

# Academic Integrity of Global Digital Masked Bandits Lurking the Deep and Dark Web

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## INTRODUCTION

Educators in the K-20 system are faced with an important issue as it pertains to academic writing and research. There are many studies on academic dishonesty and cheating at all levels of education. Administrators and faculty in education need to be aware of the entrepreneurial gravity of this scheme and be proactive in communication by informing all stakeholders to develop policies to this academic epidemic. This article will also research the motives of academic dishonesty, deep web schemes to defraud, avoidance of criminal prosecution, and non-conventional intellectual warfare while making recommendations for internal change and reform. The purpose of this article is to enlighten practitioners and researchers to include students and educational administrators about the growing concern of plagiarism, unintentional plagiarism, defrauding funding sources, governmental agencies, educational institutions, perspective employers, and affixing serious long-term consequences and liability to participants and placing a negative stigma on brand reputation and further stress on academia.

## BACKGROUND

There is a chasm between policy and research, and there is a need to increase the policy impact of educational research (Gillies, 2014). Gillies (2014) claimed knowledge activism is one method that research can influence policymaking. Fowler (2013) commented that in the event of a public problem, policymakers must have a policy process to examine any policy issue that is under debate. Public policy should be grounded by research, especially research on the phenomenon of academic integrity in a

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technologically driven society, especially with access to the deep web. When faculty at institutions of higher education recognize students' academic dishonesty tactics, they must *take corrective action* by following the university's policies by guarding the integrity of the course curricula (Larkin, Szabo, & Mintu-Wimsatt, 2017). Löfström, Trotman, Furnari, and Shephard (2015) compared academic integrity to a skill. Academic dishonesty is a phenomenon witnessed in higher education where the decision to cheat is a deliberate choice for students (Seals, Hammons, & Mamiseishvili, 2014). Moten, Fitterer, Brazier, Leonard, and Brown (2013) explicated that due to the lack of face-to-face interaction between students and faculty and because of online learning, students have a stronger opportunity to engage in cheating, which is described as defrauding the intellectual property of the institution, plagiarizing, and violating university/college policies.

No part of the educational system is immune from dishonest and illicit non-traditional schemes to attack its integrity. Although this behavior is prevalent in higher education, it is also a disturbing phenomenon witnessed at all educational levels in society. McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2001) made mention of a study that by the time high school students enter college, they have had previous years of practice regarding academic dishonesty. In addition, if college freshman continues to cheat their next few years while in college, they consider high school to align with college practices of academic dishonesty. McCabe et al. conducted a ten-year research study of college students regarding cheating that occurs in academic institutions to include the importance of having integrity/honor code policies in place. Research indicates that due to the personal and professional challenges students face today, they tend to practice dishonest study habits, therefore the reason for the implementation of policies and honor codes (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001). McCabe et al. explained that

*No campus can assume that its students, incoming or returning, will take the time to familiarize themselves with campus rules about academic integrity on their own. Even if they did, an institution's failure to emphasize for its students the high value it places on academic integrity sends the message that it is not a high priority. (p. 231)*

Understanding the reasons, although not condonable, for cheating is an important component in policy decisions (Marsh, 2011). Preserving academic integrity is a topic for all stakeholders that have been challenged by the onset of new technology and changed viewpoints of the millennial generation (Dyer, 2010; Moten, Fitterer, Brazier, Leonard, & Brown, 2013; Trenholm, 2007). The increase of technology usage has increased violations of academic integrity: an increased connectivity, collaboration, and social networking (Dyer, 2010; Jiang, Emmerton, & McKauge, 2013; Marsh, 2011). Online courses mean reduced supervision and greater availability for collaboration. Another challenge for educators includes teaching students correct ways to use and cite online sources. A digital divide exists between instructors and students. *Millennials* are adept at using computers, smartphones, and new technologies to gain answers for assignments, exams, or papers (Dyer, 2010).

A notable study undertaken by the Josephson Institute on Ethics of nearly 30,000 public and private high school students in the Los Angeles California area found 30% admitted to stealing from retail stores and 25% admitted to stealing from friends and family members (Zicari, 2008). Zicari (2008) noted another 64% admitted to cheating in school examinations, and 38% admitted to cheating multiple times in their school assignments. Thirty-six percent of students admitted to stealing digitized academic work by plagiarism tactics from the Internet. The students who participated in the study stated 93% believed their behavior was ethical. Seventy-seven percent of the student participants stated they are far more ethical than their peers. This is an epidemic in today's educational system to include the entire world.

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