

A FURTHER EXAMINATION OF WHY STUDENTS CHEAT TODAY

Sara Kiser, Judson College, Marion, AL, 36756, skiser@judson.edu

Tammy Prater, Alabama State University, Montgomery, AL, 36104, tprater@alasu.edu

Jane Philbrick, Savannah State University, Savannah, GA, philbric@savstate.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the problem of cheating in today's colleges. One iteration of this research simply examined the overall data from our study. A second looked for differences in answers based on race, gender, and the student's college orientation (public v private, religious affiliated). This research will explore the collected data in one last way. Correlation analysis will be used to determine the relationships between the variables in the study, along with regression analysis. This study will examine if the student's GPA, religiosity, how they were informed of the university's policies (i.e., handbook, faculty member, or both) on cheating, and whether the school has an honor code or the student perceives there is an honor code affects their eventual answer as to whether it is acceptable to cheat. Last, this paper will present some ideas to ponder for ethical improvements in the classroom environment and provide some other avenues for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Why should we be concerned with cheating at the college level? Anecdotally, cheating seems to have become more newsworthy. Recently, 34 graduate students in Duke's Fuqua School of Business were found guilty of cheating on take-home exams ("Duke's Business School," 2007). From this competitive program which costs \$50,000 in the first year, nine students will be expelled, 15 will receive a one-year expulsion and flunk the course. Of the other 10, nine will fail the class and one will flunk an assignment (Keenan & Sullivan, 2007). The students are allowed to appeal the decision. Sadly, these results mirror those found by Don McCabe of Rutgers University. He found 56% of MBA students in the U.S. and Canada reported cheating in 2005, while only 47% in other fields reported doing so (Allen, 2007; "Duke's Business School," 2007; Prashad, 2006). Thus, there seems to be a problem with business students, in general. This was recently contradicted by an undergraduate study which showed business students did not report cheating more often, but did seem to have more lenient attitudes toward cheating (Klein, Levenburg, McKendall, & Mothersell, 2007).

Meanwhile, it is unlikely that this tendency to cheat started in graduate school. It may have started as early as high school and it may continue into the workplace. Have we forgotten Enron? Shareholders are still trying to retrieve some of their funds lost due to the accounting scandal (Associated Press, 2007a).

As noted by Rhonda Reger of the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland, "Many students who cheat think business school is a game and not real. But if they are willing to cheat at a game, it makes me wonder if they will cheat when it is real" (Beck, 2007). With the all too recent settlements by Morgan Stanley for fraud and Motorola for kickbacks to Adelphia Communications, it is no wonder why some feel that the Duke University incident proves we need a law such as Sarbanes Oxley (Associated Press, 2007b; Associated Press, 2007c; Beck, 2007). Further, most business students believe the U.S. is having a "business crisis" (84%) ("You mean cheating," 2002). The only real difference between dishonesty in the classroom and the workplace is that in the former it called cheating and in the latter it is called competitiveness (Callahan, 2001).

VARIABLES FOR CONSIDERATION

For some, cheating has become the norm. Fortunately though, it has not become the norm for the majority. However, some report “fewer students seem to believe that academic cheating violates their own internalized standards of honesty and good character” (Allen, 2007, para. 8).

Demographics

As Davidson (2005) noted, cheating has become the “short cut to success in our winner-take-all society” (para. 1). This paper will consider some of the basic demographic variables found in the literature, in particular, race and gender. There has been little found with regard to there being a significant difference in cheating based on race. However, the literature has been mixed with regard to gender. Some have reported no differences and others significant differences (Nowell & Laufer, 1997). Survey data usually finds males admit cheating more often than females, although the difference is not always significant (“You mean cheating,” 2002). The same can be said of GPA (Nowell & Laufer, 1997). This research focuses on business majors for the most part because they have been shown to cheat more often (Callahan, 2001; Smyth & Davis, 2004). In particular, Nowell & Laufer (1997) found computer information systems majors cheat more than nonbusiness majors, which were used as the baseline. Therefore, when available, the student’s major will be included in any analysis. One reported study, which included age as a factor, found as age went up, cheating decreased (Dawkins, 2004). Although most college students are still traditional, more colleges are seeing “returning” students at the undergraduate level. Thus, age will also be examined. Also, the importance of being of “good character” will be examined. One study found this was an important issue for students and although they admitted cheating, they often felt they were more ethical than their peers (“Survey finds cheating,” 2004).

Being that one of the colleges is a private, religious institution, the religiosity of the students will be examined and how that may in turn affect their willingness to accept cheating. One study did find that those at private, religious high schools actually reported cheating more often than those in the public school (Private school students cheat more than public school pupils, says survey, 2002). In Nowell & Laufer’s (1997) study, religion was not a significant variable in the decision to cheat or not.

Peer pressure is another area to consider when inquiring about the cheating behaviors of students (Dawkins, 2004). When it is believed cheating behaviors will be tolerated by peers, then individuals seem to be more likely to cheat (Robinson, Amburgey, Swank, & Faulkner, 2004).

Honor Code

A last consideration will be whether the college in question has an honor code and/or whether the student perceives there is an honor code in place. In this sample, only one school actually has an honor code with an official honor code signing. It has been found that students from colleges with honor codes report fewer incidents of cheating (Dawkins, 2004; Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003). West, Ravenscroft, & Shrader (2004) further reported that such behavior carries over into the workplace.

Technology

Technology is becoming a bigger problem in today’s technology age. Students are being caught using cell phones, personal digital assistants, computers, and in particular the Internet and wi-fi (Allen, 2007). Students also continue to download music illegally and copy software and music from each other on a regular basis.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was distributed to students at three southern universities. One is a religious affiliated, women's college and the other two are historically black universities. They range in student population size from approximately 280 students to 6500 students. The students were asked to fill out the survey by the faculty. The survey was given either as an assignment or as extra credit. For this research, there were 231 usable surveys. The students were asked to answer a series of "yes" and "no" questions, categorical questions, and ranking questions. As has been found previously, many students did not rank their reasons for cheating or others' reasons for cheating properly. Therefore, these were converted to whether they, in essence, said "yes" or "no" to that example being a reason why the student would cheat or they thought others would cheat. SPSS was used for the analysis.

RESULTS

The first step in this research was to create and run correlations. Many were found to be significant. This particular study involved 50 variables. Based on Field (2005) a correlation of $\pm .1$ is considered to be "a small effect, explaining 1% of the total variance," while a $\pm .3$ is "a medium effect, accounts for 9% of the total variance," and finding of $\pm .5$ is a "large effect, accounts for 25% of the variance" (p. 32). The correlation findings will be used to generate a logistic regression model with regard to what variables may predict whether the student believed cheating was bad and whether the said student believed being perceived as having integrity is important.

The correlations matrix revealed the following strong effect relationships. Many of the strong relationships came from the data inquiring whether the student thought one of the provided scenarios was cheating/stealing. The following relationships had effect sizes of $\pm .41$ or stronger and are listed strongest to weakest:

- Perception that others cheat because peers see it as acceptable and perception that others cheat due to adult role models (.87)
- Cheating last semester and how often you cheated last semester (.78)
- Number of times one consumed alcohol in a two week period and number of drinks consumed in one sitting (.75)
- Perception that others cheat due to adult role models and perception that others cheat due to time constraints (.66)
- Have you ever cheated in college and cheating last semester (.66)
- Perception that others cheat because peers see it as acceptable and perception that others cheat due to laziness (.65)
- Perception that others cheat due to adult role models and perception that others cheat due to laziness (.62)
- Burning your own CD and burning a friend's CD (.62)
- Perception that others cheat because peers see it as acceptable and perception that others cheat due to time constraints (.61)
- Have you ever cheated in college and cheating on tests (.61)
- Perception that others cheat due to a lack of time and perception that others cheat due to laziness (.57)
- Perception that others cheat due to adult role models and perception that others cheat due to academic pressures (.57)
- Have you ever cheated in college and how often you cheated last semester (.56)
- Cheating on a test and how often you cheated last semester (.56)
- Cheating on a test and cheating last semester (.55)

- Individual perception of why they themselves would cheat – due to time constraints and academic pressures (-.49)
- Perception that others cheat because peers see it as acceptable and perception that others cheat due to academic pressures (.48)
- How often one attended church and perceived strength of one's religious convictions (.48)
- Downloading music without paying for it (from a non-shareware site) and burning a friend's CD (.48)
- Burning a friend's CD and copying software from a friend (.48)
- Buying a coke and another falls and burning your own CD (.48)
- Helping someone cheat on a test and helping someone cheat on a placement test (.48)
- Helping someone cheat on a test and considering cheating to be bad (.41)
- Perception that others cheat due to a lack of time and perception that others cheat due to academic pressures (.41).

For other significant, yet weaker, relationships see the correlation matrix in the Appendix.

The next step was to generate the two logistic regression models. Logistic regression was used because it is more appropriate for categorical data, which includes "Yes" and "No" answers. The logistic regression model calculates the probability of an event occurring. The higher the probability the more likely the event will occur and the lower the probability the less likely the event will occur. The first item to be examined was whether or not the student perceived cheating to be bad. In the first case, a value of one will be assigned if there is a high probability. This would translate to mean the person perceives cheating to be bad. A value of zero will be assigned if the probability is low. This means the person does not believe cheating to be bad. Twenty-two variables were included in the initial model. After using backwards logistic regression, seven variables were determined to have a significant relationship in determining whether a student perceived cheating to be bad. These seven variables were: importance of being perceived as having integrity (X_1), whether the college attended has a religious affiliation or not (X_2), considering buying a water and then getting soda at a restaurant as cheating/stealing (X_3), helping someone cheat on a test (X_4), whether or not they consider plagiarism cheating (X_5), having cheated during their college career (X_6), and the reason why they would cheat being attributed to time constraints (X_7). The following logistical equation was developed:

$$P(Y) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(4.005 + 2.023X_1 + 19.909X_2 + 1.279X_3 + 2.065X_4 + 1.96X_5 - 1.594X_6 + 1.525X_7)}}$$

A high probability in the above equation would mean the person is likely to say cheating is bad. However, a low probability would mean the person would not consider cheating to be bad.

The second item to be examined was whether or not the student thought it was important to be perceived as having integrity. Seven variables were included in the initial model. After using backwards logistic regression, three variables were determined to have a significant relationship in determining whether a student wanted to be perceived as having integrity. These three variables were: the presence of an honor code (X_1), considering sharing notes from a take home test to be cheating (X_2), and grade point average (GPA) (X_3). The following logistic regression equation was developed:

$$P(Y) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(7.143 + 2.019X_1 + 18.278X_2 - 1.476X_3)}}$$

A high probability in the above equation would mean the value of one is assigned. This means the student wants to be perceived as having integrity. However, a low probability would mean a value of zero is assigned, meaning the person does not care if they are perceived as having integrity.

DISCUSSION

The correlation analysis found in Table 1 presents some interesting findings. The strongest had to do with perceptions of why others cheat, perceptions of why the student thought they would cheat, whether the student has ever cheated in college or the last semester, how often they have cheated, and some of the scenarios. It should not have been surprising that if the student thought burning their own CD was cheating/stealing that they would think the same of burning a friend's CD. One surprising finding was the perception that why others would cheat – adult role model – was correlated with so many of the other choices. Also, many of the reasons why the student's perceive others would cheat were correlated with each other while the other opposite was true for their own individual perceptions of why they themselves would cheat. It should also not be surprising that cheating in the last semester correlated strongly with how often they reported cheating. What may be surprising was that cheating on a test was correlated with individual cheating in the last semester and how often the student reported cheating, but cheating on a paper was not. The only thought here is that the findings may have been affected by the fact one of the universities involved uses plagiarism checking software. Some of the findings tie into what any individual would consider being common sense. However, there were also some surprising findings.

The logistic regression results show that in the case of determining if cheating was considered bad, a school's religious affiliation, views on helping someone cheat on a test, having every cheated before themselves, views on plagiarism, and time constraints were some of the deciding factors in this research. The most surprising factor that was important to this model was the scenario presented to the students of making a decision at the restaurant. Here, "Buying water at a self-service restaurant and then serving yourself a soft drink was considered cheating/stealing. In the case of determining whether being perceived as having integrity was important, having an honor code, views on sharing notes on a take home test, and GPA were useful determinants when it came to integrity.

ANSWERS TO THE PROBLEM?

One potential answer is to institute an honor code. As early as 2002, Zemike reported the following situations: schools were adding honor codes, schools were rewriting honor codes to be more restrictive and aggressive, and some schools were rewriting them to be less aggressive. The institution of an honor code means there must be trust (Zemike, 2002). For example, Duke University rewrote its code to require students to report cheating so it would take some pressure off faculty members and then allow them to approach students on their own without taking them before a disciplinary council (Zemike, 2002).

One of the keys to an honor code working is the faculty trusting students and the administration. The research has shown if faculty perceive the system as fair they will use it and most faculty at honor code institutions believe their students have more integrity (McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2003). While honor codes create greater responsibility, they also involve more privileges such as unproctored exams (Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003). Therefore, students need to be made aware and understand the code. They should not be made to just "sign it" at some ceremony (McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino,

2003). This brings forth student responsibility for their actions and greater connection between actions and consequences (Mason, 2006).

Are the potential answers lying in the faculty themselves? Should faculty be more vehement about turning in students, as seen with Duke (Kiser, Jones, McCord, Prater, & Philbrick, 2006). Should they make classes more interesting (Park, 2003)? Allen (2007) suggested one reason students cheat is because they are uninspired by “bad teaching” to do their own work. It has also been recommended that universities need to do a better job in orientations and freshman classes of discussing and delineating what cheating is. Also, faculty should be clear at the beginning of each quarter or semester that cheating is not tolerated and what it is (Mason, 2006).

Should tests be eliminated as suggested by some (Robinson, Amburgey, Swank, & Faulkner, 2004). Mr. Timothy Dodd, executive director of the Center for Academic Integrity, suggested faculty “ease up on grading standards” (Allen, 2007, para. 8). Others suggest allowing students to work together and share notes (Robinson, Amburgey, Swank, & Faulkner, 2004). Yet, on the other hand, as Dr. Jim West (2007) noted, “how utterly contemptible in laziness must one be to cheat on an open book, take home exam” (para. 7).

One last consideration involves the college’s attitude toward technology. Should technology be allowed in the classroom, rather than “frowning” upon it (Gamerman, 2006)? Options for dealing with technology: completely ban electronic equipment, create multiple versions of a test, control the use of the technology (disable wireless in classrooms for example) (Read, 2004). Most fall on the side of caution and say “ban all technology” (Knight Ridder, 2007).

FUTURE RESEARCH IDEAS

It should be understood that this research does not cover every area possible. It is a starting point. Work is being continued in this area by many authors. Potential areas to include in future research include various personality variables such as self-concept, rank in school or perceived class standing, ACT/SAT scores, involvement in athletics and student organizations such as SGA or Greek groups, and the use of plagiarism finding programs such as Turnitin (Burrus, McGoldrick, & Schuhmann, 2007; Gallup Organization, 2004; Nowell & Laufer, 1997; Robinson, Amburgey, Swank, & Faulkner, 2004). Other issues that should be addressed further in the future is the student’s actual cheating behavior and how is cheating defined, if at all by those conducting the study (Burrus et al, 2007). In many areas of this study, the focus was on a student’s perception of a behavior being cheating, not whether they had actually behaved in such a manner. Last, the global nature of cheating needs to be continually studied. There have been some studies in this area, but not enough (In China, Bribery and Fakery Lower the Value of Degrees, 2002; Lupton & Chapman, 2002; Marsden, Carroll, & Neill, 2005).

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APPENDIX

[illegible]

		You Cheat Academic	You Cheat Lazy	You Cheat Time	You Cheat Adult	You Cheat Peer	Drink in Last 2 Wks	Binge Drink in Last 2 Wks	GPA	Religion Importance	Religious Convictions	Church Attendance	School Religious Affiliation	Age	Gender	Major	Race
School													.204**	.184**		.139*	-.193**
Cheat_Bad				.154*					-.142*			.171*	.246**			.177**	-.167*
Integrity Imp						-.187**			-.162*								
Informed of AI Policy																	
Have HC													.411**			.278*	-.297*
How Often Ref Disc Council			.146*								.154*		.205**				
Cheat Download								-.135*									
Cheat Water							-.231**	-.257**									-.189**
Cheat Software								-.146*									
Cheat Credit for Other's Work							-.219**	-.324**		-.167*			.198*			.134*	-.165*
Cheat Food													-.198*				.178**
Cheat Coke			.158*														
Cheat Placement Test							-.265**	-.260**	-.153*				.194**				
Cheat Own CD		-.141*															
Cheat Friend CD												.145*					
Cheat Tests Others		-.196**												.159*			
Cheat Help Someone							-.208**		-.138*				.178**				.148*
Cheat Share Notes													.228**				.209**
Cheat Plagiarism																	
When Cheat Begins																	
Friends Cheat Test																	
Friends Cheat Papers						-.137*	.203**							-.162*			
How Often Friends Cheat				-.153*		-.152*	.151*						-.139*				
You Ever Cheated			.171*			-.182*							.262**	-.261**		.180*	-.152*
You Cheated Last Semester			.204**										.327**	-.262**		.213**	
How Often You Cheated Last Semester			.262**										-.156*	-.154*		-.139*	.152*
You Cheated Tests													-.184**	-.138*		-.181**	.175*
You Cheated Paper																	
Hrs Spent Studying									-.247**			.225**	.245**			.185**	-.233**
Others Cheat Academic		.213**	-.243**	-.182**			-.177**	-.134*									
Others Cheat Lazy													.135*	-.220*			
Others Cheat Time											.248**		.161*	-.313**			
Other Cheat Adult									-.186**						-.272**		
Others Cheat Peers									-.196**		.160*				-.233**		
You Cheat Academic			-.283**	-.489**				-.136*									
You Cheat Lazy														-.138*			
You Cheat Time								.138*		.157*							
You Cheat Adult																	
You Cheat Peer																	
Drink in Last 2 Wks								.752**					-.210**		-.209**	-.178**	.159*
Binge Drink in Last 2 Wks									.159*				-.211**		-.235**	-.168*	.191**
GPA											-.147*		-.288**			-.273**	.273**
Religion Importance																	
Religious Convictions												.480**					
Church Attendance															.248**		
School Religious Affiliation														-.233**		.697**	-.687**
Age																-.168*	
Gender																	
Major																	-.586**