Promoting academic integrity in higher education

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The purpose of the study is to identify best practice initiatives that contribute to academic integrity and reduce scholastic dishonesty in higher education. Chief academic affairs officers (CAOs) or provosts at four year public and private colleges/universities and community colleges in the United States were surveyed. Four initiatives were found to be significant in reducing scholastic dishonesty: (a) faculty training, (b) effective classroom management strategies, (c) clear definitions and examples of cheating and (d) placing an "XF" on official transcripts of students found cheating. Significant differences were found between private institutions and community colleges in two initiatives: (a) encouragement of more collaboration on homework and (b) effective classroom management strategies.

Introduction and review of literature

The following study identifies the best practice initiatives that have contributed to academic honesty in higher education. Specifically, the study seeks to: (a) determine the initiatives perceived as being the most effective in promoting academic integrity and reducing academic dishonesty in higher education and (b) make recommendations to administrators for improving academic integrity.

Scandal, deceit, corruption and deception run rampant in today's society all day, every day, in all walks of life (Smith & Oakley, 1996). Grab a newspaper, magazine or a book and flip through the pages. Stare at the tabloid headlines at a store

checkout line. Simply spend a little time with any media outlet and the apparent becomes more obvious. Scurrility has taken all media outlets prisoner.

Higher education institutions are not immune to cheating and other unethical behaviors. Higher education experiences its fair share of dilemmas (Wilcox and Ebbs, 1992). Unethical behavior occurs at many colleges and universities where dishonest students and their actions successfully disrupt the learning environment. Even worse, the fraudulent behaviors are tolerated by administrators and faculty whose reputations are compromised in the process (Morrisette, 2001). As a result, faculty members often experience undue stress, discontent and eventual burnout (Morrisette, 2001).

Payne and Nantz (1994) determined between 67% and 86% of undergraduates had cheated on campus. McCabe and Trevino (1996) found that one in three students admitted to fraudulent academic behavior among 6,000 students at 31 colleges and universities. More than half of all undergraduate students cheat (Newstead, Franklin-Stokes & Armstead, 1996; & McCabe & Pavela, 2000). According to Nonis and Swift (2001), between 30% and 96% of college students participate in academic cheating. In a 1999 survey by the Center of Academic Integrity at Duke University, 68% of 2,100 students polled had committed at least one academic offense such as plagiarizing (Owings, 2002).

Some administrators emphatically point to the Internet as the major culprit for increased academic dishonesty (Scott, 2001). Students are wired with cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and super-savvy laptops to cheat during exams and plagiarize on other class assignments (Read, 2004). Notes can be exchanged with other exam takers. Text messages can be received from classmates outside the lecture hall. The more enterprising students cheat by searching the Web, especially in large classes where technology makes cheaters harder to spot (Read, 2004).

If there is any doubt that the Internet has given new glory to college-level plagiarism, hundreds of Web sites contain pre-written and custom-made essays, book reports and term papers (Owings, 2002). Web sites such as LazyStudents.com, SchoolSucks.com and Cheathouse.com claim to be research sources, but an increasing number of students are using them for much more. Likewise, professors turn to plagiarism-detection sites such as Edutie.com, TurnItIn.com and Plagiarism.org. These sites can compare papers from an Internet database to uncover cases of duplication, often in less time than it took the students to find

the source in the first place (Owings, 2002).

Statistics on the prevalence and scope of plagiarism among college students are difficult to find, but one Web site estimates that 30% of students plagiarize on all of their papers (Bloomfield, 2005). Before they make it to college, some high school students with their eyes on college are resorting to unethical behavior to get there. According to Hughes, Christian, Dayman, Kaufman and Schmidt (2002), 80% of college- and university-bound high school students have cheated at least once and view cheating as commonplace, and "more than half do not consider cheating a serious transgression" (*The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity*, 1999, p. 2).

Institutions without academic integrity practices in place, along with those that fail to place priority on character development, face ethical dilemmas. Because of increasing instances of student cheating in various forms (Ludeman, 2005), effective practices that foster awareness of the campus environment are needed at all educational institutions. Instead, institutions are providing few, and often ineffective, remedies as well as limited consequences for dishonest behavior. A *slap on the hand* has become the standard by which a student measures consequences. Yet colleges and universities are being called to educate and influence the ethics of future leaders (Carroll, 2003).

Academic dishonesty costs institutions administrative time, loss of integrity within the school, and student lack of respect for ethics and values. Faculty members point to a failure of institutional leadership to establish integrity standards and practices across campus. They agree that lack of training and communication have played a role in dishonest conduct within academia. Strategies have been recommended through research to reduce academic turpitude (Gambill, 2003; Hall, 1996; Knight & Auster, 1999; Nix, 2002 & Scott, 2001. Nix's study addressed ethical decision-making issues among administrators and examined how their professional actions differ at the public school level. Knight and Auster investigated faculty conduct when colleagues shared an ethical indiscretion. Hall, Scott and Gambill examined levels of cheating and the impact of honor codes and other integrity practices on effectively reducing unethical academic behaviors. The research approaches varied, but were consistent in portraying the widespread and increasing occurrences of academic dishonesty by students. Other than Gambill's study, which examined the impact of academic integrity practices in a small liberal arts college to reduce academic perfidiousness, few studies were found to specifically

address reducing academic deception and dishonesty. The lack of research on specific strategies to assist administrators is unfortunate.

Method

The design of the present study is a mixed method, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative section includes 14 non-parametric statistical tests to investigate a single null hypothesis. The qualitative section is guided by two research questions:

(a) What are the perceived initiatives that are most effective in promoting academic integrity and reducing scholastic dishonesty?

(b) What is the perceived single best initiative most effective in promoting academic integrity and reducing scholastic dishonesty?

A modified version of Gambill's (2003) Academic Integrity Survey instrument was used to collect the data. The survey, containing 14 best practice initiatives effective in encouraging academic integrity and reducing academic dishonesty, was administered to a sample of CAOs or provosts at public colleges/universities, private colleges/universities and community colleges.

Procedure

First, permission was acquired to use and modify the Academic Integrity Survey (see Appendix). Items on the survey include best practice initiatives identified by faculty, students and administrators from a small liberal arts university. Next, to fit the purposes of the study and strengthen the qualitative section, the survey has been modified by adding the second research question.

The modified survey is comprised of three sections. Section one asks respondents to identify their institutional types. Section two asks them to identify the perceived current level of cheating at their institutions as high, moderate or low. The third section asks respondents to rank 14 best practice initiatives. Additionally, two open-ended items are included in Section three, asking CAOs or provosts (a) to identify the single most effective initiative their institutions could undertake to promote academic integrity and reduce academic dishonesty and (b) to list and describe any other initiatives that might enhance academic integrity at their institutions.

Pilot study

Since the original instrument was modified and a different population was surveyed, a pilot study was conducted to re-establish validity and reliability. A panel of experts (six CAOs or provosts from representative institutions throughout the United States not

participating in the study) was used for the pilot study. A validation form requesting each expert to rank the clarity and consistency of each survey item was used to establish content validity. A minimum average score of at least a 3.0 (clear and important) was required for items to be included in the survey. Results of each item's clarity averaged a score of 3.6. In terms of item's consistency, the average score was 3.3. Results of the pilot study indicated no additional revision of items was necessary.

Reliability was re-established using the split-half method of internal consistency. The pilot group was asked to rate 14 best practice initiatives on a five-point Likert scale. Upon return, the instrument was split into two sub-tests based on an odd-even split. Scores on odd items were correlated with scores on even items. The Spearman-Brown formula was employed by correlating the two sub-tests. Reliability in the study yielded an alpha of .768 with an N of 7 for the pilot-study respondents. No substantive differences were found between the analyses of the split-half items. The pilot study confirmed that the instrument was valid and reliable, as well as easy to administer with clear instructions. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of .768 was considered adequate for purposes of the study.

Selection of subjects

A multi-stage sampling process, using both stratification and systematic sampling, was conducted to ensure equal representation of subjects and institutions. First, 4,364 colleges and universities were identified from the *2005 Higher Education Directory*. Next, the institutions were stratified according to three institutional types: public colleges/universities, private colleges/universities and community colleges. Proprietary and private community colleges were not included in the study. A systematic sampling process was conducted due to the large list of institutions from the stratification process. The three institutional populations (250 in each category) were divided by the number needed for the sample.

Finally, each institutional population was divided by 100 to arrive at a random number for selecting subjects; then a lesser random number was selected to identify the subjects. For example, every 5th public college/university, 18th private college/university and 10th community college was selected to participate in the study. A second round of systematic sampling was conducted to reach a total of 750 institutions. Once identified, CAOs or provosts from those institutions were asked to participate in the study.

Collection of data

A concurrent strategy was chosen to collect the data. To ensure a higher response rate, procedures to collect the data consisted of a three-phase administration process. The first phase consisted of a brief advanced-notice letter sent to the CAOs or provosts. Phase two involved a second mailing with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, risks involved, the survey instrument, informed consent letter and self-addressed-postage paid envelope. After the due date, a follow-up e-mail was sent to the non-responding CAOs or provosts.

Data analysis

Returned surveys were grouped according to institutional types, levels of cheating and rankings of best practice initiatives. Quantitative data was analyzed first, followed by the qualitative data. Integration of both open- and closed-ended data was reported during the interpretation phase of the study.

Quantitative data

Responses were coded and analyzed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)*. Data entry was verified by a comparison of the data entered with the actual surveys. A single null-hypothesis was tested to determine if there was a significant difference among CAOs' perceptions of the most effective practices in promoting academic integrity and reducing academic dishonesty. Fourteen statistical tests were conducted, using the non-parametric Kurskal-Wallis method. Whether to reject the null hypothesis was determined by a single primary variable, placing an "XF" on the transcript of all students deemed responsible for cheating by administrators. This primary variable was selected from the results of Gambill's study because, having the lowest mean (1.72), it was determined to be the most effective of three initiatives in reducing academic dishonesty.

The Bonferroni Correction statistical adjustment was used for multiple comparisons of each initiative for inflated Type I error. A revised alpha of .00357 was used for the actual number of comparisons. The mean and standard deviation were reported on all 14 best practice initiatives.

Qualitative data

The qualitative data analysis began by separating results by institutional types. Notes were then compiled to gain a general tone of ideas and determine recurring themes and patterns. Techniques for open-code analysis were conducted to determine recurring themes or answers to questions (Creswell, 2003). Results from the two open-ended items were coded by representative categories, with similar responses clustered and as-

signed a specific term. Once recurring patterns were found, the data was organized into table format with the most frequent responses appearing at the beginning. Each open-ended response that corresponded with one of the 14 best practice initiatives was indicated by a number corresponding to the Academic Integrity Survey. Repeat responses were also reported. Integration of quantitative and qualitative results occurred during the interpretation phase of the study.

Results

The present study assessed by testing a single null-hypothesis how 14 best-practice initiatives reduced scholastic dishonesty. The null-hypothesis, indicating no significant difference among CAOs' perceptions of the most effective practices, was tested in relation to a primary variable, placing an "XF" on the transcript of a student found cheating and changing the "XF" to an "F" upon completion of an educational program. Results of the 14 Kruskal-Wallis tests did not yield a significant difference in relation to the primary variable H (2, N=288) =.292, P =.864. The null-hypothesis was not rejected. However, a Mann-Whitney post hoc test revealed a significant statistical difference in the means of Initiative #3-faculty encouragement of homework collaboration and Initiative #10-promoting effective classroom management

strategies. Initiative #10 had a significantly larger mean (143.50) than Initiative #3 (35.50).

Research Question One was answered using quantitative and qualitative data analyses. Descriptive analyses revealed four initiatives to be significant in improving academic honesty: (a) providing training for faculty on academic integrity issues such as how to discourage cheating via effective classroom management, how to properly confront infractions and what current research offers as to why students cheat; (b) promoting effective classroom management strategies (e.g., using multiple exams, maintaining small class sizes and prohibiting electronic devices); (c) providing clear definitions and specific examples of what constitutes cheating under the college's honor code and (d) placing an "XF" on official transcripts when students have been found responsible for cheating and changing the "XF" to an "F" upon completion of an educational program. CAOs at community colleges had the lowest mean ranks on these four initiatives; thereby, advocating their belief in their effectiveness.

CAOs at public colleges/universities had the second lowest means in two of the four initiatives: (a) training for faculty on academic integrity issues and (b) promoting effective classroom management strategies. CAOs at

private colleges/universities advocated two different initiatives as their second lowest means: (a) providing clear definitions and specific examples of what constitutes cheating under the college's honor code and (b) placing an "XF" on official transcripts of students caught cheating.

Promoting effective classroom management strategies was also a favorable response to Research Question One, with the second lowest mean indicating significance in reducing academic dishonesty. In answering Research Question One qualitatively, this initiative also had the third highest number of repeats (29).

For Research Question Two, the single best initiative for promoting academic integrity and reducing academic dishonesty, with the third highest number of repeats (11), was promoting effective classroom management strategies. Faculty encouragement of more homework collaboration had the third overall highest mean (2.57) showing CAOs perceive the initiative increases academic dishonesty rather than reducing it. Qualitative data analyses to answer Research Question One revealed five initiatives to be significant in reducing scholastic dishonesty by the number of repetitions by CAOs. Identified as being significant strategies to promote academic integrity and reduce scholastic dishonesty were: (a) strengthening efforts to

clearly communicate the colleges policy on academic integrity by publishing it in all appropriate publications (16 repeats); (b) providing clear definitions and specific examples of what constitutes cheating under the college's honor code (15 repeats); (c) promoting effective classroom management strategies (11 repeats) and (d) providing training of faculty on academic integrity issues (8 repeats). Respondents also recommended providing software for faculty to detect cheating and plagiarism (10 repeats), a significant strategy which did not correspond with one of the 14 initiatives included in the study.

Research Question Two, asking respondents the single best initiative, was answered using quantitative and qualitative data analyses. Descriptive analyses showed the single most effect method was providing training for faculty on academic integrity issues such as how to discourage cheating via effective classroom management, how to properly confront infractions and what current research offers as to why students cheat. CAOs at community colleges had the lowest mean (130.94), followed by CAOs at public colleges/universities (152.28) and private colleges/universities (152.79).

Qualitative data analyses to answer Research Question Two revealed providing clear definitions and specific examples of

what constitutes cheating under the college's Honor Code as significant in reducing scholastic dishonesty. This initiative had 37 repeats by CAOs at all three types of institutions.

Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of current cheating levels at their institutions as being "high," "moderate," or "low." The majority (164, or 56.9%) indicated a "moderate" level of cheating at their institutions. While CAOs at public colleges/universities and community colleges (cc) indicated "moderate" levels of cheating at their institutions (public-57, or 58%; cc-69, or 64%), CAOs at private colleges/universities indicated "low" levels of cheating (private-43, or 51%). CAOs at public colleges/universities had the lowest mean (130.10), followed by CAOs at community colleges (136.80) and private colleges/universities (169.06).

An interesting finding from the study is how the rankings of the 14 best practice initiatives differ by institutional types. CAOs at community colleges had nine initiatives with low mean ranks, which was the majority of all three types of institutions. CAOs at public colleges/universities had three initiatives with the lowest mean ranks: (a) support for faculty during the adjudication process; (b) require a half-hour credit course for entering freshmen and (c) strengthen efforts to clearly

communicate academic integrity policies by publishing it in all appropriate publications. Penalize students who do not confront cheaters and recognize faculty members who properly confront and process instances of cheating were two initiatives with the lowest mean ranks at private colleges/universities.

Conclusions

Conclusions are based on the null-hypothesis and two research questions. Although the null-hypothesis was tested, using a single primary variable and was not rejected, there was a statistical difference between private institutions and community colleges in two initiatives: (a) faculty encouragement of more collaboration on homework and (b) promoting effective classroom management strategies. Results of the other initiatives did not yield a significant difference among CAOs at three institutional types. The following conclusions are presented for the study:

1. Quantitatively, Initiative #9 was perceived by all three institutions as the single best initiative, and qualitatively, #12 was perceived as the single best initiative for reducing scholastic dishonesty.

2. Quantitatively, CAOs at all three types of institutions perceived Initiatives #1, #9, #10, and #12 as favorable for promoting

academic integrity and reducing scholastic dishonesty.

3. CAOs at all three types of institutions perceived Initiatives #3, #4, #8 and #13 as those that would increase scholastic dishonesty.

4. Qualitatively, CAOs at all three types of institutions indicated Initiatives #5, #9, #10 and #12 as being effective in promoting academic integrity and reducing scholastic dishonesty.

5. Three additional initiatives were suggested that failed to correspond with one of the 14 best practice initiatives used in the study: (a) harsh penalties for those found cheating (12 repeats); (b) software to detect cheating (11 repeats) and (c) enforcing already-established institutional policies (7 repeats).

6. CAOs at public colleges/ universities (58%) and community colleges (64%) perceived "moderate" levels of cheating at their institutions, while CAOs at private colleges/ universities (51 %) surmised "low" levels of cheating at their institutions.

Although the majority of respondents perceived "moderate" levels of cheating at their institutions, this study makes it apparent that a more positive, pro-active approach is desired by CAOs for promoting academic integrity and reducing scholastic dishonesty. They perceive that the single most effective method is training for faculty on academic integrity issues to discourage cheating via classroom management; how to properly confront infractions and what current research offers as to why students cheat.

Implications for practice

Higher education institutions are affected by the increase in academic dishonesty from the loss of productive time, money and reputation in dealing with the issue. Niels (1997) imparted the need for effective practices and standards, while Nonis and Swift (2001) suggested that the entire campus climate needs to be made aware of promoting academic integrity.

Many of the best practice initiatives would have little cost implication and are relatively easy to implement. They would provide a starting place to begin dialog and discussion of the topic and ways to bring awareness campus-wide to the issue, with special emphasis on proactive intervention methods to promote scholastic honesty.

Although the findings of this study indicate that multiple initiatives and strategies are more effective in reducing academic dishonesty, the single best method involves training for faculty members on academic integrity issues. According to Bellows (1994), faculty in academic disciplines may have varied attitudes and values on what constitutes an ethical

environment. Since that variation could definitely affect their perceptions of effective classroom management strategies, administrators should provide opportunities for dialogue and discussion with faculty members, individually and as a group, working together to develop and support academic integrity within the classroom.

As supported by this study, CAOs should be cautioned about implementing initiatives that could possibly encourage cheating. More proactive and preventive approaches may better promote scholastic honesty than sanctions for students caught cheating. The initiative of penalizing students who do not confront cheaters was not found favorable in this study. However, McCabe and Trevino (1993) found that a student reporting requirement obliges each student to commit to an honor code system, as well as deters other students contemplating cheating. In contrast, Hall (1996) found that students did not want to report peers caught cheating. The implication is that relying on student reporting may not be an effective means for deterring academic dishonesty. Students believe it is the responsibility of faculty members to monitor class and enforce academic integrity policies in the classroom.

The findings of this study indicate CAOs are concerned about academic integrity and want to offer strategies at their institutions that they perceive to be effective. They need to provide support and resources to faculty members for bringing forth the issue of academic integrity.

Practices that involve students in developing policies, observing the adjudication process and participating in an honor court seem to be favorable in reducing cheating. Students need to better understand their role in promoting academic integrity.

Providing training, professional development and current research about cheating to faculty members could be a positive approach in preparing faculty members to work with academic dishonesty issues. It is important for administrators to provide opportunities for faculty members to become aware of how they influence student behaviors and their responsibilities in communicating standards of ethical behavior.

Developing an honor code, listing clear definitions, and providing specific examples for faculty members and students of what constitutes cheating, could set the stage for campus-wide implementation. Codes must be made available in a variety of ways such as publications, handbooks, syllabi, web pages, or other formats.

Developing specific sanctions for students caught cheating could be a practice to support pro-active

strategies. Students must equate zero-tolerance with academic dishonesty. Enforcing policies on academic integrity can help support institutional-wide academic integrity policies.

Developing a philosophy about academic integrity that promotes and educates faculty members and students on academic integrity rather than placing the emphasis on sanctions and penalties for cheating students is a recommended implication for practice. Professional development and preparation on academic integrity are needed for institutions that educate future administrators. Opportunities for dialogue and discussion on how to confront cheating in the classroom can provide much needed assistance to new faculty members. Faculty senates can also contribute to academic integrity by discussing policies as a group and including the policies on class syllabi and exams.

Recommendations for further study

The findings of the current study provide recommended best practices for CAOs or provosts in promoting academic integrity and reducing scholastic dishonesty. Practices, standards and strategies must be in place that include administrators, faculty members and students working together to address the issue. Although academic integrity is everyone's responsibility, CAOs or provosts are the administrators charged to ensure a campus climate supportive of it.

The following recommendations are given for further study:

1. A national study assessing best practice initiatives to reduce cheating from the perspectives of faculty members and students might provide additional intervention strategies.

2. An additional study is needed to address ever-increasing cheating by means of the Internet and other electronic devices.

3. A third recommended study would be a qualitative study to determine specific differences of perception about academic dishonesty between CAOs at public colleges/universities, private colleges/universities and community colleges.

4. Future research could determine the effectiveness of reducing scholastic dishonesty by specific best practices such as student involvement in honor courts.

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Appendix. Best Practice Initiatives

1. Placing an "XF on official transcripts when a student has been found responsible for cheating. "XF" would be defined as "failed class due to academic dishonesty" and could be changed to an "F" upon completion of an educational program.

2. Require an educational program for all students found responsible for cheating. This program would include discussion on moral and ethical development, as well as academic skills training.

3. Faculty encouragement of more collaboration on homework assignments in an attempt to better prepare students for today's workforce and to reduce the temptation of inappropriate collaboration assignments expected to be completed independently.

4. Penalize those students who do not confront cheaters. If students are to assist in the promotion of integrity, then they must be held accountable for not confronting incidences of cheating.

5. Strengthen efforts to clearly communicate the College's policy on academic integrity by publishing it in all appropriate publications (handbooks, applications, web pages, syllabi) and discussing it at college functions (orientations, opening convocations, campus forums).

6. Involve administrators, students, and faculty in policy development, educational efforts, and adjudication of alleged offenses. Examples of involvement could include policy review committees, design and implementation of educational forums, and compositions of an honor court.

7. Assign a single office the responsibility of coordinating academic integrity initiatives. This office could house records, train honor court members, educate faculty on academic integrity issues, and coordinate educational and information efforts.

8. Recognize those faculty members who properly confront and process instances of cheating. Student newspaper announcements, annual awards, campus mailings and appreciation luncheons could be used to demonstrate appreciation.

9. Provide training for faculty on academic integrity issues such as how to discourage cheating via effective classroom management, how to properly confront infractions, and what current research offers as to why students cheat.

10. Promote effective classroom management strategies: examples could include the utilization of multiple exams, maintaining small class sizes, and prohibiting calculators and other electronic devices.

11. Require a half-hour credit course on moral and ethical behavior for all first-year students. This class would be team-taught by administrators, faculty, and student Honor Court representatives. It would focus on the importance of integrity of all community or society members and would combat the normalizing of deviant behaviors.

12. Provide clear definitions and specific examples of what constitutes cheating under the College's Honor Code.

13. Provide additional support for faculty during the formal adjudication process (available legal counsel, informal hearings, clear communication from the Honor Court regarding the process after a charge has been filed).

14. Creation of a user-friendly settlement process in which faculty can resolve first-time minor cheating offenses directly with the student through a mutually-endorsed settlement that carries a maximum sanction of an "F" for the course.

Open-ended Items

1. What is the single most effective initiative your institution could undertake to promote academic integrity and reduce academic dishonesty?

2. Please list and describe any other initiatives that you feel might enhance academic integrity at your institution.