

# **Initial Findings Regarding Cheating by Undergraduate Business Students**

**Phillips, Melodie**  
**Middle Tennessee State University**

**Smith, Garry**  
**Tarleton State University**

## ***ABSTRACT***

*This paper addresses the many problems facing educators relating to academic fraud. These issues have become even more problematic as technology continues to expand the opportunities and options available to motivated students. The Internet and the challenges of integrating it appropriately into the marketing curriculum has emerged as just one of many technology based cheating tools. Recent findings indicate that the Internet has led to an explosion of fraudulent opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, yet surprisingly only about a third of educators feel that cheating is a problem at their institutions. This paper begins by examining the current state of integration and research regarding academic fraud in marketing and business education. Then current issues facing educators relates to the use of technology by students. Areas of interest include student research and reference techniques, plagiarism and accessibility to custom and off-the-shelf term papers.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Studies examining issues of academic integrity have been of interest to educators since the 1940's, yet today, as few as 35% of educators feel that cheating is a problem (Educational Testing Service, 2011). Unfortunately, over 70% of high school students and 80% of college students admit to cheating on an exam in the last 12 months (Educational Testing Service, 2011).

The range of cheating techniques has greatly increased in the past twenty years with the advent of computer, smart phone and additional innovations in technology. It seems that the old adage, where there is a will, there is a way," is still alive and well on today's college campuses. The old concerns of cheating during an exam, plagiarism, efforts to counter standardized examinations through substitute test takers and networks of available examinations have troubled educators to greater and lesser degrees. Yet today's educator is faced with the additional worries of "cut and paste," downloading term papers, and the use of portable electronic devices to send test answers during exams.

Business and marketing academicians surprisingly, were startled by the trend that business students are the most likely to engage in these types of breeches of academic integrity (NBC News, February 1999). Why would a business student seem more prone to acts of cheating than other majors? Yet, the simple

fact that business professors use examples of familiar business faces to considered pillars of success because they are believed to have sacrificed all to achieve financial success. This may hold the key to many of these findings related to cheating behavior.

This paper will address the bane of the college educators' existence – academic fraud and the tricks of the trade. The manuscript reviews the literature and identifies constructs to assist in identifying the precursors to this type of behavior. The study also proposes approaches to reducing its occurrence. Recommendations will focus on the Internet.

This manuscript begins by exploring the research on academic dishonesty, discusses concerns and trends and then develops research questions into the motivations of cheaters. It is the belief that this will provide information to support a model of cheating behavior and its predictors.

## **BACKGROUND**

Research examining academic integrity in students is nothing new. Similarly, concerns regarding plagiarism, cheating on exams, and failing to cite factual information have been of serious concern to educators since the turn of the century. The increase in the use of the Internet and the virtual disappearance of traditional information searches by students, has led to a new chapter in academic dishonesty.

Cheating behaviors were once thought to be the occasional outlier by a desperate student with extenuating circumstances. Faculty failed to recognize the epidemic before universities were literally overwhelmed by cheating. The Internet was initially welcomed into the university arena as a tempting technology that would provide an outlet for information sharing and research. However, the Internet quickly became a source of concern when “cites” began emerging quoting statistics as facts, yet these facts had no proper documentation or support. This eventually spurred concern by academicians with regard to the quality of information available to students. Was readily available information necessarily reliable? And who was providing training to students to properly cite information and recognize truly reliable information vs. a mere statement of information with inadequate support.

Prior studies have indicated that student dishonesty on campus is widespread (Allen, Fuller and Luckett 1998; Davis et al. 1992) with upwards of 50% (Bowers, 1964; Stannard and Bowers 1970) to 76% (Newberger 2003) of students indicating some level of participation in academic dishonesty (Karlins, Michaels and Podlogar 1988). Eighty eight percent of high school students have judged cheating behavior to be “common” among their peers.” Unfortunately, these figures show no indication of declining in frequency (Haines, Diekoff, LaBeff and Clark, 1986). The terms “rampant” and “pervasive” (Karlins et al. 1988) became associated with declining levels of academic integrity and increasing complaints of cheating.

Additional research has shown that there is an assumption in most models dealing with cheating that assumes the student and teacher are in adversarial roles with regard to academic dishonesty. Built into these studies assumptions is the belief that the merit or grading system adequately assesses talent and the amount of learning that has occurred within a class of students (Newberger 2003). Certainly both of the assumptions require more investigation as to their validity

Early studies primarily focused on identifying the frequency of cheating episodes and the types of incidents, current research has begun to focus on identifying a number of factors related to the frequency or propensity to cheat. Factors correlated with cheating have been identified as lack of maturity and

commitment and the impact of neutralizing attitudes (Haines et al. 1986). Simple opportunity is also believed to play a role in this behavior.

Traditional studies investigating cheating have investigated academic dishonesty in terms of a number of categories: 1) exam cheating in which students looked on others' papers, carried in reference materials, or somehow exchanged information; 2) assignment cheating involving sharing information inappropriately or copying other student efforts; and 3) term project or paper plagiarism. Efforts investigating plagiarism by students on term projects, however, have focused on the recycling of efforts from semester to semester. Karlins, Michaels and Podlogar (1988) reported that 80% of cheating efforts occurred across semesters instead of within semesters. Today's student projects are more likely to involve an online effort at cheating (Phillips and Horton, 1998).

### **PROBLEMS IN CURRENT RESEARCH**

There have been a number of studies aimed at identifying the accuracy of self-reported activity (Houston, 1986) in the hopes of identifying inflationary or inhibitory reporting factors. The fact remains that a troubling number of undergraduate students have continued to participate in and voluntarily admit to engaging in activities that are perceived as violations of academic integrity. Many cite their reasons for continuing to engage in this behavior include the minimal threat of being caught, and even in the event of discovery, the perceived benefits outweigh minimal negative consequences anticipated. Haines et al. (1986) found that a mere 1.3% of students actually reported being caught in the act. Further explanations seem to center around increasing competitiveness for graduate school and jobs. It has been reported that students feel that cheating is now required to merely keep up with the pack (Hickman, 1998).

Certain demographic characteristics have also been associated with higher reported incidences of cheating. These include age, marital status and gender. Males (NBC News Report), younger students and singles (Haines et al. 1986) tend to report higher levels of academic dishonesty. In addition, increasing levels of parental support and lack of employment are also positively correlated with participation in these activities. It is believed that parental support for the college expenses reduces personal involvement and responsibility for the educational process. While it remains unclear if cheating activities reflect moral development problems or are simply behavioral problems, the troubling issue remains that many faculty are reluctant to identify and report cheating behavior, and the result is a student population that is not particularly concerned with the *perceived* consequences of being "caught in the act" (Hickman 1998; Phillips and Horton 1998).

### **TERM PROJECT ISSUES**

A new tool has entered the marketplace enhancing the ease of finding suitable term papers, reducing the risk of being caught, and minimizing the effort required: the Internet. Universities in an attempt to incorporate technology and enhance research techniques have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on equipment and WiFi capabilities for students and faculty. Unfortunately, it is no longer necessary to find a fraternity/sorority network or a previous student from whom to acquire research and term papers. The Internet simply offers sites that enable students to purchase projects. There are currently no less than 70 active sites on the Internet for students to acquire a range of term paper products. These products range from free (often very low quality), previously turned in work, to customized papers in which page charges vary by the number and type of specifications mandated by the buyer/student.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN THE CLASSROOM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

The up and coming value of this approach (WWW) as a reference source to students seems unmatched. "The Internet has distinctive powers to complement, reinforce, and enhance some of our most effective

traditional approaches to university teaching and learning” (Rudenstine, 1997, p. A48). Computer based instruction enables students to follow individual learning paths, offers the convenience of self-paced work, richer materials, and an automatic measurement of progress (Phillips and Horton, 1998; Brown, Nielson & Sullivan, 1996). “If one accepts the premise that learning is enhanced through discovery, the Internet sets the stage of individualized growth,” (Corder & Ruby, 1996, p. 31). It is now possible to introduce the student population to a new avenue of “educational browsing” that provides visual, auditory and interactive stimulation.

The concern of marketing academicians as we enter the new millennium is not merely how to embrace and incorporate the Internet into undergraduate education, but how to become *savvy* instructors that can effectively encourage the appropriate uses of the Internet, dissuade the shortcuts, and recognize the results of unscrupulous efforts garnered from the Internet and its associated entrepreneurs.

### **CAPITALISM AT ITS BEST**

The Internet has truly come into its own for the resourceful student in the marketplace. It is currently possible to gain access to a multitude of sites offering a variety of services to potential buyers. The wide variety of services provided by these sites ranges from cheating tips for examinations, to access to banks of reusable essays/papers, and customized paper ordering. Many of these sites offer yearly memberships to enable *repeated* access to information, while others merely charge on an as needed basis.

From an educational perspective, what is troubling is the minimal discussion afforded regarding plagiarism, consequences and morality. Many of these sites have WARNING pages discussing that plagiarism is a serious offense ([www.papermasters.com/Legal%20resources.htm](http://www.papermasters.com/Legal%20resources.htm)), and that proper citations should be afforded for referenced material. While this is a touching sentiment, it has never been necessary from an academic perspective to then pay \$18.95 and up for customized *reference* materials! Why would a potential researcher require a customized paper, with specific topic, page limit and reference styles for mere *reference* material? Further, why would a student want to spend \$24.95 a page for a customized, rush paper ([www.papermasters.com](http://www.papermasters.com)).

The typical format for a customized term paper merely requires the purchaser to specify the field of study, report needs (i.e., term paper, book report, essay, dissertation, etc.), number of pages, number of bibliographic sources required, report style (MLA, APA, Turabian) and indicate a selected shipping method, and oh, yeah, payment! Additional required information includes the title, author, date of publication, place of publication and any other relevant information - this of course, enables the completion of the cover sheet for this reference material ([www.a1-term-paper.com/custom.shtml](http://www.a1-term-paper.com/custom.shtml)). Many of these sites also offer a guarantee that customized papers will never be resold ([www.papermasters.com](http://www.papermasters.com)). It can only be assumed that this guarantee is reliable from a firm that specializes in violations of academic integrity! Further, why would one need a guarantee of this sort for a paper merely used as a reference?

### **RESEARCH ON MOTIVATION – NARCISSISM, CHEATING SERIOUSNESS, AND STRESS**

To focus on applied research to decrease cheating prevalence, marketing researchers need to grasp the motivations behind these behaviors. Our study seeks to develop a survey that will enable us to investigate narcissism, perceived seriousness in being caught and stress.

### **EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE APPROPRIATE USES OF THE INTERNET**

It seems clear that it is necessary to instigate a number of educational strategies targeted at stimulating use of the Internet yet discouraging and monitoring for abuses of the Internet and the associated outputs. It is necessary to minimize the opportunity and perceived advantage of utilizing the Internet as a research “crutch” vs. research tool

## **STRATEGIES FOR MONITORING AND DISCOURAGING CHEATING**

**Strategy 1:** Tailor research projects to topics that are not “classics” in which multiple outlets for previously published works are available. The instructor should stay current and integrate recent events in the assignment of the material.

**Strategy 2:** Incorporate group thinking and effort into assignments. This reduces the last minute effort and the desperation that might yield the actual purchase of a project.

**Strategy 2a:** Set intermediate deadlines to force students to work throughout the semester and avoid procrastination.

**Strategy 3:** While a less than desirable alternative, police the Internet for potential violations. Search for term papers on topics related to assigned projects and require students to turn in paper copies of their Internet research cites. This will minimize the cut and paste approach to research from information taken from corporate home pages. Further, make students aware of the monitoring activities that the faculty member engages in to alleviate cheating activities. Many students think that twice about the “cut and paste” approach, if they believe that the faculty member is checking their sources and facts.

**Strategy 4:** Develop a well thought-out policy regarding academic dishonesty and address it in the syllabus and fully discuss this. This reduces the risk that students perceive that the faculty member is unaware of these opportunities. Further, it states clearly for the student the associated consequences of engaging in plagiarism regarding the Internet and the WWW.

## **THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY AND FACULTY IN PREVENTION**

In an academic environment in which many students feel that cheating is rarely noticed and faculty is reluctant to act upon a particular episode, students seem more predisposed to engage in questionable behavior. The real dilemma facing academicians is how to change the environment and the motivation to cheat. Further, equitable punishment of offenders is necessary. Isolated cases of negotiated private settlements with individual faculty members certainly encourages rampant cheating amongst those students motivated through feelings of insecurity, immaturity, competitiveness or mere laziness (Ulig and Howes, 1967). Stated policies with mandatory consequences helps level the playing field and sets the boundaries.

Universities and/or colleges must take an active role in curbing the propensity to challenge academic morals and ethics. The development of standardized consequences by colleges will allow procedures to be put into place that will deter cheating and enable due process for those students accused of offenses. Steps in the direction of curtailing cheating include the following:

- ◆ Colleges should encourage and support faculty to identify and follow through with cases of cheating.
- ◆ Develop a system of punishments to fit the crime. Lesser offenses like copying someone’s homework should receive less severe penalties than buying a term paper, recycling a paper or cheating on exam.
- ◆ Develop a systems of record keeping in which individual offenses are recorded. Repeat activity should result in the most severe penalties. Without a system of record keeping, the repeat offender goes through life minimizing each episode as a one time only offense reflecting some situational factor.
- ◆ Promote the climate of academic integrity and achievement. Pride in one’s individual accomplishments and performance become primary.
- ◆ Allow student participation in disciplinary hearings, to enable information about the process to permeate the campus and encourage conformance.
- ◆ Students seem genuinely confused as to what constitutes cheating behaviors. These inappropriate activities should be identified and discussed with student populations.

## **DISCUSSION**

It has been referred to as a knowledge revolution. Virtual classrooms are being developed by cable operators and telecommunications companies, and multimedia products are available that replace the traditional classroom instruction (Ives & Jarvenpa, 1996). The Internet has clearly entering the world of education and information dissemination. Interestingly, although the Internet has long been the domain of the academic, moving academia to a proactive position has been difficult.

It behooves marketing educators to become conscious of the Internet and both its positive and negative applications. Seasoned academicians must realize that the technology savvy student will utilize the Internet for their optimum advantage. Faculty must not only embrace the positive aspects of the WEB but also recognize and plan for the negative outcomes as well.

While academic concerns with curriculum integration are numerous, many of these issues regarding the use of the Internet are easily overcome. The positives of stimulating the curiosity of students, opening up round the clock access to current information and broadening the perspectives of the young business student seem unparalleled. Related to these issues are concerns as to whether this new source of information (Internet) should replace or merely supplement previous forms of research behavior. There is also the underlying question of reliability and validity of information widely available through this electronically interconnected information base. In just a few short years, the WWW has emerged as a mainstream approach to information dissemination and each day several thousand new Web sites are published (Fleischman, 1996). As a result, the question of validity remains an issue of considerable concern.

Unfortunately, it is this wealth of information and ease of access that has ultimately led to concerns regarding the proliferation of cheating utilizing the Internet as the primary resource. How easy is it to cheat using the Internet? In just one form of cheating, all that is required is typing in the words "term paper" using a search engine like Yahoo! and a plethora of sites is instantaneously generated. Further, it is the ease of this access and the feeling that detection is unlikely that has led to increasing temptation. The consequences are perceived as limited and unlikely, further encouraging students to test the waters.

As noted earlier, the reality of cybercheating is an issue that is challenging educators and their institutions. Thus the necessity of curbing cheating is demanded through identifying the motivations behind these behaviors.

## **CONCLUSION**

The question in educational research that is often posed is "why is this important in a real world context?" Unfortunately, in issues of cheating and dishonest behavior, these activities do not limit themselves to the classroom. The strategies for survival demonstrated in college translate to professional graduate work and ultimately to their professional careers (Sierles, Hendrickx and Circle, 1980). Reducing cheating and understanding the implications of these activities are paramount to educating the leaders of tomorrow regarding ethical and acceptable practices.

While the world of cyberspace appears to be the popular place to go these days, one question remains glaringly unanswered: does the Internet truly offer students a better learning method? Or does this approach merely offer creative shortcuts in the learning process that may ultimately lead to a student being enticed by the term paper brokers? As the business world's entry into the realm of virtual reality continues, there will be an even greater push for marketing graduates to be experienced and

comfortable with this technology. However, the burden of assuring the appropriate uses of this medium falls upon faculty.

Hence it is essential that faculty become learned in this new and exciting educational tool. Through the education and familiarity of faculty, students will be less likely to assume that academic misbehavior will go undetected. Further, it enables faculty to open dialogue with students to assure that these behaviors are viewed in the proper context - unacceptable, punishable and minimizing the value of their education dollar.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **SCALES PROPOSED IN DATA COLLECTION**



**SELF ESTEEM (Rosenberg 1965)**

1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Unsure, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly Agree

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

At times I think I am no good at all.

I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

I am able to do things as well as most other people.

I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

I certainly feel useless at times.

I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

I wish I could have more respect for myself.

All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure

I take a positive view of myself.

**CHEATING SERIOUSNESS**

1-Serious cheating, 2- trivial cheating, 3- not cheating

Plagiarism

Telling another student what is on the test

Looking on another person's exam during the test with their permission

Looking on another person's exam during the test without their permission

Failing to cite quoted information

Failing to cite reference material

Not doing my fair share on a group project

Having someone else take a test for another person

Stealing a test

Stealing an answer key

Purchasing a term paper

Purchasing a project

Allowing someone to copy off of your exam

Falsifying or fabricating research

Copying from a person with their knowledge

Working on a project with another person when instructed that it is an individual assignment

Copying another student's computer program in a computer sciences course

Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography

Writing a paper for another student

Cutting or pasting off the Internet into a paper or assignment

Bringing in a cheat sheet to an exam

**NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY INVENTORY (Emmons 1987)**

1-True, 2- False

I see myself as a good leader.

I would prefer to be a leader.

I really like to be the center of attention.

I like having authority over other people.

I would be willing to describe myself as a strong personality.

I have a natural talent for influencing people.

I like to be the center of attention.

I am assertive.  
 People always seem to recognize my authority.  
 I like to look at my body.  
 I like to look at myself in the mirror.  
 I am an extraordinary person.  
 I like to display my body.  
 I have good taste when it comes to beauty.  
 I think I am a special person.  
 I like to be complimented.  
 I am going to be a great person.  
 I know that I am good because everyone keeps telling me so.  
 Everybody likes to hear my stories.  
 I usually dominate any conversation.  
 I can make anybody believe anything.  
 I am a born leader.  
 I can read people like a book.  
 I am apt to show off if I get the chance.  
 People can learn a great deal from me.  
 I always know what I am doing.  
 I can usually talk my way out of anything.  
 Superiority is something you are born with.  
 I would do almost anything on a dare.  
 I expect a great deal from other people.  
 I am envious of other people's good fortune.  
 I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.  
 I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve.  
 I have a strong will to acquire power.  
 I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in public.  
 I find it easy to manipulate people.  
 I am more capable than other people.

**Cheating perception**

1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neither, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly Agree

**Plagiarism**

Telling another student what is on the test  
 Looking on another person's exam during the test with their permission  
 Looking on another person's exam during the test without their permission  
 Failing to cite quoted information  
 Failing to cite reference material  
 Not doing my fair share on a group project  
 Having someone else take a test for another person  
 Stealing a test  
 Stealing an answer key  
 Purchasing a term paper  
 Purchasing a project  
 Allowing someone to copy off of your exam  
 Falsifying or fabricating research  
 Copying from a person with their knowledge

Working on a project with another person when instructed that it is an individual assignment  
Copying another student's computer program in a computer sciences course  
Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography  
Writing a paper for another student  
Cutting or pasting off the internet into a paper or assignment  
Bringing in a cheat sheet to an exam

**Cheating frequency**

1- Never, 2- once, 3- more than once

**Plagiarism**

Telling another student what is on the test  
Looking on another person's exam during the test with their permission  
Looking on another person's exam during the test without their permission  
Failing to cite quoted information  
Failing to cite reference material  
Not doing my fair share on a group project  
Having someone else take a test for another person  
Stealing a test  
Stealing an answer key  
Purchasing a term paper  
Purchasing a project  
Allowing someone to copy off of your exam  
Falsifying or fabricating research  
Copying from a person with their knowledge  
Working on a project with another person when instructed that it is an individual assignment  
Copying another student's computer program in a computer sciences course  
Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography  
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