Broadly stated, academic dishonesty involves the use by individuals in academia of unethical means such as fraud or plagiarism to achieve success in educational and job performance. Academic dishonesty by students, the primary focus of this entry, includes their copying or stealing examinations, cheating on examinations, plagiarizing reports and term papers, buying term papers, using a variety of strategies for crib notes, and, more recently, using cell phones or Internet connections in order to pass exams. Student infringement on copyright and intellectual property rights is especially prevalent when individuals plagiarize term papers.

Examples of faculty dishonesty include falsifying data to gain research grants, plagiarizing materials in their published works, failing to reveal criminal records in employment interviews, exaggerating academic or work credentials, taking credit for articles that are ghostwritten by others, and fabricating or manipulating data to reach conclusions that are threatening to ethical research. Further, excessive absences by faculty members from assigned duties may be considered as dishonest.

Administrators in higher education may engage in academic dishonesty when they use their positions to award contracts in return for financial or other rewards, falsify academic records, and, in rare cases, allow students of prominent business or government officials or athletic prowess to acquire degrees without attending classes or completing degree requirements.

**Historical Background**

Academic dishonesty has been prevalent in varying degrees since the founding of higher institutions. Although institutions identify unethical behavior for faculty, student, and staff in policy handbooks, they also typically have different disciplinary and honor codes for students. Such codes have a long history in the Western tradition. Aristotle's works on politics and ethics influenced academic integrity in the Western tradition. In fact, Aristotle wrote that ethical codes had to be embodied in a code of law interconnected with the whole framework of social and political systems. Aristotle also explained that young citizens had to learn these laws in order to live the life of citizens and of individuals following accepted standards of right and wrong.

"Do no harm," the crux of the Hippocratic oath, has been a model for medical and educational ethical codes. The oath includes a commitment to serve others selflessly and to avoid intentional misdeeds. Colonial schools and colleges adhered to policies requiring moral and ethical conduct. Although there were instances of deviations, accountability for responsible conduct, honesty, and service were highly prized. Punishment for immorality was harsh and swift. Schoolbooks such as McGuffey's Readers emphasized duty, honor, respect for authority, and hard work. Truth, accuracy, and industry were expected and rewarded. Schools and colleges had assessment measures for comportment in the 19th and 20th centuries.

From public schools to universities, there has been a growing culture of academic dishonesty. The larger society has been challenged by fraudulent unethical behavior in governmental, religious, economic, and business organizations. As a result, there is renewed attention throughout American society, institutions, and organizations to maintaining the highest performance modes of integrity, honesty, and
Academic dishonesty undermines the central values of higher education. The integrity of research by faculty and students depends on the ability to replicate findings. Responsibility for ethical behavior individually, or as a member of group, may be built from organizational expectations. Undergraduate and graduate students are governed by academic integrity policies that identify specific behaviors of deceit or dishonesty. Student and faculty responsibilities are identified by university policies that define a variety of sanctions against students who have shown such behaviors, including being required to take courses over again, being given failing grades in courses in which they have been deceitful or dishonest, or being assigned additional class reports or work.

Responses to Academic Dishonesty

In today's complex, speed-centered, and information-oriented society, cutting corners, taking shortcuts, and operating on the fringes of ethical conduct to gain market advantage have become more common in the highly competitive business environment. The failures of Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and other major businesses resulted from fraudulent management behavior due to pressures for profit. Regulatory action by the federal government, such as the enactment of the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act, is a common approach to ethical business lapses. Interestingly, many of the major corporate executives caught in fraudulent scandals were educated in top-ranked business schools. At the same time, applicants for business and other professional schools such as schools of law or medicine have been known to try to hire high-scoring imposters to take their graduate admission tests or other appropriate standardized measures. John Hechinger (2008) notes the use of digital fingerprinting and palm scanning to validate the identity of test takers, for business school applicants in particular. To combat dishonesty, business school applicants also are photographed and videotaped while they are taking their exams.

In response to dishonesty, the law has made it clear that final disciplinary decisions need to be objective and grounded in fact. Although Board of Curators of the University of Missouri v. Horowitz (1987) dealt with dismissal due to a student's poor academic performance rather than academic dishonesty, it is worth noting. This is because in it, the U.S. Supreme Court illustrated the requirement that even though it was willing to defer to their expertise in matters of academic decision making, officials in higher education must base their judgments on objective, defensible criteria. Although Charlene Horowitz had excellent grades on written exams and in her clinical performance, concerns about peer relations and hygiene prompted faculty members to recommend that she be dismissed from the medical school. The Court held that it would not interfere with university and faculty decisions in their area of expertise, thus reversing an order of the Eighth Circuit that had entered a judgment in favor of the use of procedural due process in academic decisions.

In disciplining a student for unethical or unacceptable behavior, officials in higher education institutions must provide notice of infractions with opportunities for those charged to present defenses. McMillan v. Hunt (1992) highlights the importance of evidence in dismissing students from universities. After comparing Jacqueline McMillan's research paper with that of her roommate and talking with two students, McMillan's instructor was convinced that McMillan had plagiarized the work of her roommate. The record revealed that the roommate had finished her paper several hours earlier than McMillan and that the papers were strikingly similar. The Student Disciplinary Committee found that McMillan had violated the student honor code and recommended permanent expulsion from the university's law
school. McMillan, a first-year student, unsuccessfully filed suit, claiming violations of her rights to procedural and constitutional due process. She argued that officials at the University of Akron School of Law acted arbitrarily and capriciously in dismissing her in violation of her rights. The court noted that in light of the evidence presented that the student copied her roommate’s paper, combined with the fact that law school officials had a rational basis for dismissing her, it had no choice but to uphold the adjudication of the law school’s Student Disciplinary Committee.

When it comes to plagiarism, students who are required to complete reports and projects may change titles and a few other items in copying each other’s work. Students operate on the expectation that faculty will not have the time or inclination to ferret out their dishonesty. Charges can be brought by faculty, administrators, librarians, staff, or students for alleged violations of codes of academic integrity or for other dishonesty.

Once charged with dishonesty, students must be afforded hearings with opportunities for the accused to provide their sides of the stories. Careful adherence to legal protections for both the accused and the institution is essential. Students or accused faculty may bring charges of defamation of character. Excessive and consistent violations of ethical codes may have a demoralizing effect on classmates who do not cheat. Moreover, as Kenneth H. Ryesky (2007) points out, repeated violations can lower morale while creating cynical attitudes and disrespect for faculty members.

Insofar as students have ready access to widely advertised companies that sell term papers covering all subjects, addressing issues of academic dishonesty requires a total commitment from all institutional components of higher education. Faculty members need administrative support for their student disciplinary actions. Penalties for academic dishonesty depend on individual institutions, the seriousness of the offenses, the character and accomplishments of individuals, penalties assigned others with the same or similar offenses, and the purpose of the disciplinary actions. Sanctions may include warnings, grade reductions, course failures, additional student assignments, or other disciplinary measures as deemed appropriate.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974), which governs student records, protects student privacy while allowing leeway for situations when a need for information may outweigh privacy interests. It should be followed when academic dishonesty issues arise with regard to students, faculty, or administrators. Students’ personal identifiable information must be kept confidential and should not be released by officials without written consent unless there are legitimate extenuating circumstances.

According to Ryesky, an emerging issue is that academic dishonesty may be viewed differently in other cultures. In our increasingly diverse society, where there are many different ethnicities and language skills, academic counselors and faculty should review college and university codes of conduct to help those from other cultures become familiar with ethical expectations.

**Technology and Academic Dishonesty**

Rapidly expanding technology makes it difficult to keep up with needed academic integrity codes. Educational institutions are developing new instructional delivery models. Distance learning in a digital age through online computer courses and programs creates a need for faculty surveillance of student responsibility for adhering to academic ethical principles.

Students and Internet users have developed a culture that often does not view utilizing information from the vast resources of the Internet without attribution as academic dishonesty. Plagiarism involving
material readily available on the Internet is a growing problem. The software company iParadigm developed a computer program, Turnitin, that identifies matches between digital content on the Internet or in the company’s databases and text in student term papers, take-home examinations, and other research assignments. This system can also be used to evaluate work by faculty members who have submitted their manuscripts for publication. Public exposure of administrative and faculty malfeasance can end careers. Clearly, it is often difficult for educational policy makers to keep up with the rapidly exploding growth of our information age.

Bernadette H. Schell and Clemens Martin (2004) identify some of the most common cybercrimes impacting academic dishonesty. Identity theft—the malicious theft and subsequent misuse of someone else’s identity in order to commit crimes—is increasing. Computer hackers may destroy, manipulate, or use personal information of students, faculty, or staff. Colleges and university personnel must thus strive to protect e-mail and account information while providing or encouraging the use of antivirus software. University data banks may be compromised, necessitating that administrators take expensive corrective action.

In United States v. Diekman (2001), Justice Department investigators discovered that an individual had hacked into a number of government and university computers, including ones at Stanford University. The hacker also gained access to usernames and passwords from Harvard University, Cornell University, California State University at Fullerton, Oregon State University, and the Los Angeles and San Diego campuses of the University of California. In an unreported case, the 20-year-old culprit was sentenced to federal prison on a variety of claims, including unauthorized access to computers and damaging protected computers. Computer crime is so prevalent that a growing number of colleges and universities award degrees in computer crime as an area of specialization within the field of information technology. In addition, Congress has enacted legislation dealing with the growing problem.

Donald L. McCabe (2005) surveyed more than 40,000 undergraduates on 68 campuses. His survey revealed that 21% of respondents acknowledged at least one form of serious exam cheating, while 51% admitted at least one incident of cheating on written work. Faculty members often overlook or ignore suspicious behavior or do not conduct proper surveillance during examination periods. Reporting such behavior often involves much work, and for untenured faculty there may be some hesitancy to report academic dishonesty.

Individual and Institutional Responsibilities

Faculty members need to be aware of the need for clear evidence of cheating before reporting students. All institutions of higher education have their own disciplinary procedures and culture. It is essential to have total commitment to individual and institutional ethics. Faculty, administrators, staff, and students can work toward mutual enforcement of codes of conduct, creating a self-regulatory environment dedicated to academic integrity, morality, and ethics. Most higher education institutions have these policies in course syllabi that faculty members highlight during first class meetings periods and as needed throughout semesters.

Affirmative action to ensure ethical conduct requires guidance from educational, governmental, legal, religious, business, and corporate institutions. Additionally, legal counsel in institutions of higher education should engage in risk avoidance strategies to prevent defamation of character suits. In sum, to the extent that academic dishonesty threatens mutual trust and the free exchange of ideas essential in all educational institutions, educational leaders must act in concert to seek to alleviate academic
dishonesty.

See also
Cheating and Academic Discipline, Disciplinary Sanctions and Due Process Rights, Educational Malpractice, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

Further Readings


Legal Citations


Patten, James J. Van

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA