeed, Carpenter (2002) reveals that plagiarism can sometimes be inadvertent, but nevertheless it is still wrong. Not only do students perceive academic dishonesty in different ways, but faculty members perceive academic dishonesty differently than students. Compared to students, faculty members tend “to believe that cheating happens less” and that it “is a more serious offense” (Cizek, 1999, p. 27).

In a multidimensional scaling analysis, Schmelkin et al. (2008) interpreted two dimensions of how students perceive academic dishonesty: *Papers vs. Exams* and *Seriousness*. In the *Papers vs. Exams* dimension, the researchers recognized that students differentiated between cheating on papers and cheating on exams (Schmelkin et al.). Behaviors in the *Papers* dimension included plagiarism, falsifying or fabricating a bibliography, and copying material without proper citations. The *Exams* dimension included giving or receiving answers during an exam, obtaining a test from a previous semester, and giving exam questions to students in later sections. The second dimension,

Seriousness, provided a continuum on which acts of academic dishonesty ranged from less serious to more serious (Schmelkin et al.). Schmelkin et al. report that

It appears that students' perceptions of the seriousness of the violation is intertwined with the degree to which they believe that it is a clear example of academic dishonesty, the degree to which particular behaviors are examples of intentional cheating, as well as the possible consequences associated with the beliefs. (p. 598)

Students' perceptions of academic dishonesty differed from faculty perceptions in the Schmelkin et al. study in a few areas. Fewer students than faculty indicated that obtaining exam questions and answers before a test was cheating (Schmelkin et al.). Also, more faculty than students reported that delaying an exam or turning in an assignment via a false excuse constituted academic dishonesty (Schmelkin et al.).

The issue of whether lying in order to delay an exam or to delay turning in an assignment constitutes academic dishonesty is a contentious subject. In their article, Roig and Caso (2005) maintain that fraudulent excuse making is one of the most widely committed acts of academic dishonesty, even though it has received little empirical attention from researchers. Few universities have academic dishonesty policies that specify fraudulent excuse making as an unacceptable behavior, and many students do not consider this action to be cheating (Roig & Caso). As previously stated, the results from Schmelkin et al. (2008) are consistent with these findings because their study showed that more faculty members consider this lying behavior to be cheating than students.

Another study of students' misunderstanding of academic dishonesty was conducted by Valente and Newman (2006), whose goal was to "identify what students

perceive as appropriate behavior” (p. 3). Valente and Newman reported variations in how students perceived cheating parameters and that “the researchers were surprised by the amount of variation concerning plagiarism as contrasted to paraphrase, and the amount of rationalization of less than ethical options” (p. 13). The hypothesis of the present study is that similar variations in how students understand cheating will be found.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Students at a small mid-western, faith-based university enrolled in two different classes were participants in this study. The first class, which included two sections, was a general education course consisting of mostly first-year students. The second class was a general education Bible course consisting of mostly third- and fourth- year students. The university does not have an explicit honor code, but every student and faculty member signs a covenant at the beginning of each academic year. The following statement is included in the covenant: “Academic Integrity and Truthfulness: As a Christ-centered University community we apply biblical responsibilities for honesty to all forms of academic integrity. Plagiarism is forbidden; we expect truthfulness and fidelity to be expressed in every learning context” (University covenant, n.d.). The university policy on plagiarism is that the faculty member must report the incident to the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Student Affairs, and these offices will “track plagiarism incidents in order to identify patterns of behavior. This tracking will affect student consequences for any additional plagiarism incidents reported and may affect recommendations for off-campus student activity participation” (Academic Integrity, n.d.).

Tables 1 and 2 show frequencies of participants by sex and class. Approximately two-thirds of the participants were female students, and slightly less than two-thirds of participants were freshmen students.

Table 1
Frequencies by Sex

Male	32
Female	63
Not reported	1
<i>Total</i>	96

Table 2
Frequencies by Class Rank

Freshman	62
Non-Freshman	33
Not reported	1
<i>Total</i>	96

Procedures

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, the survey (Appendix B) was administered to students during class sessions late in the fall semester 2008. To ensure anonymity, surveys were distributed and collected in envelopes and asked few identifying questions. In the first class, the survey was distributed with an exam, and students could turn their surveys in with their exam. Between 5 and 10 students with learning disabilities were not present because they had an alternate testing location. In this class, 73 surveys were collected. One survey was eliminated because the participant was not 18 years old. In the second class, surveys were distributed at the beginning of a regular class period and collected at the end. In this class, 24 surveys were collected. The final sample contained 96 surveys.

Measures

The survey reproduced questions from both the Academic Integrity Awareness Survey, developed by Valente and Lawson (2006), and items used in a study conducted by Moberg, Sojka, and Gupta (2008) (see Appendix B). Valente and Lawson's instrument presents six ethical dilemmas, which students are asked to read and evaluate

in order to judge whether the characters cheated or not. The instrument developed by Moberg, Sojka, and Gupta requires students to use a Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *at every opportunity*) to indicate the frequency with which they engaged in nine specific cheating behaviors. Students were classified as “cheaters” if they responded with any number greater than 1 on this scale. Students also indicated (yes or no) whether they knew someone else who had engaged in the behavior.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

This study investigated the effect of gender and class on nine dependent variables of cheating behavior. To test if there was a significant difference in the nine dependent variable scores, a 2 x 2 multiple analysis of variance was utilized with sex (male vs. female) and class (freshmen vs. non-freshmen) used as the fixed factors. Tables 3 and 4 represent the results of this analysis. Overall, four significant ($p < .05$) effects were found. These effects included differences between male and female participants on fabricating a bibliography and differences between freshmen and non-freshmen participants on copying homework, giving answers to someone else during an exam, and receiving answers from someone else during an exam.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics Indicating Cheating Behavior Classified by Sex

Cheating Behavior	Mean for Males	Mean for Females	Significance between Sex
Copied homework assignment	1.63	1.62	.925
Gave exam questions to students in a later section	1.41	1.28	.341
Received exam questions from students in earlier sections	1.34	1.43	.911
Obtained an old test from a previous term	1.13	1.13	.794
Faked or fabricated a bibliography	1.47	1.11	.005*
Gave answers to someone else during an exam	1.41	1.34	.594
Received answers from someone else during an exam	1.34	1.30	.609
Lied about family death/illness to miss an exam or get more time	1.03	1.10	.682
Plagiarized	1.34	1.33	.610

Note. Participants responded to questions on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (at every opportunity)

* $p < .01$ level

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics Indicating Cheating Behavior Classified by Class Rank

Cheating Behavior	Mean for Freshmen	Mean for Non-Freshmen	Significance between Class
Copying homework	1.75	1.36	.011*
Giving exam questions to students in a later section	1.36	1.25	.608
Obtaining exam questions from students in an earlier section	1.41	1.38	.855
Obtaining a test from a previous semester	1.08	1.22	.263
Falsifying or fabricating a bibliography	1.18	1.34	.209
Giving answers to someone else during an exam	1.51	1.09	.016*
Obtaining answers from someone else during an exam	1.43	1.09	.031*
Delaying taking an exam or turning in a paper due to a false excuse	1.10	1.03	.682
Plagiarizing	1.36	1.28	.766

Note. Participants responded to questions on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (at every opportunity)

* $p < .05$ level

Self-reported Cheating Behavior and Peer Perception of Cheating

Participants were asked to approximate what percentage of their peers cheat.

Approximately 91% responded with estimates that 40% or fewer of their peers cheat. Of the 96 surveys that were analyzed, 75 (78.1%) participants admitted to cheating. Table 5 shows the frequencies of cheating by sex.

Table 5
Frequencies of Cheating by Sex

Classification	Male	Female
Cheaters	78.1%	79.4%
Non-cheaters	21.9%	20.6%

Note. Participants responded to questions on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (at every opportunity). Participants whose responses were greater than 1 for any of the cheating behaviors were labeled as “cheaters.”

Cheating frequencies by class status are reported in Table 6.

Table 6
Frequencies of Cheating by Freshman or Non-Freshman Status

Classification	Freshman	Non-Freshman
Cheaters	79.4%	75.8%
Non-cheaters	20.6%	24.2%

Note. Participants responded to questions on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (at every opportunity). Participants whose responses were greater than 1 for any of the cheating behaviors were labeled as “cheaters.”

In regard to the various cheating activities, students admitted to copying a homework assignment ($M=1.62$) more than any other behavior. The second most common behavior was that students received exam questions from students in earlier sections ($M=1.40$). The least common behavior to which students admitted engaging was lying about family death/illness to miss an exam or get more time ($M=1.08$). Means for other behaviors are listed in Table 7. Table 7 also shows the percent of participants who claimed that they knew someone who engaged in the cheating behaviors. The behavior that students reported most was copying homework (71.9%). The behavior that students

reported least frequently was knowing someone who had lied about a family death/illness to miss an exam or get more time (28.4%).

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics of Cheating Behavior for All Participants

Cheating Behavior	Mean	Self-Reported Cheater	Know Someone Who Cheats
Copied homework assignment	1.62	49.0%	71.9%
Gave exam questions to students in a later section	1.32	20.8%	55.2%
Received exam questions from students in earlier sections	1.40	26.0%	56.3%
Obtained an old test from a previous term	1.13	8.4%	29.2%
Faked or fabricated a bibliography	1.24	16.7%	29.2%
Gave answers to someone else during an exam	1.37	24.0%	43.8%
Received answers from someone else during an exam	1.31	22.1%	38.3%
Lied about family death/illness to miss an exam or get more time	1.08	5.2%	28.4%
Plagiarized	1.33	30.2%	45.3%

Note. Participants responded to questions on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (at every opportunity).

Males: $n=32$; Females: $n=61$

Ethical Dilemmas

Participants were presented with six ethical dilemmas involving different forms of academic dishonesty. These scenarios were developed by Valente and Lawson (2006).

Three situations involved various forms of plagiarism, while a fourth concerned obtaining tests from previous semesters. Two final scenarios explored the practices of lying to delay turning in an assignment and helping someone in a later section study for an exam.

The scenarios and the frequencies of student responses can be found in Table 8.

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics of Ethical Dilemmas

Scenario	Did Jane cheat?	Did Joe cheat?
Jane and Joe are dating. They take a class together. This class requires a paper. Joe has other commitments so Jane writes the paper for Joe. Joe submits the paper as his own work.	Yes: 78.3% No: 21.7% <i>n</i> =92	Yes: 97.9% No: 2.1% <i>n</i> =95
A group of students keeps copies of old tests from Professor Jones. Jill uses the test bank to study for her upcoming test with Professor Jones.	Did Jill cheat? Yes: 54.7% No: 45.3% <i>n</i> =86	
John decides to pledge a fraternity. A required meeting conflicts with a class session where a major assignment is due. John tells the professor that he was ill.	Did John cheat? Yes: 62.0% No: 38.0% <i>n</i> =92	
Dorothy has yet to start her research paper. John has finished his paper in the same class. Dorothy asks to borrow John's paper to get some ideas, then paraphrases most of John's work.	Did John cheat? Yes: 19.8% No: 80.2% <i>n</i> =91	Did Dorothy cheat? Yes: 92.4% No: 7.6% <i>n</i> =92
Professor Doe teaches multiple sections of College 231. Gary takes the exam during the 11am class but Karen doesn't take the exam until the night class. Gary helps Karen with the test.	Did Gary cheat? Yes: 53.5% No: 46.5% <i>n</i> =86	Did Karen cheat? Yes: 60.5% No: 39.5% <i>n</i> =86
Paul searches the internet for his research paper. He finds some websites that answer his research question exactly. He includes one quote as is with no rewording, yet he rewords the second quote. Neither quote is cited or given a footnote.	Did Paul cheat with quote one? Yes: 97.8% No: 2.2% <i>n</i> =92	Did Paul cheat with quote two? Yes: 94.6% No: 5.4% <i>n</i> =92

Participants were asked to explain their answer to the ethical dilemma items.

Table 9 presents an overview of participants' responses to these questions.

Table 9
Students' Responses to Ethical Dilemmas

Behavior	Students' Responses
Writing a term paper for someone else/ Having someone else write a term paper for you Obtaining a test from a previous semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student who wrote the paper cheated because she let the other student cheat/she knew about it (23) • Both students cheated (22) • Only the student who actually turned the paper in cheated (8) • The student was only studying, not copying (27) • The student should not have the old tests because she has an unfair advantage over other students (22) • It depends (4) • The professor should change the test every semester (2)
Delaying taking an exam or turning in a paper due to a false excuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lying is a form of cheating (38) • Lying is different than cheating (27) • The student did not cheat because cheating requires getting answers for something (1) • The student did not cheat because he did not get an unfair advantage (1) • The student's lie is meant to put himself ahead of where he should be, which is cheating (1)
Paraphrasing a peer's paper and submitting it as one's own	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student who wrote the original paper did not cheat because he was unaware of what the other student was doing/ he was only giving her ideas (57) • Both students cheated (8) • The student did not expect his work to be plagiarized, so he is innocent (2) • Neither student cheated because she did not use his work; she changed it (1)
Obtaining exam questions from a student in an earlier section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both students cheated (28) • Neither student cheated; they were just studying together (27) • As long as he did not give her the answers, neither student cheated (14) • It depends (8) • Unless the professor said specifically not to, it is permissible (1)
Copying information without utilizing quotation marks/Copying material without proper footnotes or citations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have to cite or it is considered to be plagiarism (41) • Plagiarism is cheating (16) • Paraphrasing is not cheating (6) • Was it intentional? Did he know he was plagiarizing? (3)

Note. The number in parentheses represents the number of students who provided this response.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study indicate cheating is prevalent on this campus. The following discussion will address how sex and class status are related to cheating, how these results compare to those of similar studies, peer perception of cheating, the six ethical dilemmas and, finally, the limitations.

Sex and Cheating

Male and female students responded similarly to most questions in the current study. Their overall cheating scores were comparable, with 78.1% of male participants admitting to cheating and 79.4% of female participants admitting to cheating, despite that McCabe and Treviño's (1997) study found that male participants reported higher levels of cheating than female participants. Female participants actually reported slightly higher levels of cheating in this study. Male and female students scored similarly on all individual cheating behaviors except for faking or fabricating a bibliography, on which male participants scored significantly higher. The reasons for this difference are not evident from the current data.

Class and Cheating

Non-freshmen students reported less cheating than freshmen students. This study found significant differences between freshmen and non-freshmen students, where

freshmen reported higher levels of the following cheating behaviors: copying homework, giving answers to someone else during an exam, and receiving answers from someone else during an exam. Logically, one would expect upperclassmen to report more instances of cheating than freshmen students because they have had more time, more opportunities, and more classes in which to cheat. However, these results indicate the opposite is occurring. One exception to this paradox was that non-freshmen students reported higher levels of obtaining an old test from a previous term than non-freshmen students, which makes sense because older students have had more opportunities to obtain old tests and possibly more friends who had taken the same classes in the past. Perhaps upperclassmen reported lower rates of cheating overall because some students who cheated as freshmen have left the university.

Other Studies

Moberg et al. (2008) used a similar instrument studying cheating behaviors at a medium-sized midwestern university among upperclassmen. The means from the Moberg et al. study were all higher than the means from the current study. The largest discrepancies were in the behaviors of giving exam questions to students in later sections and obtaining an old test from a previous term. Possible explanations for these discrepancies are the differences in participants between the Moberg et al. study and the current study. Over three-fourths of participants in the Moberg et al. study were juniors and seniors whereas the current study included almost two-thirds freshmen. Another difference is that the Moberg et al. study was conducted at a medium-sized nonreligious university with a plethora of majors and the current study was conducted at a very small-sized religious university with limited majors.

Peer Perception of Cheating

Researchers (McCabe et al., 2001; Whitley, 1998) have established that peer-related forces have significant impacts on cheating behaviors. In the current study, approximately 91% of students thought that 40% or fewer of their peers cheated. In reality, 78% of students reported cheating. Even though most students believe that less than half of their peers cheat, over three-fourths of students admitted to some form of cheating. Students who cheat might think highly of their peers and that their peers would not cheat. Perhaps these students think that they are alone in their dishonesty.

Ethical Dilemmas

The ethical dilemmas were reproduced from a study by Valente and Lawson (2006), which was conducted at a liberal arts university in Ohio with more than 6,000 students. This school is affiliated with the Brethren Church, but Valente and Newman (2006) note that the university has taken “a departure from these religious roots” (p. 4). All participants were freshmen. Therefore, size, location, religious affiliation, and participant selection were different in Valente and Lawson’s study than in the current study.

Writing a term paper for someone else/ Having someone else write a term paper for you

Jane and Joe are characters in the first scenario, and Jane writes a paper for Joe to submit as his own. Of the 21.7% of students who said that Jane did not cheat, many cited that Joe did the actual cheating by turning in the paper. Jane “just wrote the paper,” students responded. Of the students who said that both Jane and Joe cheated, many said that Jane was aware of what Joe did, so she cheated too. One student compared this scenario with a hired killer. She said, “They both cheated. It's like when someone is a

hired killer. If Jane was the killer she would go to jail. Joe would also go to jail for hiring her.” Only one student mentioned plagiarism. Few students (2.1%) said that Joe did not cheat, and one of these students said that Jane just helped Joe.

Obtaining a test from a previous semester

Jill, the character in the second dilemma, uses old tests to study for an upcoming exam. Over half of participants (54.7%) said that Jill cheated. Many of these students mentioned that Jill gained an unfair advantage over the other students in her class. Some students defended Jill’s actions by saying that she was only studying, not copying. Many students put conditions on their answer, saying that unless the exam she took was the same, or unless students use the old test during the exam, or unless the answers are marked, then Jill did not cheat. One student wrote, “She didn't look at the answers, only used legal resources to help her study *note* this would be cheating if the Prof banned it.” Slightly fewer of the students in this study said that Jill, the student who used copies of old tests to study, cheated than in Valente and Lawson’s study (2005: 67.84% and 2006: 70.00%).

In many cases, students attempted to justify the cheating behaviors or put conditions on them. This effort was most evident in Jill’s scenario. Some respondents said that Jill was only trying to understand the professor’s style of testing or that it was the professor’s fault for not changing the tests. Perhaps participants wanted to believe that Jill was a good student who did not cheat, or maybe participants identified with Jill and did not want to acknowledge their own academic dishonesty.

Delaying taking an exam or turning in a paper due to a false excuse

In perhaps the most controversial scenario, John tells his professor that he is sick so that he can get out of a class where a major assignment is due. Instead of going to class, John attends a required meeting with the fraternity that he is joining. Student responses were split on whether John's lie constitutes cheating. Of the students who said that John didn't cheat (38.0%), they said that he was just bending the rules, being irresponsible, or just skipping class, but that lying is not cheating. Of the 62.0% of students who said that John cheated, most described John's actions as wrong and deceitful, therefore he cheated.

Paraphrasing a peer's paper and submitting it as one's own

In another scenario, Dorothy and John are in the same class. Dorothy asks John to borrow his research paper to get some ideas, but she ends up paraphrasing most of John's paper. A majority of students (80.2%) said that John did not cheat. Of these students, most claimed that John was not aware of Dorothy's intentions or actions. Many said that John was naïve and innocent. One student said, "Using most ideas from someone else's paper is an act of cheating. . . unless the topic for the paper is different." Other students said that it was not fair for John but that he still helped Dorothy cheat or that he at least allowed her to paraphrase his work. One student remarked, "While John might not have known for sure that Dorothy would copy his work, he should've kept the paper away from her because the ideas she wanted to 'get' were his and she should've come up with her own." Fewer of the students in the current study (19.8%) said that John cheated than in Valente and Lawson's study (2005: 31.90% and 2006: 36.00%).

Most students acknowledged that Dorothy's paraphrasing or Joe turning in Jane's paper were cheating behaviors. However, very few students used the word plagiarism

when discussing Dorothy and Joe's actions. Despite the fact that a majority of students believe John to be innocent, allowing someone to copy off of one's term paper is considered to be academic dishonesty.

Obtaining exam questions from a student in an earlier section

Gary and Karen are characters in the fifth situation. Gary takes an exam in an early section of a class and then helps Karen, who is in a later section, study for the test. Over half of participants said that Gary (53.5%) and Karen (60.5%) cheated. The reasoning behind many of the students' answers was that Karen had an unfair advantage over her classmates. A significant minority of students reported no cheating from Gary (46.5%) or Karen (39.5%). These students said that as long as Gary spoke generally and not specifically, then neither Gary nor Karen cheated. Many students said that Gary and Karen would be cheating if Gary gave Karen the answers. One student said, "Gary could have given Karen all the answers. If he told her the kinds of things to look for on the test, but not specific questions, that cheating is not as bad." Another student said, "Depends on if Gary gave Karen the answers or the general content the test covered. If he just gave her the general content, that doesn't seem much different than if the professor passed out a study guide. If the professor did not pass out a study guide, or if Gary gave Karen exact answers, they would both be cheating." Some students needed a clearer definition of what it meant for Gary to "help" Karen. Some students criticized the professor, saying, "Unless they [professors] said specifically not to, it's fine."

Copying information without utilizing quotation marks/Copying material without proper footnotes or citations

In the final scenario, Paul includes two quotes from a website in his research paper. Paul includes the first quote in his paper with no rewording, but he rewords the second quote. He does not cite either of the quotes. Most students were able to at least identify that Paul was guilty of plagiarism. They said that writers must cite their sources and give credit where it is due. One student said, “He is guilty of plagiarizing- even if he ‘reworded’ the quote, the idea (as long as it was not common knowledge) was taken from another source and he should have given the reference.” Of the 5.4% of students who said that Paul did not cheat by using the second quote, one said, “he copied one and not the other.” More of the students in the current study said that Paul cheated with the reworded quote (94.6%) than in Valente and Lawson’s study (2005: 71.36% and 2006: 72.11%).

Participants were knowledgeable about Paul’s blatant plagiarism and were aware that he was cheating. However, some students questioned whether Paul intentionally plagiarized. “Literally yes Paul cheated, but did he know he was cheating, or he forgot to cite the article I don’t know,” one student responded. “Did Paul intentionally plagiarize?” some students asked. Therefore intention determines students’ perceptions of cheating in some instances. However, someone’s intentions are irrelevant in cases of plagiarism. It does not matter if Paul knew that he was plagiarizing. These comments from students suggest that to them, ignorance can be an excuse for cheating. The belief that ignorance excuses cheating is one way that college students misunderstand academic honesty.

How college students understand academic dishonesty

The primary research question of this study was, “What do college students understand academic dishonesty to be?” In their responses to the ethical dilemmas, many students exhibited very narrow definitions of cheating. Students often used the phrase “gaining an unfair advantage” as their definition of cheating. Another common response to the cheating behaviors was that the cheaters were only cheating themselves out of learning.

Some students consider only obvious forms of cheating to be wrong. In response to the item about lying to avoid turning in an assignment, one student said, “Cheating requires getting answers for something not making up an excuse.” If students believe that the only behavior that constitutes cheating is “getting answers for something,” then they might inadvertently be engaging in flagrant cheating.

Language is problematic in studying how college students understand academic dishonesty. People can use the same word to describe different concepts and vice versa, and the terminology used in studying academic dishonesty is a prime example of this problem. Over one third of students in this study did not consider lying to be a form of cheating. However, the terms cheating and academic dishonesty were used synonymously in this study. Would the same students consider lying to be a form of academic dishonesty? Because these terms are not clear to many students, they might not fully understand what academic dishonesty is.

Most students in this study could identify the cheating behaviors, but many students found ways to rationalize the cheating. For example, students asked how much one student (who had already taken the test) “helped” another student prepare for the

exam. A student is more likely to consider a behavior cheating if he or she benefits personally, as opposed to benefiting someone else. Another common response was that the student who obtained copies of exams from previous years was just being smart. Students see many gray areas of academic dishonesty. By the same token, as previously discussed, researchers have not agreed on a standard definition of academic dishonesty. This lack of a standard definition is one of the limitations of this study.

Limitations

Another limitation of this study is the non-random nature of the selection of participants. The two classes were selected because of their relatively large sizes at this small university. Full-time enrollment at the university is 299, including many non-traditional and commuter students. The sample included more female students than male students, which reflects the overall campus population. The sample also included more freshmen than non-freshmen, particularly because of the courses that were selected to participate. Another limitation is that information on this survey is completely self-reported, however, measures were taken to ensure participants' anonymity that encouraged students to give honest feedback without fear of consequences. Another limitation of this study is that the results need to be analyzed in context of the unique campus. Besides the small size, another distinctive factor is the decidedly Christian essence of the university. Thus, one must be careful to interpret the results in the context of the current literature on cheating. A final limitation, as previously discussed, is the lack of a standard definition of cheating, which complicates participant and researcher interpretation of data.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS

While this study continues the exploration into the topic of academic dishonesty, further research is necessary. In the setting of the current study, student definitions of academic dishonesty differed from each other, and an area of future research is to further examine these differences. Similarly, another area of future research is how faculty members perceive academic dishonesty. If faculty members were to complete the survey from this study, would their responses all be the same? Or would their responses resemble student answers?

This study was conducted at a faith-based institution. Administrators and faculty members would like to think that students at a faith-based institution follow a high moral code, but what do these high cheating rates indicate? Does religion impact cheating behaviors? If so, how? What do these high rates of academic dishonesty say about how students are living out their faith? Future studies about the impact of faith on academics are necessary at both faith-based and secular institutions.

Academic dishonesty is detrimental to the individual and to the society at large and, thus, institutions like this one must address student academic integrity in a serious, comprehensive manner. Action should be taken by individual faculty members as well as administrators to decrease academic dishonesty. Perhaps the existence of an honor code

with an explicit commitment to academic honesty or requiring students to sign statements of academic honesty would be effective in this community. Because students have different definitions of academic dishonesty, academic integrity awareness could be integrated into curricula so that students understand what it means to be academically honest. For example, faculty members could distribute literature about academic honesty with their syllabi or present examples of plagiarism to students when they assign term papers.

This investigation into academic dishonesty was valuable to bring awareness to the issue. If administrators and faculty members are not aware of the nature of cheating at their institutions, they will be ineffective in their efforts to decrease academic dishonesty. Therefore, future studies like this one are paramount to promoting efforts to curb cheating and increase academic integrity.

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APPENDIX A: ACADEMICALLY DISHONEST BEHAVIORS

30 Academically Dishonest Behaviors^a

Collaborating with others on an assignment that was assigned as individual work
 Copying homework
 Copying information without utilizing quotation marks
 Copying material without proper footnotes or citations
 Cutting and pasting material from the internet and submitting it as one's own
 Delaying taking an exam or turning in a paper due to a false excuse
 Downloading a complete term paper from the internet and submitting it as one's own
 Failing to report a grading error
 Falsifying or fabricating a bibliography
 Forging a University document
 Giving answers to someone else during an exam
 Giving exam questions to students in a later section
 Having someone else write a term paper for you
 Hiring a ghostwriter
 Inputting information or formulas needed for an exam into a calculator
 Not contributing a fair share in a group project
 Obtaining a copy of the exam to be given prior to class
 Obtaining a test from a previous semester
 Obtaining answers from someone else during an exam
 Plagiarizing
 Purchasing a term paper to be turned in as one's own
 Sabotaging someone else's work (on a disk, in a lab, etc.)
 Stealing or copying a test
 Studying from someone else's notes
 Submitting the same term paper to another class without permission
 Taking a test for someone else
 Using crib sheets
 Utilizing a term paper or exam from a fraternity or sorority test file
 Utilizing a tutor or writing center inappropriately
 Writing a term paper for someone else

Note. ^aas established by Schmelkin, Gilbert, Spencer, Pincus, and Silva (2003)

APPENDIX B: ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AWARENESS SURVEY

2008 Academic Integrity Awareness Survey

You are being asked to complete the following survey. Your participation is voluntary.

You are under no obligation to take part. Your responses are anonymous; you may choose to answer only those questions that you so desire.

About you:

I am 18 years old or older (circle one): YES NO

If you circled NO, please do not complete the survey and return it in the envelope provided.

Sex (circle one): Male Female
Year in school (circle one): Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

1. Approximately what percentage of your peers cheat in their classes? (circle one)
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Questions 2-10 How often have you engaged in the following behaviors during your college career?

1= never 5=at every opportunity

2	Have you ever copied a homework assignment?	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone else who has engaged in this behavior?	Yes	No
3	Have you ever given exam questions to a student in a later section?	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone else who has engaged in this behavior?	Yes	No
4	Have you ever received exam questions from a student in an earlier section?	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone else who has engaged in this behavior?	Yes	No
5	Have you ever obtained an old test from a previous term?	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone else who has engaged in this behavior?	Yes	No
6	Have you ever faked or fabricated a bibliography?	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone else who has engaged in this behavior?	Yes	No
7	Have you ever given answers to someone else during an exam?	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone else who has engaged in this behavior?	Yes	No
8	Have you ever received	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone	Yes	No

answers from someone else during an exam?						else who has engaged in this behavior?		
9 Have you ever lied about family death/illness to miss an exam or get more time?	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone else who has engaged in this behavior?	Yes	No
10 Have you ever plagiarized?	1	2	3	4	5	Do you know anyone else who has engaged in this behavior?	Yes	No

Questions 11-16 In the following scenarios, a situation will be described to you. Please circle the answer corresponding to the response that most accurately describes your opinion whether or not cheating took place. In the subsequent box, please describe why you indicated yes or no.

11. Jane and Joe are dating. They take a class together. This class requires a paper. Joe has other commitments so Jane writes the paper for Joe. Joe submits the paper as his own work.

Did Jane cheat? Yes No

Did Joe cheat? Yes No

Comment on your answers as to whether or not Jane and/or Joe cheated:

12. A group of students keeps copies of old tests from Professor Jones. Jill uses the tests to study for her upcoming test with Professor Jones.

Did Jill cheat? Yes No

Comment on your answer as to whether or not Jill cheated:

13. John decides to pledge a fraternity. A required meeting conflicts with a class session where a major assignment is due. John tells the professor that he was ill.

Did John cheat? Yes No

Comment on your answer as to whether or not John cheated:

--

14. Dorothy has yet to start her research paper. John has finished his paper in the same class. Dorothy asks to borrow John's paper to get some ideas, then paraphrases most of John's work.

Did John cheat?	Yes	No
Did Dorothy cheat?	Yes	No

Comment on your answers as to whether or not John and/or Dorothy cheated:

15. Professor Doe teaches multiple sections of College 231. Gary takes the exam during the 11am class but Karen doesn't take the exam until the night class. Gary helps Karen with the test.

Did Gary cheat?	Yes	No
Did Karen cheat?	Yes	No

Comment on your answers as to whether or not Gary and/or Karen cheated:

16. Paul searches the internet for his research paper. He finds some websites that answer his research question exactly. He includes one quote as is with no rewording, yet he rewords the second quote. Neither quote is cited or given a footnote.

Did Paul cheat with quote one?	Yes	No
Did Paul cheat with quote two?	Yes	No

Comment on your answers as to whether or not Paul cheated:
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