

Week x Lecture: Academic Honesty

In a national survey conducted in 2000 by the Center for Academic Integrity, 45% of Duke University students reported they had engaged in unauthorized collaboration and 37% percent had falsified lab reports or research data at least once during their collegiate experience. Even more disturbing were statistics surrounding faculty responses to cheating. Fifty percent of the faculty surveyed at Duke never reported student cheating; more than 30% were aware of student cheating and did nothing; and less than 30% utilized methods available for disciplining these students (“Faculty Play,” 2004). Similar studies conducted by Dr. Donald McCabe and others have indicated comparable results at institutions of higher education across the United States. The conclusion appears to be that college students cheat and faculty do little about it.

While this may be the case at some institutions, it is certainly not the case at all institutions. Some important factors exist in the institutional culture that can impact the likelihood students will cheat, plagiarize, or commit other acts of academic dishonesty. These include: faculty reactions to academic misconduct; peer reactions to academic misconduct; the presence of some type of honor code or clear and explicit policies regarding academic misconduct and how violations will be addressed; community dialogue about the importance of academic honesty and its relationship to ethical decision-making; the impact of technology on academic coursework; and assessing the institution’s constituents concerning academic honesty and misconduct.

Does your institution have an academic honor code or clear and explicit policies regarding academic dishonesty? How do students, faculty, and staff learn about the honor code or policies?

Faculty Reactions to Academic Misconduct

Many faculty believe that they should be involved in addressing cases of academic misconduct. Whether they believe they alone should handle violations or whether as part of institutional processes for responding, faculty share responsibility with staff and students for monitoring student behavior. Research done by McCabe et al. (2003) indicates that the presence of an honor code significantly influences faculty attitudes and behaviors regarding the need to respond to academic misconduct. Faculty at institutions like the University of Virginia have been found to have more faith in institutional responses to academic misconduct, will share responsibility with students for monitoring student behavior, and typically believe the system is fair and effective in responding to student academic misconduct (McCabe et al., 2003). In a different study, McCabe et al. (2002) determined that faculty failure to enforce academic honesty policies could lead to more cheating and academic misconduct.

Some institutions are responding to the need for honor codes by creating modified honor codes. Through these modified honor codes and associated processes, the institution clearly communicates that academic integrity is a major institutional priority. In addition, students play a significant role through the judicial board and other educational roles by informing other students about the code. It is important to note that responsibility does not rest solely with the students but with the entire collegiate community (McCabe et al., 2002). The University of Maryland offers the best example of a modified honor code, and details can be viewed at <http://www.jpo.umd.edu/>.

Faculty will often complain that excessive bureaucracy and paperwork prevents them from reporting incidents of academic misconduct. Determine if your institution has an honor code or clear and explicit policies for addressing academic misconduct. Describe your

perception or solicit the perceptions of others regarding the possible bureaucratic nature of addressing academic misconduct.

Peer Reactions to Academic Misconduct

Research by McCabe et al. (2002, 2003) indicates that students look to their peers, as well as faculty for cues regarding the acceptability of academic misconduct. Like faculty at institutions with honor codes, students have been found to have more faith in institutional responses to academic misconduct, will share responsibility with faculty for monitoring other student's behavior, and typically believe the system is fair and effective in responding to student academic misconduct (McCabe et al., 2003). As an institution, it is important that students understand the academic discipline system and outcomes of being found responsible for academic misconduct (McCabe et al., 2002). The institution also needs to allow students to play a role in resolving academic discipline cases (McCabe & Pavela, 2000) and educating other students about ethical decision-making.

What role do students have your academic and non-academic discipline processes? What types of proactive educational efforts exist for addressing community or institutional values and student behavior?

Institutional Policies and Conflicting Values

What values does your institution communicate are critical to individual and institutional success?

As institutions aspire to national recognition, the expectations of and demands placed on students, faculty, and staff increase. In order to be the best, you have to recruit, retain, and place the best students in either employment or educational settings. For some students, academic misconduct may be tied to academic and personal survival. Grades and class rank are tied to

scholarship programs and admission to other institutions of higher education or professional schools.

It is important to help students, faculty, and staff understand what the institutional priorities are including a commitment to academic honesty. They also need to understand how the academic discipline process works and play a role in educating others about this process (“Faculty Play,” 2004). The institutional community must also evaluate how their espoused (spoken or articulated) values may conflict with their values in action. **So what does the institution indicate we are committed to or desire in our academic community, and how does institutional resource allocation support our espoused values?**

Encouraging Community Dialogue

The academic preparation of many faculty does not include instruction on how to be an effective educator and facilitator. Faculty often have a passion for their academic discipline but may lack requisite interpersonal training to effectively facilitate dialogue in the classroom. As student affairs professionals, we can offer training to undergraduate faculty about how to engage students in dialogue about community values including the importance of academic honesty (“Faculty Play,” 2004).

In research conducted with high school students who had transitioned to their first year of college, students were asked about differences in how academic misconduct was addressed in high school and college (Kessler, 2003). This qualitative study asked students to speak to the impact of these differences in negotiating the academic experience during their first year of college. These students spoke to three key differences between how academic misconduct is addressed in high school and college. First, these students addressed differences in punishment, indicating that some colleges have very clear and explicit institutional punishments where high

schools allow more latitude to the teacher to respond (Kessler, 2003). For example, Barton Community College gives an XF, which is clearly indicated on the transcript that it is an F for cheating or plagiarizing (Burnett, 2002). McCabe et al. (2002) indicate that the severity of penalties is a deterrent to student misconduct and that students look to see what the punishment will be before acting.

Second, these students spoke to differences in perception about what constitutes cheating (Kessler, 2003). While students may be pretty clear in high school about what is acceptable and unacceptable academic conduct, they indicate it can be difficult to navigate all the various ways one might cheat in college. Some faculty encourage collaboration and group study then punish students who collaborate on graded assignments. Other faculty may allow students to use calculators and other tools on exams without realizing the technology now available for storing information for use on exams. Faculty and students should have regular discussion about acceptable and unacceptable academic conduct for each course, including when collaboration is and is not acceptable.

Finally, these students spoke to differences in student attitudes about cheating (Kessler, 2003). College can be a place of ethical transition where behavior tolerated in high school is no longer acceptable. Students begin to consider the implications on their future of being found responsible for academic misconduct. If communities share responsibility in holding others accountable, students will consider likelihood of being reported before acting (McCabe et al., 2002). And when students are given a voice in policy creation, they feel empowered as members of the community (McCabe & Pavela, 2000).

What opportunities exist for community dialogue on academic honesty and other important institutional values? How do you prepare faculty and staff to engage in ethical dialogue with students?

Impact of Internet on Academic Honesty

Today's students begin working on the computer as early as kindergarten. With access to the Internet so great and resources like Napster, which encourage that music and other things are there for the taking, students can get to a multitude of academic resources. Students can copy work off the Internet, buy completed papers from individuals of paper mills, or steal others' work (Burnett, 2002). And some faculty are nowhere near as savvy as their students at accessing Internet resources. Faculty may need to ask students to print and provide Internet materials cited. They definitely need to discuss how to cite Internet material and to assess the reliability of the information the student may want to use. Faculty and staff also need to be aware of resources both available to students who wish to buy papers, as well as for them in determining when a student paper might be plagiarized (for example, computer software that scans the paper and can determine when a large amount of the paper has been plagiarized or online search engines that can assist in locating online references).

How familiar are you with the resources out there? How would you address the impact of the Internet on preparing academic assignments with your students?

Assessing Academic Integrity

The Center for Academic Integrity (<http://www.academicintegrity.org/assessGuide.asp>) sells an academic integrity assessment guide, though the cost is substantially higher for non-member institutions. Much research also exists on academic integrity from student and faculty perspectives. Depending on the institutional resources available, an institution might elect to

create their own assessment instrument. Additionally, statistics and data available as part of the academic discipline process allow an examination of the instances of cheating reported (“Faculty Play,” 2004); the nature of sanctions for particular types of violations; and the numbers of students actually found responsible for allegations of cheating. An institution can also survey faculty, staff, and students regarding their perceptions of the value placed on academic honesty; how the institution proactively and reactively addresses student behavior; and other measures that the institution deems valuable to understanding the culture of academic honesty at the institution (“Faculty Play,” 2004).

What methods of assessment does your institution utilize for examining the culture of academic honesty?

Assignments

- (1) Search your institutional website for the academic honor code or policies and procedures for responding to academic misconduct. Search words may include academic honesty, academic dishonesty, academic misconduct, cheating, plagiarizing, and academic discipline. What did you find?
- (2) Go to www.academicintegrity.org which is the website for the Center for Academic Integrity. Review The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity, which is a downloadable pdf, file with lots of food for thought on academic integrity.
- (3) What role can you play in educating the campus community about the importance of academic honesty? What barriers may impede your community dialogue? What supports exist that support this type of dialogue?

References

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