Deep Integrity: Campus Ethics in the Flat World

Timothy K. Daugherty, Ph.D., ABPP

Thomas F. Moore, Ph.D.

Winthrop University

September 2007

Tim Daugherty is an associate professor of psychology at Winthrop University. He is a licensed clinical psychologist and fellow of the American Academy of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology. Tom Moore is the vice president for academic affairs at Winthrop University. Winthrop University is a member of the leadership consortium for the AAC&U Core Commitments Program, focused on educating for personal and social responsibility.

Abstract

A recent cheating scandal at a top business school led at least one commentator to propose recasting cheating as postmodern learning. Paradoxically counterproductive, the proposal represents a special challenge to the academy. As accountable institutions, universities serve students by purposefully integrating integrity initiatives into the most basic discussions of the learning enterprise.

Deep Integrity: Campus Ethics in the Flat World

In March of 2007, thirty-four M.B.A. students were disciplined following inappropriate collaboration on a take-home exam (Young, 2007). The magnitude of the cheating incident – the largest ever reported at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business – raised a provocative question. In a BusinessWeek commentary, Michelle Conlin (2007) wondered whether the students' actions were better understood as "cheating or postmodern learning?" Few questions asked of academia press more firmly for a clear response, a response that not only takes account of the accountability movement but moreover takes inspiration from a new commitment to both deep learning and integrity.

American universities are being challenged. The large number, credible sources, and focused intensity of recent criticisms are such that they cannot be dismissed as shrill disaffections or mere cyclical events. Concerns are voiced both about the nature of higher education and about the ability of graduates to apply their education in a complex world. Through surveys and focus groups, a recent report from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education suggests that the public appears to be more skeptical of higher education than in the past (Immerwahr & Johnson, 2007). Art Levine (2005), former president of Columbia University's Teachers College, uses the terms "inadequate" and "appalling" to describe programs that prepare educational leaders. Charles Miller, chairman of the Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education, paints a picture of university culture as "complacent" and "change-resistant" (Field, 2006). Derek Bok (2006), former president of Harvard, argues that – while not in decline by historic standards – American higher education is "underachieving."

The academy could respond to these concerns and new demands for accountability by simply changing underlying definitions. When for example nearly a tenth of a class cheats on an exam, the behavior could be redefined as cyber-collaboration and the academy could then report that no cheating occurs in its hallowed halls. To its credit, Duke University did not employ the newspeak invited by Conlin's BusinessWeek commentary.

Like other human institutions, universities must constantly self-monitor and self-correct. Viktor Frankl (1959), pioneering existential psychiatrist and author of Man's Search for Meaning, warned about "paradoxical counterproductivity" – the inclination of institutions toward their opposite natures (Illich, 1976). Those initially charged with protecting, eventually abuse. Those charged with producing, consume. Those charged with inspiring, placate. And so on. Unchecked the paradoxical force leads to a profound existential challenge, the resolution of which ultimately defines an institution. An impoverished response to cheating – redefining it away – would be paradoxical indeed. Cheating, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level of instruction, cuts to the core of the academic enterprise.

Many universities are now engaged in soul searching – partly a reflexive reaction to the accountability movement but potentially a pathway to fulfilling deeper goals. Accountability is best conceptualized broadly, rather than simply in terms of line-item optimization and the narrow clericalism of current approaches to outcomes assessment. The successful university invests time in weaving initiatives to and through one another – using the time-tested threads of the institution's mission. Accountability then involves the search for both external validation *and* internal consistency (the former being elusive

without the latter). Lee Shulman (2007) proposes that an accountable institution seeks to tell a richly compelling story with its assessment data. Cheating tears at the fabric of an institution's narrative. When all is counted and the story is told, a college's graduates ought to live and work with integrity, in part, because they learned with integrity.

A number of universities are pursuing discussions of "deep learning" and a number of universities are examining policies and pedagogies related to "integrity." These initiatives ought to be considered simultaneously. The purposeful interweaving of deep learning and integrity is a prime example of effective self-monitoring and self-correction in the face of significant challenges – political, professional, and paradoxical. Caryn McTighe Musil (2003), Vice President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, argues that successful universities are "melding the work of the mind with the welfare of the world."

What is deep learning and what does it have to do with integrity? According to John Tagg (2003), "Deep learning is learning that takes root in our apparatus of understanding, in the embedded meanings that define us and that we use to define the world" (p. 70). Deep learning systematically connects what the individual learns to what the individual already knows – and ultimately prepares the learner for the unknown.

The world is changing. True enough at any time, but occasionally truisms mark substantial events. The world's new operating system as cited by Thomas Friedman (2006), "Globalization 3.0," clearly produces new ethical questions. Jason Stephens recently surveyed college students and found that digital plagiarism is now outpacing conventional plagiarism (Stephens, Young, & Calabrese, 2006). While labor and material may be sourced in a variety of ways in Friedman's "flat world," the source of

ethical guidance must continue to be deeply integrated moral reasoning. Through a battery of surveys, Scott Wowra (2006) found that students who understand ethical principles are less likely to cheat. Thus, Toni Morrison (2002) is correct in asserting that the university must "take seriously and rigorously its role…as interrogator of more and more complex ethical problems" (p. 7).

Accountability tends to reduce to counting (e.g., how many students, how many skills, etc.). This purely mechanical, static apprehension of learning nudges us along paradoxical paths. Better that the evaluation of learning focuses on *how deeply* new skills are applied to solve problems of living, not simply on how many skills are acquired. Michelle Conlin is correct in one sense: students now operate in a technologically shifting, collaborative world and universities are struggling to provide guidance (Mccabe & Stephens, 2006). Without systematic attention to both depth and integrity in the classroom, our graduates risk becoming like Robert Pirsig's (1974) mechanics "who have learned how to handle everything except a new situation."

References

Bok, D. (2006). Our underachieving colleges: A candid look at how much students learn and why they should be learning more. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Conlin, M. (2007, May 14). Cheating -- or postmodern learning? Duke's b-school scandal points up the fuzzy ethics of a collaborative world. BusinessWeek, p. 42.

Field, K. (2006, June 2). A Texas millionaire plots the future of higher education. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 52, p. A16.

Frankl, V. (1959). Man's search for meaning. New York: Washington Square Press.

Friedman, T. (2006). The world is flat [updated and expanded]: A brief history of the twenty-first century. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Illich, I. (1976). Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health. New York: Random House.

Immerwahr, J. & Johnson, J. (2007). Squeeze play: How parents and the public look at higher education today [report]. San Jose, CA: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

Levine, A. (2005, March). Educating school leaders [report]. Washington, DC: The Education Schools Project.

McCabe D. L. & Stephens, J. M. (2006, November 11). “Epidemic” as opportunity: Internet plagiarism as a lever for cultural change. Teachers College Record. Retrieved January 25, 2007 from www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=12860.

Morrison, T. (2002). How can values be taught in the university? Peer Review, 4, 4 -7.

Musil, C.M. (2003). Educating for citizenship. Peer Review, 5, 4-8.

Shulman, L. (2007). Counting and recounting: Assessment and the quest for accountability. Change, 20, 20-25.

Pirsig, R.M. (1974). Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance: An inquiry into values. New York: William Morrow.

Stephens, J.M., Young, M.F., & Calabrese, T.H. (in press). Does moral judgment go offline when students are online? A comparative analysis of undergraduates’ beliefs and behaviors related to conventional and digital cheating. Ethics & Behavior.

Tagg, J. (2003). The learning paradigm college. Bolton, MA: Anker.

Wowra, S. (2006). Moral identities, social anxiety, and academic dishonesty among American college students. Synthesis: Law and Policy in Higher Education, 18, 1262-1264.

Young, J.R. (2007, May 11). Cheating incident involving 34 students at Duke is business school's biggest ever. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 53, p. A45.