

Academic Integrity in the 21st Century

Barba Aldis Patton¹, C. Northington Purdie²
University of Houston-Victoria¹, USA
William Paterson University², USA

Abstract

The 21st century and its technology have brought much to the field of higher education. The omnipresence of the Internet has forced those in higher education to revisit preconceived certainties about academic integrity. Students' understanding of what constitutes academic integrity and its consequences is called into question. Do students believe that ethics are a major part of academic integrity? Where does plagiarism come in? The purpose of this study therefore is to assess perceptions of academic integrity in higher education. The assessment is in the form of a questionnaire. Variations by gender, academic standing, and locale are also considered. It is hypothesized that such an assessment can create a more realistic understanding of millennial perceptions of academic integrity in higher education.

1. Introduction

Classrooms of the 21st century are much different than those of the past century. Almost every student has at least one if not more classes online or delivered in a technological format [1]. It's important to note not all online schools operate in the same manner; the main difference is in their mode of instruction. In general online schools have two main modes of instruction, which are synchronous and asynchronous [2]. We have had distant education almost as long as we have had education. Some of the first classes were conducted via mail when students and teachers could not be in the same locale. These helped students become educated even if they were in a remote area. The popularity of correspondence courses in the mid-20th century provides an example of this trend. The need for education was a priority.

The Internet has brought about many changes to education. It is no longer necessary to travel to a library to read books if available to locate information. Today the Internet allows one to access that same information on a tablet computer, an e-reader or with a few clicks of a mouse. As a result many feel that what is online is not owned or copyrighted by anyone. The ubiquity of websites like Wikipedia and Quora provide users with the option of editing or adding information directly onto the site. Flagrant disregard for the original research

conducted by the author is actually encouraged. This is mandating a paradigm shift.

Now there is the question of whether students can answer the question: 'what is academic integrity with regards to cheating and/or plagiarism and the use of online resources'? The International Center for Academic Integrity characterizes academic integrity as using one's own work in citations and research without sharing, purchasing the work of another. They also specify the act of paying someone to do work that was assigned as academic dishonesty [3]. According to Neils [4] students don't understand what is considered cheating, either online or in a regular classroom. Furthermore, many don't know what is considered ethical with respect to material they find on the Internet, and usually demonstrate poor judgment in its use [5] [6] [7].

Current news media is replete with examples of innovative cheating and plagiarism examples from all over the world. In Vietnam for example, twenty students were fined for wearing wired wigs and shirts in an effort to collaborate with each other during an examination [8]. In 2012, one hundred twenty five students were impugned for cheating on an online final examination [9]. Despite the parameters set, by the professor, students found an unauthorized way to obtain information. Unfortunately, teachers often make the assumption, students know or understand what is ethical in terms of use of technology, when in actuality they are tremendously lacking in this area [6]. This area of education is frequently neglected, partly as a result of adults being uninformed themselves [7]. It's imperative that students be educated on appropriate use of online information.

2. Literature Review

Although online learning has many benefits, there are serious concerns about academic integrity, and as a result the validity of online education [10]. There are many who believe technology has made cheating easier for students, which has led to it becoming a more prevalent problem now than it was in the past [11] [12]. Part of this problem may be due to the fact students do not know what is considered cheating with respect to material on the Internet [2] [4] [13] [14]. Plagiarism is rampant in online classes at the graduate and undergraduate level according to Patton (in progress).

In general, people do things online that they would never attempt in the real world. This is due in large part to the über presence of social media. The anonymity and lack of social accountability afforded by social media has influenced moral behavior [5]. Online communication often provides psychological distance for users. The perception of "cyber-invisibility" as it were influences tendencies that would not be observable in real life for fear of reprisal [15]. As a result, it is necessary to distinguish between ethical behavior with respect to technology and ethical behavior in general. Ethical behavior that applies to other social institutions are not always congruent with an online context [15]. It might be argued in this context therefore, that ethics adapt to the need at hand.

3. Method

A questionnaire, consisting of eleven forced choice questions was designed to assess students' views on academic integrity was created. Graduate, undergraduate students and some faculty at three universities were encouraged to complete the questionnaire voluntarily.

The questionnaires were analyzed and the data recorded on a spreadsheet. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire online and were given a small amount of extra credit if they completed it. The information which from each student received however was anonymous therefore the students had the freedom to be as candid as they wished.

4. Purpose of the study

In view of the wealth of available online resources, the purpose of this study was to determine how student viewed academic integrity (ethics and plagiarism) in their classes in today's technological society.

5. Participants

Participation in this student was completely voluntary and anonymous. Participants elected to complete a short, online questionnaire created by the authors. The participants themselves were students attending three different institutes of higher learning. One was located in the southern part of the United States which is a fairly urban area, second was on the east coast of the USA which is metropolitan and the third one was in the United Kingdom which was also more of an urban/rural area. They were approximately 52% females and 48% males. There were 106 participants and the numbers were nearly equal in each of the three institutes of higher learning. There were 15 graduate students, 88 undergraduate students and 3 three instructors who completed the questionnaire. The ethnicity was not addressed in this part of the study.

The majority of the participants were in the 18-30 age group (94 or 89%), while there were six in the

31-40 group, five in the 41-50 group and one in the 55 and over group.

6. Instruments

Each participant was given a short questionnaire addressing ethnics and plagiarism. A pilot questionnaire was given in an earlier semester to determine if the issues the researchers desired to explore were being addressed. The information from the questionnaires was aggregated with reference to frequency and percentage of response as well as correlative demographics.

In addition, several students were interviewed about the ethics and plagiarism. A general set of questions were presented to each however, extra time was devoted to free conversation.

The questions which were on the questionnaire were:

- How do you define plagiarism?
- How do you define cheating?
- What best describes your status?
- What best reflects your opinion?
- What would be a fair penalty to college/university students who are caught plagiarizing?
- What would be a fair penalty to college/university students who are caught cheating?

7. Results

The results of the questions are in the tables below. Since the students were able to give more than one response on several questions, the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table 1: How do you define plagiarism?

Possible alternatives	Number of responses	Percentage
Submitting papers comprised entirely of cited direct quotes from other sources	47	44%
Using direct quotes from sources without in-text citations	88	81%
Copying text from another source but failing to use as one's own	58	55%
Using information from a source, citing it in-text, but not in a work cited or reference page	52	49%
Using information from a source that is cited in the reference or work cited page but not in-text	47	44%
Purchasing or downloading research online and using it as your own	90	85%
Other	9	8%

- Student could select more than on checkbox so percentages may not add to 100

Table 2: How do you define cheating?

Possible alternatives	Number of responses	Percentage
Writing the answers to potential questions and hiding them during for use in a test or exam situation.	95	90%
Giving answers to another student during a test or exam	92	87
Not doing your part in a group activity, yet sharing the credit	69	65%
Using notes when the instructions state that you are not authorized to do so	94	89%
Receiving answers from another student during a test or exam	98	92%
Using a search engine to complete an assignment when told not to do so by the professor	80	75%
Using a search engine to complete a take home or online test when told not to do so by the professor	70	66%
Using an unauthorized aid (e.g. cheat sheet) to assist you with a test.	92	87%
Collaborating with another student on an individually graded assignment	48	45%
Other	1	1%

- Student could select more than on checkbox so percentages may not add to 100

Table 3: What best describes your status?

Possible alternatives	Number of responses	Percentage
Writing the answers to potential questions and hiding them during for use in a test or exam situation.	95	90%
Giving answers to another student during a test or exam	92	87
Not doing your part in a group activity, yet sharing the credit	69	65%
Using notes when the instructions state that you are not authorized to do so	94	89%
Receiving answers from another student during a test or exam	98	92%
Using a search engine to complete an assignment when told not to do so by the professor	80	75%
Using a search engine to complete a take home or online test when told not to do so by the professor	70	66%
Using an unauthorized aid (e.g. cheat sheet) to assist you with a test.	92	87%
Collaborating with another student on an individually graded assignment	48	45%
Other	1	1%

- Student could select more than on checkbox so percentages may not add to 100

Table 4: What best reflects your opinion?

Possible alternatives	Number of responses	Percentage
Whether online or in class, I understand what constitutes cheating and what does not	82	77%
I fully understand what it means to cheat on a test in class, but not on take home or online tests	12	11%
My definition of cheating has changed now that we have the Internet. It's difficult to pin down	9	8%
In the age of Internet, the concept of cheating is irrelevant.	3	3%

- Student could select more than on checkbox so percentages may not add to 100

Table 5: What would be a fair penalty to college/university students who are caught plagiarizing?

Possible alternatives	Number of responses	Percentage
There should not be a penalty	2	2%
Student should be given the opportunity to redo the assignment without any penalty	18	17%
Student should be given the opportunity to redo the assignment with a few points off	48	45%
Student should receive a zero for the entire assignment	55	52%
Student should receive points off for each plagiarized item	46	43%
Student should fail the class	21	20%
Student should be suspended from all classes for the remainder of the semester	8	8%
Student should be expelled from the university without a hearing	1	1%
Student should be expelled from the university pending a hearing	18	17%
Other	12	11%

- Student could select more than on checkbox so percentages may not add to 100

Table 6: What would be a fair penalty to college/university students who are caught cheating?

Possible alternatives	Number of responses	Percentage
There should be no penalty	1	1%
Student should be given a make-up test	19	19%
There should be a penalty only if the instructor can proved that the cheating occurred (i.e. confiscated cheat sheet)	51	49%
There should be a hearing in which an objective panel of students and teachers decide the penalty	36	35%
Student should receive a zero for the test with no possibility of make up	50	48%
Student should receive a zero for the test but given an extra credit assignment to make up the work.	16	15%
Student should fail the class	19	19%
Student should be expelled from the university without a hearing	6	5%
Student should be expelled from the university pending a hearing	15	14%
Other	4	3%

- Student could select more than on checkbox so percentages may not add to 100

8. Conclusions

In the 20th century, the concepts of cheating and plagiarism were more pragmatic and less ambiguous than those of today. In the 21st century, the omnipresence of the Internet has forced those in higher education to revisit preconceived certainties about academic integrity. Students' understanding of what constitutes academic integrity and its consequences is called into question. It was

hypothesized that such an assessment could create a more realistic understanding of millennial perceptions of academic integrity in higher education.

Although the findings support the original hypothesis, several questions persist. To what extent does the age and academic standing of a student impact their perceptions of academic integrity? Do perceptions of academic integrity vary depending on whether or not the class is taught online? Research has shown that there are also sociological differences between the moral reasoning of males and females. It might therefore be argued that correlations between gender and responses to the question items might lead to a clearer understanding of the moral implications of academic integrity [16]. A possible correlation between academic status (graduate versus undergraduate) and views on academic integrity should be explored as well.

Finally, views on academic integrity can illustrate variation by age. The survey specified age generationally. An exploration of this might illuminate the evolution of views on academic integrity. Further inquiry will also focus on possibly bringing a consensus to the definitions of plagiarism and cheating. It is clear therefore, that much additional research is necessary before a complete understanding of this topic is acquired.

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