

Blight in the Classroom

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Abstract

Cheating by students is a serious problem that needs to be dealt with effectively by college teachers. This paper describes how to guard against cheating, how to detect cheating, and what to do when cheating is detected. Teachers should keep thorough records, closely monitor exams, use a dynamic testing strategy, and use multiple tests. Effectively dealing with the problems of cheating are costly in terms of time and effort. Each individual teacher is encouraged to select a combination of preventative measures to reduce the risk of cheating. Each cheating incident should be referred to judiciary or administrative hearings.

You are administering another undergraduate exam. A student whom you have not seen in class for three weeks arrives wearing a sheik blouse and skirt and a baseball cap. It's cloudy outside and the cap is not color coordinated with the rest of her clothing. Is she wearing a cap to cover her eyes as she looks on a neighboring student's test? You suspect a crime in the making.

After you return the corrected exams to the class, a student approaches you with two tests in his hands. He points out that both tests have the same answers. His answers were incorrect, while his friend's answers were correct. Yes, but this student had a green test and his friend had a white test. While you are explaining that different tests may require different answers, you suspect foul play.

Soon after returning the exams, another student demands

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year college faculty and ultimately to their students, or will all the errors and terror of "publish or perish" become part of the two-year college scene? Mooney (June 27, 1990) describes a faculty increasingly divided over expectations, standards, and rewards for scholarly activity versus teaching and service. Can two-year colleges keep their central focus on teaching if they push too hard for faculty scholars and scholarly activities?

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to get his corrected exam back. Since he did not take the exam in the first place, you will have great difficulty in returning it to him. For the first time, his memory is perfect. He recalls the test and his answers in great detail. He has been planning this caper for several days, and his adrenalin is high. He has caught you off-guard, and if he can cause you to doubt your handling of the papers, he will make an easy A. He has a lot to gain and apparently nothing to lose by pursuing this course of action rather than taking the exam.

Six hours after returning the corrected exams, you are faced with an irate student. After only six hours, he has now recognized that you made an error in adding up the number of incorrect points on his exam. You found 45 points of incorrect answers, but he produces (and I mean produces) an exam with only 15 points of incorrect answers. Dum de dum dum ... dum!

Could any of this really happen? Yes, it all happened to me recently, and it can happen to you. However, there are ways to protect yourself against cheating by students. The objective of this paper is to identify practical approaches for instructors to deal with academic dishonesty. More specifically, the paper will describe how to guard against academic dishonesty, how to detect it, and how to deal with it if detected.

Academic Dishonesty Described

University regulations on academic honesty require students to do independent work. Any of the following actions violate this principle and constitute academic dishonesty¹.

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1. receiving unauthorized assistance in the preparation of materials for any requirement for credit, including examinations;
2. giving unauthorized assistance in the preparation of materials for such requirements;
3. quoting another person's words or appropriating another's ideas without acknowledgement;
4. furnishing questions or answers for an examination to an unauthorized person;
5. procuring in an unauthorized manner any class materials, including examinations; and
6. falsifying any fact presented in any material to be submitted for credit.

The above list of activities is presented as examples of academic dishonesty and is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Through time imaginative students will probably add to the list.

Guarding Against Academic Dishonesty

Preventative Approaches

There are several practical approaches which can be used to guard against academic dishonesty. These approaches require added security, records, and personnel. The instructor has to balance the cost of reducing and/or policing cheating against the risk of potential cheating.

Examinations and records of student grades should be kept securely locked behind locked doors when not being used. Duplicate copies of student records can be kept at two separate locations. Hence, tampering with one set of records could be detected by a comparison with the other set. Examinations should be changed from one term to the next in order to reduce the probability of cheating.

The number of examinations being produced should be determined, verified and recorded. Then an accounting should be made of all examinations. The instructor should keep track of how many exams are taken to class and how many are returned after the exam. A good accounting and record system can be used to prove whether a student, who claims to have taken an exam, actually took the exam when you do not have one to return to him.

The classroom environment can be structured in such a way as to reduce cheating during an exam. A large, spacious room with student desks located far apart is ideal. Unfortunately, these conditions do not characterize most university classrooms. The class may be subdivided into groups and assigned to different classrooms if space and personnel are available. If it is not possible to adequately separate the students physically, extra precautions are needed. Additional monitors can be used to discourage and detect cheating. The instructor can create a seating chart for each exam, randomly distributing the students over the classroom. Random separation should break up groups of would-be cheaters. Multiple colored tests and an announcement of multiple tests will discourage cheating, but not eliminate it. More on this subject will be said later. Keep student move-

ment and other distractions during the exam to a minimum.

Identifying Potential Cheaters

Cheaters come from all races, sexes, and ages, but they are more prevalent among the young. They will cheat from the beginning of their academic careers to the very end. However, there are some common characteristics of cheaters. Understanding these characteristics could help you identify potential cheaters.

Consider ten students whom I caught cheating in my class. Each of these students copied from 50 to 100 percent of the test answers from other students' tests. Both the mean and median grade-point averages for these students were 2.3 on a 4.0 scale. The mode, or most frequent grade-point average, for these students was 2.0. Since the university requires a 2.0 grade-point average for graduation, it is evident that these students are having difficulty satisfying minimal requirements.

These students were generally overcommitted given their previous academic performances. Four of the ten students dropped from 5 to 10 hours each during the quarter they were caught cheating. Three of the ten students were enrolled in 20 hours of coursework that quarter, even though 15 hours is a full load. Some of these ten students encountered serious physical and/or emotional problems during the quarter. Being overcommitted, these students turned to cheating to make their grades and continue their pursuit of a degree rather than a pursuit of knowledge.

Detecting Academic Dishonesty

Regulations related to academic dishonesty can be policed by faculty and students. Students who witness cheating by others are not likely to turn them in because of (1) the risk of being "ostracized" by fellow students, (2) lack of sufficient evidence, and/or (3) apathy. Hence, faculty bear almost exclusive responsibility for detecting academic dishonesty.

Cheating on examinations can be detected by using multiple tests. Questions on one test can be altered slightly to form a second test. As many tests as needed can be developed in this fashion. The tests should be systematically mixed so that a student will have a different test from his/her neighbors. Each student's test is first corrected using the appropriate test key. Then the incorrect answers are compared with other keys. If several incorrect answers appear on other keys, a possible cheater has been detected.

Make photocopies of tests with low scores before returning the tests to students. If a student approaches you after receiving the corrected test and claims a discrepancy in the test grade, you can compare the test with your photocopy of the test to detect any alterations that might have been made in the test.

Keep thorough records on the number of exams produced, given to students, and completed by students. Similar records are needed for homework assignments indicating who turned in assignments. Later if a student claims to have completed an exam or assignment for which he/she received no grade, you have records which can be used to help detect possible cheating.

¹ Office of Judicial Programs, University of Georgia. "The Student Guide to Academic Honesty." Undated pamphlet.

Dealing with Academic Dishonesty

In a suspected case of academic dishonesty, the instructor is responsible for obtaining evidence and presenting the evidence at a judicial or administrative hearing. An instructor cannot legally penalize a student by changing his/her grade as a result of cheating without first taking the case through a hearing for a decision and allowing for possible appeals. The hearing will take any mitigating circumstances into account. While the mitigating circumstances should not influence the basic findings of the court, these circumstances may be taken into account in determining the appropriate penalty for academic dishonesty.

If a student is found guilty of academic dishonesty, the instructor can either assign a grade of zero on the material in question or an F for the course. Also, the student may receive a penalty from the court, normally suspension for one or two quarters from the university. A requirement for community service may be substituted by the court for a quarter of university suspension.

Recommendations

Take ample precautions to protect against cheating in your classroom. Develop a policy statement on academic dishonesty and inform students about the policy. Keep good records, maintain a suitable classroom environment for examinations, and use multiple tests. Use a dynamic testing strategy that will keep potential cheaters off-guard, because they will try to beat whatever system you devise to protect against cheating. Expect cheating and use proactive measures rather than simply reacting after it has already occurred.

Cheating should be dealt with as early in a student's academic career as possible. Legally, cases of academic dishonesty must be brought before a judiciary hearing so that a judgement can be reached and the appropriate sanctions determined. When a student passes one course by cheating rather than understanding the material, that student will not possess the requisite knowledge to enter the next course. Since the academic records will indicate the student is ready for the next course, the student will be allowed to enroll in more advanced courses. Once enrolled in an advanced course there will be a strong tendency for the student to continue cheating, because he/she never understood the fundamentals covered in the previous course. Pervasive cheating can undermine an entire academic program.

Collective departmental action can effectively reduce cheating. Departmental policies on academic dishonesty should be developed and discussed openly among faculty. The faculty should develop plans for combatting academic dishonesty. In particular, the faculty should consider setting limits on the amount of coursework that students with low grade-point averages can take, based on what they can handle and do independent work. Widespread faculty involvement is needed, because faculty have primary responsibility for policing academic dishonesty.



BUILDING A BOND

Supporting The First Year Teacher

John P. Mundt and Laurie A. Stenberg

The article references the dramatic changes which are occurring in the field of education and the need for addressing change in the preparation of teachers. The article specifically addresses how the profession has historically abandoned new teachers upon entering the profession. A model for teacher induction and first year assistance is discussed and results are highlighted. Cited in the article are results of an evaluative study and comments from first year teachers of high school agriculture and home economics and their building principals.

Education as a whole, and specifically the preparation of teachers, is at a crossroad. During the past decade, a minimum of ten nationally commissioned reports surfaced - - each telling us that our educational system is at risk. Overall, these reports indicate a general dissatisfaction with the current status of education. Within this context of change, one area receiving significant attention has been that of teachers and teacher preparation. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) forwarded a seven-part recommendation to improve the preparation of teachers, raise salaries and respect, and assist novice teachers in their career development. Beginning teachers have been singled out as needing special help and assistance.

Providing First Year Teacher Assistance

The expectation of the beginning teacher from the educational community is the ideal teacher. No other profession puts its beginners into a position where they are immediately expected to perform like a veteran. Lortie (1975) described the isolation of the early years of teaching: "The cellular organization of school constrains the amount and type of interaction possible, beginning teachers spend most of their time physically apart from colleagues." (p. 72) In addition, the beginning teacher is expected to perform the same tasks as the veteran but without systematic induction or guidance. Lortie (1975) goes on to say:

Fully responsible for the instruction of his students from his first working day, the beginning teacher performs the same tasks as the twenty-five year veteran. Tasks are not added sequentially to allow for gradual increase in skill and knowledge; the beginner learns while performing the full complement of teaching

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