ISSUES IN ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: IMPROVING ACADEMIC HONOR CODES

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ABSTRACT
Ethical values and moral principles are the foundation of personal integrity. These values and moral principles also constitute the fabric of academic integrity in any academic institution. Institutions of higher education are increasingly facing challenges of academic misconduct due to multiple influencing factors. The typical and perhaps most influential factors are: first, the gradual but continued destruction of moral values in today's society; second, the lack of prompt remedial actions by parents and/or insufficient attention in the early stages of the educational process; and finally the new technological developments that have become facilitators of the process. The purpose of this study is to examine areas of ethical risk as perceived by college students. The study will seek information on various aspects of ethical risk at the college level. These include but are not limited to cheating, plagiarism, group work, and lying. This paper addresses issues about the existence of written policies, faculty behavior, and strategies. Finally, the authors look at potential initiatives to minimize unethical behavior. From this process of discovery, a better understanding of these issues will be gained. The results could enhance and improve the elements and strategies that make up the codes of Conduct or Honor Codes.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW
Personal integrity is founded in ethical values and moral principles. These values and moral principles also constitute the fabric of academic integrity in any academic institution. Institutions of higher education are increasingly facing challenges of academic misconduct due to multiple influencing factors. The typical and perhaps most influential factors are: first, the gradual but continued destruction of moral values in today's society; second, the lack of prompt remedial actions by parents and/or insufficient attention in the early stages of the educational process; and finally the new technological developments that have become facilitators of the process.

A good way to start is to look at Hellriegel and Slocum's views on ethics. Ethics defines the right and wrong conduct in a given situation while moral principles act as a compass to guide us through the process (Hellriegel and Slocum 1992).

McCabe's assertion that integrity policies in many higher educational institutions are not well defined, not frequently updated, and not frequently reevaluated by faculty continues to be the case today.   Additionally, some policies become complex due to the overuse of legalistic terms creating concerns among faculty. McCabe also points out that the students are more concerned about how they are perceived by peers rather than how faculty views ethical conduct. The most important thing for students is making a good grade in the class. McCabe also indicates that some institutions are focusing more in promoting integrity rather than the sanctions strategies in place (McCabe 2005).

Richter and Buttery, in their "*Convergence of Ethics?*" article, take an in depth view of Western culture and how it influences business ethics. They examined the fundamental Western cultural values, from whether they can be implemented in a different culture, to issues of free markets and the utilitarian philosophy and moral rights (Richter and Buttery 2002).   These realities are essential in preparing the students for the global environment they will be facing.

A number of studies on college cheating—mostly in medium and large universities—have been conducted to get a better understanding of this important issue; from how often does cheating occur to the reasons of why it happened. (Bowers 1964, McCabe and Trevino 1996).

An earlier study by Kullberg found that business schools were not preparing their students to deal with ethical dilemmas in the business world. It is the responsibility for business schools to provide business students with a framework of analysis that helps students identify the ethical problems. Also, business students should be taught how to consider possible options, examine alternative methods of resolution, and examine the tradeoffs involved in each ethical decision. (Kullberg 1988)

The literature has mixed results regarding the effect business ethics classes have on real life business ethical decisions. Some studies suggest that a business ethics course is not enough to make an impact on students when they enter the real world. However, other studies indicate that a business ethics course can have an effect on ethical behavioral in the real world. Peppas and Diskin found no significant difference in ethical values between students who have taken a business ethics course and student who have not taken a business ethics course. There is a need for further study regarding the impact a business ethics course has on the ethical behavior of business students. (Peppas and Diskin 2001).

According to Gerdy students know that plagiarism is wrong, but many students still plagiarize simply because they think they can get by with it. It is becoming easier for students to plagiarize because of the amount of material available on the Internet. There are many plagiarism detection techniques available to faculty, but faculty need to understand what motivates students to plagiarize in order to be better teachers and mentors. (Gerdy 2004)

Based on study by Adkins and Radtke faculty members do not believe more than students that ethics in accounting education is important.   Students are aware of the need to have ethics as a part of their accounting education. The study indicates that women perceive ethics education to be more important than men. Also, the study indicates that older people perceive ethics in accounting education to be more important than younger people. (Adkins and Radtke 2004)

METHODOLOGY
Business students from a small public university in a southeastern state represented the population of interest. A non probability convenience sample of twelve business courses was selected. A total of 278 questionnaires were collected from a captive population of 340 students.

Considering that six questionnaires were rejected for lack of completion or other concerns, an effective response rate of 80% was attained. The purpose of the study as well as the voluntary nature of participation was timely disclosed and made clear to participants. Research procedures were properly applied to assure the students' anonymity, to maintain the privacy of the information, and to avoid duplications in participation. Demographic/classificatory questions were used to be able to further evaluate potential differences between the participants.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY
Table 1 shows the sample characteristics of the respondents in the study. Female respondents outnumbered male respondents by over a two to one margin. Most of the students surveyed were between the ages of seventeen to twenty. The classification of the students was fairly even distributed among freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. Also, there was approximately an equal number of business and nonbusiness students. Management/Marketing represented the largest emphasis area with 40%. Health Care Management was second with 26%, followed by Accounting with 23%, and Econ/Finance with 11%.

Table 1 Sample Characteristics								
Description	**Gender**	**Age**	**Class**	**Major**	**Emphasis**	**GPA**	**Student**	**Residence**
Male	31%							
Female	69%							
17-20		61%						
21-24		36%						
25-28		2%						
29+		1%						
Freshman			26%					
Sophomore			26%					
Junior			22%					
Senior			26%					
Other			0%					
Business				49%				
Other				51%				
Accounting					23%			
Fin/Econ					11%			
HCMT					26%			
MGMT/MKT					40%			
Below 2.0						3%		
2.0 < 2.5						23%		
2.5 < 3.0						30%		
3.0 < 3.5						27%		
3.5 - 4.0						17%		
American							94%	
International							6%	
On campus								47%
Off campus								53%

In addition, the GPA of the students is presented in Table 1. Approximately 44% of the students have a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Fifty three percent of the students have a GPA between 2.0 and less than 3.0. The vast majority of the students are Americans and approximately 53% of the students live off campus, while approximately 43% live on campus.

Table 2 shows the student responses regarding different ethical issues.   According to this table, only 21% of the students in the study indicated that cheating on exams was "likely" to exist at this university and 5% indicated "very likely". This means that the majority of the students at this university do not deem cheating to be a problem. However, this is contrary to much of the research that suggests cheating is widespread at the university level. Also, only 14% of the students believe whistle blowing is either "likely" or "very likely" to occur.

Table 2				
Student Perceptions of Ethical Issues				
How likely is conduct in this area	VU	U	L	VL
Cheating on Exams	40%	34%	21%	5%
Whistle Blowing	44%	42%	12%	2%
Signing class roll for absent student	37%	29%	23%	11%
Allowing student to copy your work	25%	33%	30%	11%
Plagiarism	55%	28%	15%	2%
Putting your name on a group assignment although you made no contribution	32%	33%	25%	10%
Allowing another student to get credit for group work without contributing	28%	32%	33%	7%
Not asking questions in class for fear of being perceived as a nerd	28%	36%	25%	11%
Telling a professor that you are ill on the day of exam because not ready	40%	34%	20%	6%
"Kissing up" to a professor to get a better grade	32%	28%	29%	11%
Offering to pay a professor for a grade	73%	22%	4%	1%
Coming to class unprepared	18%	34%	32%	16%
Praising another's performance when their performance actually is very poor	30%	43%	23%	4%
Allowing someone else to do your assignments	38%	32%	24%	6%
Lying to peers to impress them	39%	29%	25%	7%
Lying to prospective employers to impress them	40%	32%	21%	7%
Stealing from fellow students	67%	23%	5%	0%
Stealing from the university	72%	23%	5%	0%
Stealing from your family	80%	14%	4%	2%

VU = very unlikely U = unlikely L = likely V L= very likely

The areas which received at least 40% in the two "likely" categories were "coming to class unprepared," "allowing a student to copy your work," "kissing up to a professor to get a better grade," and "allowing another student to get credit for group work without contributing." Surprisingly, plagiarism received only a 15% and 2% response in the "likely" and "very likely" categories respectively. The reason for this may indicate that most plagiarism issues are handled secretly and students are unaware of most cases. Another reason to account for the responses may be that many students really do not understand what plagiarism is. Regardless of the reason, plagiarism has been an issue at this university as well as universities across the nation. Also, stealing and lying were not considered to be major problems according to the students surveyed.

Student responses suggest that universities can do things to discourage unethical behavior. Table 3 shows the student responses to a set of questions concerning different ways to combat unethical behavior. The students felt strongly that schools should have a written ethics policy. However, only 44% of the students believe that a written policy would affect their behavior. The two top choices for discouraging unethical behavior were much more aggressive. Seventy six of the

respondents believe that a threat of severe punishment would work in discouraging unethical behavior.   Also, sixty seven percent of those surveyed believe that public disclosure would be effective in discouraging unethical behavior. One aspect of particular interest and significance was the perception of the students about the influence of the professor's behavior. In this respect seventy seven percent of the students answer the question positively.

Table 3				
Discouraging Unethical Behavior				
Questions	**Yes**	**No**	**Do not know**	**No Opinion**
Does your school have a policy to address any of the ethical issues?	80%	2%	18%	
If your school does not have a written ethics policy, should they?	80%	5%		15%
Does the behavior of a professor influence your ethical behavior in class?	77%	16%		7%
Would a written policy on ethical conduct affect your behavior?	44%	41%		15%
Would the threat of severe punishment discourage unethical behavior?	76%	11%	13%	
Would public disclosure discourage unethical behavior?	67%	11%	22%	

Table 4 presents the possible initiatives that may be effective in minimizing the risk of unethical behavior. About half of the students believe that close teacher monitoring would have at least some impact on minimizing unethical behavior. The same can be said about having a student code of ethics and having ethical discussion in all classes. Twenty five percent of the students believe that having a confidential system to report conduct without being identified would be very effective in minimizing unethical behavior while 32% believed it would be fairly effective. Having a university zero tolerance policy regarding unethical behavior received the highest responses in the very effective category with 34%, while 32% believe this would be fairly effective.

Table 4				
Effective Initiatives to Minimize the Risk of Unethical Behavior				
Possible Initiatives	**NE**	**SE**	**FE**	**VE**
Close teacher monitoring	11%	40%	29%	20%
A student code of ethics	15%	39%	32%	14%
Ethical discussions in all classes	17%	36%	33%	14%
A confidential system to report conduct without being identified	9%	31%	35%	25%
A university zero tolerance policy regarding unethical behavior	6%	28%	32%	34%
Close teacher monitoring	11%	40%	29%	20%

NE = Never Effective   SE = Somewhat Effective   FE = Fairly Effective   VE = Very Effective

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS
Student perception of various ethical issues indicated that the majority of the students do not believe it is likely for these behaviors to occur. However, many of the students suggest otherwise. Students indicate that professors have a significant impact on ethical behavior as well as the threat of punishment or public exposure. The majority of the students surveyed believe

that it would be effective to have a confidential system to report conduct as well as have a university zero tolerance policy regarding unethical behavior. Close teacher monitoring, a student code of ethics, and ethical discussions in all classes were not deemed as effective as a confidential reporting system or a zero tolerance policy. This appears to be more of a hard nose approach by the students in regard to curtailing unethical behavior. The sensitivity of the topics of this nature generally offers a tremendous challenge to researchers and the literature is plagued with miscellaneous findings. It is the contention of the authors that there is not a clear cut solution to this and other ethical dilemmas present in education. In addition, as changes occur in the values and beliefs of future generations of students, further research will be needed to determine the strategies that would be most effective in minimizing unethical behavior.

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