

Chapter XIII

An American Perspective of Ethical Misconduct in ODLS: Who's to Blame?

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ABSTRACT

Open and distance learning systems (ODLS) brought about immeasurable advancement in the delivery of education. Albeit all the benefits ODLS offers, there are some issues that need to be addressed. One of the most prevalent issues is the problem of persistent academic dishonesty. Much research effort has been devoted to explain why students commit acts of dishonesty, but there is limited research done on why faculty members do not take on a stronger position against it. This chapter offers cases of ODLS misconducts at an American University, the process that faculty members took to document academic dishonesty, the appeals process used by students, and the consequences of dishonesty. This chapter provides insights from faculty faced with dishonesty. It also addresses what administrators should do to support their faculty in curbing dishonesty in their institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is experiencing a new growth through technological advancements. In the 21st century workforce, a college degree has become a competitive advantage. Globalization demands an educated workforce. Many American employers today are requiring their employees to seek further

education in the forms of certifications or college degrees. The majority of American employers are also offering some form of tuition reimbursement as an incentive to encourage more of their employees to return to schools. The constraints of limited time and family demands have made open and distance learning systems (ODLS) very popular and appealing to fulltime workers. The

growth of open and distance learning systems has created a new educational delivery mode that offers a formidable means to fulfil the needs of fulltime employees seeking further education. ODLS offers students the flexibility to further their education with less restriction to time and location. Although these benefits are indisputable, researchers have also found problems, including an increasing problem of dishonesty in academia, that can partially be due to the availability of electronic resources.

This chapter focuses on the growing problem of dishonesty in higher education in the United States. It provides an extensive literature review on factors that contribute to the epidemic of dishonesty. This chapter also sheds light from the perspective of faculty in regards to administrators' support or lack thereof. The objectives of this chapter are to present actual cases of ODLS dishonesty, and explore why students cheat, and what administrators and faculty should do to curtail the epidemic of dishonesty in higher education.

BACKGROUND

Cheating on campus is not a new phenomenon, nor is it limited to higher education. Evidence of cheating in U.S. schools was reported by the Centre for Academic Integrity at Duke University and the Rutgers' Management Education Centre to have increased in the last 10 years and 75% of all college students confessed to cheating at least once (Bushweller, 1999; Kleiner & Lord, 1999; Niels, 1997; Olt, 2002; Slobogin, 2002). McCabe indicated a 200% increase in cheating since the early 1960s (as cited in Carroll, 2002). Koch found that 20-30% of undergraduate students cheat regularly (Koch, 2002). According to McCabe, "... these results indicate that dishonesty appears to not carry the stigma that it used to" (as cited in Koch, 2002). Kleiner and Lord (1999) concur and found that 50% of those who had never been

caught cheating also believe that there is nothing wrong with cheating.

The advancement of technology created a new venue for educational institutions to offer new delivery formats to accommodate the needs of an increasing number of people returning to schools. Although there are many advantages of electronically delivered education, there are also the unfortunate and unforeseen problems of dishonesty due to availability, ease of obtaining material illegally, and companies aggressively enticing students to cut corners. Heberling (2002) documented the availability of papers and custom-tailored assignments available to students for purchase from digital paper mills such as Schoolsucks.com, PaperTopics.com, and Cheathouse.com. Academic dishonesty through technology was also reported in a survey conducted at Rutgers, which found that 50% of their students plagiarized Internet resources they used (Slobogin, 2002).

Kenkel (2004) found that students who took online classes are more likely to obtain unauthorized help than those who take classes in the classroom. Numerous studies reported the use of "ringers," or people who are paid to take classes for others (Maramark & Maline, 1993; Wein, 1994). Obviously, in an online environment, the use of "ringers" to complete courses for students becomes a very challenging problem, as technological advancement in identifying course-takers is not yet at the stage where we can monitor it consistently or systematically. Faculty members are concerned with this issue and many have reservations about online or distance education because they consider the use of "ringers" among the most serious forms of academic dishonesty (Nuss, 1984).

CASES OF ODLS MISCONDUCT

The cases of ODLS misconduct discussed in this chapter took place in a midsize public university in the United States. The grading system at the

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