



Acts of Academic Dishonesty: Perceptions of Severity by Honor Council Members

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Other Researchers (Kansas State University)

- Steven K. Starrett – Director of Honor and Integrity System and Associate Professor in Civil Engineering
- James Teagarden – Associate Professor in Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs (Vice Chair of the Honor Council)
- Adriana Gonzalez – Department Head for Faculty and Graduate Service with University Libraries (Chair of the Honor Council)
- Emily Mesker – Graduate Student in Civil Engineering

Background Literature

- Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development – how one makes a moral decision changes as they encounter new things (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977)
- Faculty who have Honor Code experience are more likely to encourage students to hold peers accountable (McCabe, Butterfield, & Treviño, 2003)
- Student's perceptions of their peers' opinions influence their own decisions in terms of academic honesty (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002)

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Institutional Background

- 25,000 students, public, land-grant institution
- Honor and Integrity System introduced in 1999 as a modified Honor Pledge School
- Honor Council Representing 14 different Units: 59 students and 29 faculty/staff
- To date approximately 1825 cases and 2500 students have been reported



Research Methodology

- Convenience Sampling of current (who had served at least one semester) and former Honor Council members
- 21 semi-structured interviews occurred (12 faculty/staff and 9 students)
- Asked to assign a level of significance to the severity of various acts of academic dishonesty



Levels of Severity

- 5 = very bad, obvious intent
- 4 = bad, cannot be overlooked
- 3 = dishonest, but causes little harm
- 2 = benign, possible naïve mistake
- 1 = acceptable

- 6 = “it depends” (rating removed from statistical testing)

Academic Dishonesty Acts

- A. A student that has completed an exam discussing test topics with a classmate who has not yet taken the exam. (f=3.0; s=3.1)
- B. A student that has completed an exam discussing test questions and answers with a classmate who has not yet taken the exam. (f=4.6; s=4.4)
- C. A student gaining access to and distributing an unauthorized copy of an exam. (f=4.9; s=5.0)

Academic Dishonesty Acts, con't.

- D. A student copying another student's homework and turning it in as own work. (f=4.6; s=4.7)
- E. Students collaborating on an assignment when the instructor required individual work. (f=3.7; s=3.7)
- F. A student directly copying from a book or internet source and presenting it as his/her own original work. (f=4.5; s=5.0)*

Academic Dishonesty Acts, con't.

- G. A student putting quotes around a piece of copied material without indicating the original author. (f=3.2; s=2.1)**
- H. A student falsifying a note, signature, or other evidence to obtain an excused absence or no absence at all. (f=4.8; s=4.6)
- I. A student copying from a neighbor's test. (f=4.7; s=4.8)
- J. A student tutor or classmate completing another student's work for them. (f=4.6; s=4.8)



Interesting Findings

- Only statistically significant difference between faculty/staff and students was on question F (directly copying from a book/internet). ($p=0.01$)
- Faculty/Staff were more likely than students to rate the situation as a 6 – “it depends” ($p=0.05$)

“It depends”

- Faculty Staff labeled “it depends”:
 - G: Putting quotes around a piece of copied material without indicating the author – $f=2$; $s=2$
 - E: Students collaborating when the instructor required individual work – $f=5$; $s=3$
 - A: A student completed an exam and is now discussing topics with a classmate who has yet to take the exam – $f=5$; $s=1$.

Grey Areas

- Actions may not be completely honest or dishonest (f=100%; s=89%)
- “[The] whole reason for the Honor Council [is] to evaluate grey.”
- Common grey areas include, “cultural differences, showing of work [to a friend], working together, helping [a] friend [with] more understanding...”. The intent of a possible violation was important to examine.

Grey Areas

- Understanding or lack of understanding of academic integrity leads to grey areas
- Grey areas occur when there is a “difference in [various] professor’s expectations and students fall back on previous experience.”
- “International students aren’t correctly educated on cheating, a cultural difference.”
- Plagiarism: “Students [are] not prepared.”



Grey Areas and Service on Honor Council

- “I was naïve to believe things are black and white. I had no idea before of issues that arise.”
- “It’s affected [my] syllabus [and encouraged me to make] references to [the] Honor Code in class for new projects.”
- “[Prior to serving], I thought cases were very cut and dry but multiple perspectives provide new experiences.”



Conclusion

- Important to examine individual cases for those grey areas.
- Students and faculty are very similar in holding students accountable in terms of academic integrity.
- Service on an honor council can benefit faculty and students in understanding those grey areas.

References

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