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Cheating on exams, plagiarizing, falsifying bibliographies, turning in work done by someone else, receiving improper assistance on assignments, and intentionally

facilitating cheating on the part of others are commonplace in American higher education. All of these behaviors comprise academic dishonesty, a widespread problem at colleges and universities (Burke, 1997; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). Dishonest academic behavior occurs at all types of institutions and involves a wide array of students (Desruisseaux, 1999). A primary issue facing community colleges is how to effectively reduce dishonest student conduct. This digest cites studies on academic dishonesty from both two- and four-year institutions. Though studies focusing specifically on community colleges are relatively rare, many findings from four-year institutions are relevant for community colleges.

FREQUENCY OF DISHONEST BEHAVIOR

By most measures, cheating is prevalent on college campuses around the nation. McCabe and Trevino (1996) found that two out of three students admitted to dishonest academic behavior in a study of 6,000 students at thirty-one highly selective colleges and universities. In a sample of 1,800 students at nine state universities, seventy percent of students admitted to cheating on exams, eighty-four percent to cheating on written assignments, and almost half to inappropriately collaborating with others on assignments (McCabe & Trevino, 1996). Genereux and McLeod (1995) reported that eighty-five percent of males and seventy-nine percent of females at an urban community college admitted engaging in at least one dishonest behavior. Over twenty-five percent of students had engaged in one of the following: sharing of exam questions, listing false references in papers, allowing others to copy during an exam, or plagiarizing parts of papers. A survey of faculty at a multi-campus community college found that eighty percent of respondents had suspected academic dishonesty in their classes and sixty-five percent had been certain of dishonesty (Burke, 1997).

A number of authors and commentators have suggested that cheating is on the rise among college students, although relatively few longitudinal studies exist to confirm this assertion. Methodological inconsistencies between studies conducted over the last fifty years greatly complicate meaningful comparisons (Crown & Spiller, 1998). McCabe and Trevino (1996) reported that the overall percentage of students admitting to at least one incidence in test cheating rose slightly from 63 to 70 percent between 1963 and 1993. Substantial increases in the number of students copying from others on exams (from 26 to 52 percent), using crib notes during tests (from 16 to 27 percent), and improperly collaborating on written assignments (from 11 to 49 percent) were observed. Other dishonest behaviors such as plagiarizing, falsifying bibliographies, and turning in unoriginal work remained essentially unchanged or had decreased. Overall, these data indicate moderate increases in academic dishonesty over the last few decades.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH DISHONESTY

Research has revealed numerous individual and environmental factors associated with dishonest student behavior. The following four categories represent common factors

cited in the literature: individual characteristics, peer group influences, instructor influences, and institutional policies.

(1) Individual Characteristics

Five student characteristic variables are frequently related to the incidence of dishonest behavior: academic achievement, age, social activities, major, and gender. In a study of students at a suburban community college, Antion and Michael (1983) found that students with lower GPA's were more likely to cheat on an examination. Crown and Spiller (1998, p. 689) noted that "a significant negative relationship between cheating and GPA," as well as other measures of achievement, is a recurring theme in the literature. Younger students, traditional college students, and underclassmen are more likely to engage in cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty (Crown & Spiller, 1998; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Whitley, 1998). Social activities such as membership in a fraternity/sorority, frequent partying, and increased extracurricular involvement have also been related to higher levels of dishonesty (Crown & Spiller, 1998; McCabe & Trevino, 1997). Several studies have indicated that business majors are more likely to cheat than non-business students and that business majors have more tolerant attitudes toward dishonesty (Crown & Spiller, 1998; Roig and Ballew, 1994). The relationship between gender and dishonesty is less clear. Studies indicating that males are more likely to cheat are common, as are studies indicating no significant differences in gender (Crown & Spiller, 1998; Whitley, 1998).

(2) Peer Group Influences

The behaviors and attitudes of peers influence student decisions regarding academic misconduct. McCabe and Trevino (1997) found that students' perception of peer disapproval was the strongest predictor of reduced cheating behavior. Genereux and McLeod (1995) reported that estimates of the prevalence of cheating among peers significantly predicted cheating behavior. According to Crown & Spiller (1998), studies have consistently indicated that students are more likely to cheat if they observe other students cheating or if they perceive that cheating is commonplace or acceptable among peers (Crown & Spiller, 1998).

(3) Instructor Influences

Students who perceive instructors to be concerned for students and actively involved in the learning process are less likely to engage in dishonesty. If the professor seems indifferent or if the subject matter seems unimportant or uninteresting, students feel less

moral obligation to avoid cheating (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997; Kerkvliet & Sigmund, 1999; McCabe & Trevino, 1996). A number of studies have indicated that the environment within the classroom or examination setting, as established by the instructor, can have significant impacts on cheating (Crown & Spiller, 1998; Roig & Ballew, 1994; Whitely, 1998). Genereux and McLeod (1995) reported that permissive instructor attitudes and low instructor vigilance tend to increase cheating, while higher vigilance, use of essay exams and spacing of students further apart tend to reduce cheating. A study of classroom settings by Kerkvliet and Sigmund (1999) found that higher number of test proctors, use of non-multiple choice exams, and use of multipe versions of an exam reduce cheating. Exam content and structure is also important, as students are more likely to cheat on tests perceived to be unfair or confusing (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997; Genereux &McLeod, 1995).

(4) Institutional Policies

Aaron (1992) found that over ninety percent of community colleges in a national sample have academic integrity policies and almost ninety-eight percent have procedures for dealing with student misconduct. Community colleges were significantly less likely than four-year institutions to have separate guidelines for academic dishonesty distinct from other types of student misconduct. The community colleges were more likely to rely on student handbooks and orientation to communicate policies rather than specific programs and faculty presentations. Effective communication of policies and increased student awareness of penalties and enforcement tend to reduce dishonest behavior (Aaron, 1992; Crown & Spiller, 1998; McCabe & Trevino, 1996). Students do not seem to be opposed to strict penalties, as long as they are clearly articulated and evenly enforced (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997; McCabe & Trevino, 1996).

RESPONSES OF FACULTY

College faculty members tend to be highly disapproving of academic dishonesty but may not necessarily be vigilant about dishonest behavior. In Burke's (1997) sample of community college faculty, respondents did not believe dishonesty to be a serious problem at their institution. When student dishonesty was suspected or occurred, faculty tended to employ informal measures with students rather than pursue official procedures. Time constraints, due process protocol, fear of backlash, lack of administrative support, and misunderstanding of policies may all contribute to faculty reluctance to act on suspicions of cheating (Burke, 1997; Roig & Ballew, 1994). Aaron (1992) reported that twenty-five percent of community colleges sampled did not employ any specific method for disseminating information on academic integrity to faculty and that less than three percent of the colleges relied on faculty to disseminate information to students.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

College leaders should establish an environment where dishonesty is viewed as unacceptable and where any possible benefits are outweighed by risks of being caught and peer disapproval. Specific recommendations are as follows:

(1) Communicate policies on academic misconduct to students and faculty. Regular communication through a variety of media (e.g. handbooks, orientations, programs, course materials) conveys the message that academic integrity is an important institutional priority.

(2) Encourage faculty to discuss dishonesty with students. Faculty comments reinforce and remind students of unacceptable behavior.

(3) Establish non-permissive examination environments. Watchful instructors, spaced seating, and varying exam formats are effective deterrents.

(4) Apply consequences in a consistent, fair, and timely manner. Inconsistent and unpredictable responses to dishonesty erode student support for existing policies.

(5) Maintain an environment of trust and honor. An emphasis on mature behavior, self-responsibility, and proper conduct enhances academic integrity. (Burke, 1997; Kerkvliet & Sigmund, 1999; McCabe & Trevino, 1996, 1997; Roig & Ballew, 1994; Whitley, 1998).

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