Relation of gender, course enrollment, and grades to distinct forms of academic dishonesty

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A thorough understanding of academic dishonesty and the students who engage in it is necessary to develop appropriate policies and educational interventions to discourage such actions. The present study examines the frequency of academic dishonesty and the characteristics (i.e. gender, course enrollment, and grades) of students who engage in distinct forms of the behavior by surveying undergraduates at a large public university in the USA. Of 292 students, 57.19% reported some form of academic dishonesty in the previous six months, with cheating on a test being the most frequent form (51.71%). Men and students in a study strategies course had a significantly higher report rate for both plagiarism and making false excuses in comparison to women and students in a science course, respectively. Low grades corresponded with high rates of academic dishonesty, specifically in terms of having provided false excuses. Implications for college teaching settings are discussed.

Keywords: academic dishonesty; cheating; college students; gender; grades; plagiarism

Introduction

Many of those who teach in postsecondary settings have encountered the disconcerting trend of academic dishonesty in the classroom. Although rates of students’ academic dishonesty vary, most studies at the college level report rates above 50% (Schmelkin et al. 2008). Academic dishonesty among college students is widespread, with single-campus studies revealing that as many as 89.9% of students have cheated in some form or other (Graham et al. 1994). In this paper, we further examine the incidence of academic dishonesty and consider implications of its becoming normative.

At both the individual and the institutional level, consequences of academic dishonesty are noteworthy. Considered a ‘cognitive shortcut’ (Anderman and Murdock 2007, 2), academic dishonesty undermines opportunities for quality learning (Ogilvie and Stewart 2010). McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2001) frame the issue as ‘one of the most basic ethical decisions faced by college students’ (220). Professors may be seen as sharing the responsibility for students’ behavior with the extent to which they create environments that overlook or permit dishonesty (Parameswaran 2007). Further, professors’ responses to academically dishonest
acts have potential to either promote or stunt moral development (Schmelkin et al. 2008). On a broader scale, a culture in which students complete academic work by dishonest means or use deception to avoid academic work is at odds with the value of integrity many postsecondary institutions wish to develop. Thus, academic dishonesty becomes an issue of academic integrity at the institutional level (Boehm, Justice, and Weeks 2009; Craig, Federici, and Buehler 2010; Piascik and Brazeau 2010; Whitley and Keith-Spiegel 2001), and not just at the classroom level.

Academic dishonesty also relates to long-term outcomes for college graduates and their communities. There is a positive correlation between dishonesty in college and in the workplace, which can have both interpersonal and financial implications (Nonis and Swift 2001; Sims 1993). Another implication for society at large is that students who pass courses by cheating may be unqualified for their professions. Employees who have potentially cheated their way to graduation may lack the requisite skills and knowledge to enact their roles effectively; this is an issue of particular concern to industries that involve well-being and safety, such as health care or engineering (Gulli, Kohler, and Patriquin 2007).

Academic dishonesty, considered a form of academic deviance, relates to other, nonacademic deviant behaviors (Kisamore, Stone, and Jawahar 2007). For instance, providing false excuses relates to high rates of dangerous behaviors, such as substance abuse and reckless driving (Blankenship and Whitley 2000). Additionally, involvement in plagiarism is positively correlated with students’ identification with possible selves who break rules (Lovett-Hooper et al. 2007). In other words, when speculating about what their identities and behaviors will look like in the future, students who plagiarize are likely to envision themselves as rule breakers.

Considering the implications of academic dishonesty, it is a pertinent topic for continued inquiry. Although the thrust of the literature supports that certain students are more likely to engage in academic dishonesty than are others, evidence is mixed. The present study contributes to a more thorough understanding of academic dishonesty by examining the frequency of its distinct forms and the characteristics of students who are most likely to engage in them.

**Framework**

**Types of dishonesty**

There is reason to believe academic dishonesty is a multifaceted rather than a unified construct, as the behaviors underneath the umbrella term of academic dishonesty occur with different frequencies (Jensen et al. 2002; Marsden, Carroll, and Neill 2005) and are perceived by students as having distinct levels of severity (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, and Armstead 1996; Kisamore, Stone, and Jawahar 2007). Students’ creative uses of technology increase not only the range of possible dishonest behaviors (Stephens, Young, and Calabrese 2007) but also the difficulty of detection (Craig, Federici, and Buehler 2010). Although few educators dispute that technology has potential to enhance teaching and learning, ease of access to personal computing devices enables students to engage in myriad forms of academic dishonesty. Examples of such behavior include using smart phones to look up information during examinations (Johnson and Martin 2005), copying and pasting
text from online sources (Ma, Wan, and Lu 2008), and purchasing papers from websites devoted to that purpose (Boehm, Justice, and Weeks 2009).

College students are often divided on whether certain behaviors, such as submitting the same paper for credit in different courses, are considered acts of cheating (Craig, Federici, and Buehler 2010) and are less likely to engage in academically dishonest behaviors they view as more severe (Yardley et al. 2009). Such nuances challenge the presupposition that academic dishonesty is a black-and-white issue and suggest that continued research efforts on the subject of academic dishonesty can inform how higher education faculty and administrators respond to, and proactively address, academic dishonesty.

Owunwanne, Rustagi, and Dada (2010) argue that ambiguous definitions of academic dishonesty are a primary reason for the prevalence of the behavior in higher education. To reduce the misunderstandings in both research and practice, Marsden, Carroll, and Neill (2005) caution against referring to academic dishonesty as if it were uniform in nature. Lambert, Hogan, and Barton (2003) demonstrated differences in reporting rates for individual and composite cheating behaviors and recommended further research using varied measurement approaches. Although it is possible to measure upwards of 20 distinct behaviors (e.g. Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, and Armstead 1996), Roig and Caso (2005) argue that most can be grouped into one of the three categories: (1) cheating on tests, (2) plagiarizing, and (3) giving false excuses (e.g. lying about the reason for not completing coursework). Roig and Caso explain that the first-mentioned category has been studied extensively, while the others less frequently.

**Differences by gender**

In his foundational study on academic dishonesty in higher education, Bowers (1964) revealed that academic dishonesty in college was more prevalent among men than women. While most studies replicate this early finding (e.g. Jensen et al. 2002; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, and Armstead 1996), nonsignificant results are also present in the literature (e.g. Yardley et al. 2009). Other studies (e.g. Graham et al. 1994) indicate women cheat more often than men. One possible explanation is that men and women engage in distinct forms of dishonesty (Yardley et al. 2009). Indeed, when scholars break down academic dishonesty into component parts, gender differences often emerge. For instance, although data gathered by Thorpe, Pittenger, and Reed (1999) initially indicated men cheated more often than women, further analyses revealed gender differences present only for turning in a plagiarized paper. No known study has replicated the above method or result, and questions about gender differences persist.

**Differences by course enrollment**

Academic dishonesty tends to be more prevalent in certain subjects than others. Overall, the literature indicates academic dishonesty is most common among students who major in science, technology, engineering, math, or business (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, and Armstead 1996; Marsden, Carroll, and Neill 2005; Williams, Nathanson, and Paulhus 2010), although some studies (e.g. McCabe and Trevino 1997) have found science students cheat relatively infrequently.
On an average, students in courses that teach study strategies possess academic skills that are weak relative to those of other students (Pintrich, McKeachie, and Lin 1987). Through their analysis of qualitative interviews with pharmacy students in the UK, Ng et al. (2003) found that a lack of strong study skills was a commonly indicated motivation for academic dishonesty. Williams, Nathanson, and Paulhus (2010) surmise, ‘students with poorer academic skills tend to cheat more – perhaps to compensate for their shortcomings’ (297).

Differences by grades
In a review of more than 100 studies on cheating, Whitley (1998) found a small effect size for grades. Providing an overview of attributes associated with academic dishonesty a decade later, Miller et al. (2007) emphasized the link between grades and cheating among high school and college students. Studies of postsecondary institutions in the USA generally share the finding that low grades relate positively to academic dishonesty, whether at small colleges (Graham et al. 1994), religiously affiliated universities (Yardley et al. 2009), or medium-to-large public institutions (McCabe and Trevino 1997; Graham et al. 1994; Yardley et al. 2009). Less clear, however, is the breadth of behaviors in which students with low grades engage.

Current study context
This study furthers the research describing which college students are likely to engage in different forms of academic dishonesty. In addition to entering the debate over differences in academic dishonesty related to gender and grades, we make a unique contribution through comparing behaviors of the students in two distinct courses. Rather than assuming grades to be a proxy for academic skills, we consider another potential indicator of academic skills – enrollment in a study strategies course. By offering new insights into the nuances of academically dishonest behavior, we hope the present study will inform university policies and teaching practices. Specifically, the study considers the following research questions:

- Which forms of academic dishonesty (i.e. test cheating, plagiarism, and making a false excuse) are most and least prevalent among college students?
- Does recent participation in distinct forms of academic dishonesty vary based upon gender, course enrollment, and/or grades?

Method
During the first week of the spring 2011 academic term (i.e. late March), undergraduates \((N = 292)\) at a large public university in the USA completed an online survey about academic behaviors. Students were recruited from two introductory-level courses with large enrollments: a study strategies course and a prerequisite science course with a laboratory. The study strategies course was marketed toward students who sought to increase their strategies for success in college, whereas the prerequisite science course was required of students in pursuit of health science-related majors. Participation in the study was voluntary, and students...
were assured their responses would not be associated with identifiable information. Following the first author’s in-person visit to describe the study, students received electronic communication (e.g. email) with the link to the anonymous, online survey.

The survey collected self-report data on background characteristics and recent behaviors. Students indicated their gender and course enrollment. Students also selected one of eight categories to represent grades they most often received in college. Categories ranged from 1 (‘mostly Es/Fs’; i.e. failing grades) to 8 (‘mostly As’; i.e. perfect scores). The survey ascertained recent engagement in various forms of academically dishonest behavior by asking students to indicate whether they had engaged in any of the listed behaviors in the previous six months. To measure academically dishonest behavior, we adapted items from the Self-Report Cheating Scale (Paulhus, Williams, and Nathanson 2004), which has a reported reliability of 0.81 (Williams, Nathanson, and Paulhus 2010). Adaptations reduced overlap among similar behaviors and increased the distinctiveness of different behaviors in order to more fully represent the range of behaviors suggested by the literature (Roig and DeTommaso 1995; McCabe and Trevino 1997). The adapted scale included 16 items in the three areas of interest: seven items about cheating on tests, seven items about plagiarism, and two items about false excuses. Cronbach alpha coefficients for the current study sample were at acceptable levels of internal reliability: 0.77 (cheating on tests), 0.77 (plagiarism), and 0.70 (false excuses).

We proactively addressed internal validity in several ways. The scale included eight filler items about general misconduct to diffuse the focus on academic misconduct (see Williams, Nathanson, and Paulhus 2010). To encourage accurate responses, instructions emphasized the survey was anonymous and would not collect personally identifiable information. To further enhance the validity of responses, the instrument posed questions about whether behaviors had or had not occurred within a recent and concrete time frame, rather than asking students to estimate the frequency with which they tended to engage in certain behaviors.

We conducted statistical analyses using IBM SPSS Statistics 19. To represent engagement in the major forms of academically dishonest behavior, we created binary composite variables for the category of academic dishonesty, overall, and three subcategories for behaviors of interest to this study; that is, the four composite variables reflected whether a student had engaged in (1) any academic dishonesty, (2) any cheating on tests, (3) any plagiarism, or (4) any false excuse-making. Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and chi-square tests examined differences in behavior by gender and course enrollment. Participation in academically dishonest behaviors according to grade categories was examined with chi-square and Jonckheere–Terpstra (J–T) tests, as the latter uses mean ranks to determine whether there is a monotonic trend across the categories in question (Agresti 2010).

### Results

As indicated in Table 1, demographic information included gender, course enrollment, and grades most commonly received in college. The mean grade score for the sample was 6.30 (SD = 1.34), between mostly Bs (6) and about half As and Bs (7). The distribution of grades had a slight negative skew (0.648), with a total of six students (2.05%) reporting grades in any of the three lowest categories (about half Cs and Ds or below). To represent the distribution of grades more evenly, we reduced
the grades to four categories, each containing approximately one quarter of the students. Table 1 provides the frequency and percentage of students who, in the previous six months, engaged in any of the academically dishonest behaviors measured by the four composite variables: overall academic dishonesty and the three subcategories relating to tests, papers, and false excuses. Results are broken down based on the characteristics of gender, course enrollment, and grades. Table 2 provides the statistics for the individual behaviors on the self-report instrument.

Chi-square tests of association were used to examine differences by gender, course enrollment, and self-reported college grades (see Table 1). Cheating on tests was equally prevalent regardless of gender, course, or grades. In terms of gender and course enrollment, the overall category of academic dishonesty obfuscated differences, whereas more precise subcategories revealed differences for between-student groups. Men were more likely than women to plagiarize or make false excuses. Plagiarism and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total N (%)</th>
<th>Dishonesty(^1)</th>
<th>Test cheating(^1)</th>
<th>Plagiarism(^1)</th>
<th>False excuses(^1)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>114 (39.04%)</td>
<td>62 (53.16%)</td>
<td>66 (57.89%)</td>
<td>24 (20.97%)</td>
<td>17 (14.84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>178 (60.96%)</td>
<td>95 (53.37%)</td>
<td>85 (47.75%)</td>
<td>26 (14.61%)</td>
<td>17 (9.55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(X^2) (df)</td>
<td>2.719 (1)</td>
<td>2.863 (1)</td>
<td>7.914 (1)</td>
<td>4.013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymptotic sig.</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.005(^a)</td>
<td>0.045(^b)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course enrollment</th>
<th>Total N (%)</th>
<th>Dishonesty(^1)</th>
<th>Test cheating(^1)</th>
<th>Plagiarism(^1)</th>
<th>False excuses(^1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study strategies</td>
<td>188 (64.38%)</td>
<td>114 (60.64%)</td>
<td>102 (54.26%)</td>
<td>44 (23.40%)</td>
<td>33 (17.55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science prerequisite</td>
<td>104 (35.62%)</td>
<td>53 (50.96%)</td>
<td>49 (47.12%)</td>
<td>14 (13.46%)</td>
<td>4 (3.84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(X^2) (df)</td>
<td>2.561 (1)</td>
<td>1.367 (1)</td>
<td>4.159 (1)</td>
<td>11.369 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymptotic sig.</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>0.041(^c)</td>
<td>0.001(^d)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Total N (%)</th>
<th>Dishonesty(^1)</th>
<th>Test cheating(^1)</th>
<th>Plagiarism(^1)</th>
<th>False excuses(^1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest quartile</td>
<td>61 (20.89%)</td>
<td>26 (42.62%)</td>
<td>24 (39.34%)</td>
<td>5 (8.20%)</td>
<td>1 (1.64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-highest</td>
<td>86 (29.45%)</td>
<td>50 (58.14%)</td>
<td>48 (55.81%)</td>
<td>19 (22.09%)</td>
<td>12 (13.95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-lowest</td>
<td>63 (21.57%)</td>
<td>42 (66.67%)</td>
<td>36 (57.14%)</td>
<td>15 (23.81%)</td>
<td>8 (12.70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest quartile</td>
<td>82 (28.08%)</td>
<td>49 (59.76%)</td>
<td>43 (52.44%)</td>
<td>19 (23.17%)</td>
<td>16 (19.51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(X^2) (df)</td>
<td>7.85 (3)</td>
<td>5.08 (3)</td>
<td>6.67 (3)</td>
<td>10.31 (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymptotic sig.</td>
<td>0.049(^e)</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.016(^f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \(N = 292\).

\(^{1}\)Final four columns report the number and the percentage of students in each group who indicated they had engaged in any of the behaviors in the overarching category of academic dishonesty or the three subcategories. See Table 2 for the individual items.

\(^{2}\)Self-reported grades were divided into four comparably sized groups using quartile cut points.

\(^{a}\)M > W.

\(^{b}\)M > W.

\(^{c}\)SS > SP.

\(^{d}\)SS > SP.

\(^{e}\)Overall academic dishonesty and false excuses differ across grade categories.
false excuses were also significantly more likely for students in the study strategies course than in the prerequisite science course. A follow-up J–T Test for behavioral trends across grade categories indicated the presence of monotonic trends for academic dishonesty ($p = 0.041$) and making false excuses ($p = 0.004$). In other words, the general pattern of these relations was monotonic, with low grades corresponding with high amounts of academic dishonesty and high amounts of false excuses.

### Discussion

Generational theory, which examines the characteristics of cohorts of students as a whole, may explain why most students in the study were academically dishonest in the recent past. Millennial students, who were born between 1982 and 2002 and who currently comprise the bulk of postsecondary enrollment (DeBard 2004), have several distinguishing characteristics. Having been sheltered by parents, reflects DeBard,
may relate to the tendency to have lofty aspirations without a sense of direction in terms of how to achieve them; the transition to self-regulation is a difficult one. Wilson (2004) has thus suggested, ‘educators should . . . assist students in developing realistic expectations of the amount and quality of effort required to be academically successful’ (63). This goal may be especially important when teaching Millennial students, whose preferences for multitasking and immediate gratification may impede effective learning processes (Oblinger 2003) and require alternate means for attaining desired grades. Millennial students’ sense of pressure to achieve (Lowery 2004) and prioritization of results (i.e. the ends justify the means) suggests students may cheat simply because it is expedient; ethical or knowledge-related costs may not come under consideration (Piascik and Brazeau 2010). If growth in knowledge and critical thinking are indeed goals of postsecondary education, such tendencies are disconcerting.

Beyond the overall tendencies of the sample, our study focused on the relation of gender, course enrollment, and grades in different areas of academic dishonesty. The overall category of academic dishonesty made it difficult to identify the differences; however, when academic dishonesty was separated into more precise subcategories of dishonesty (i.e. cheating on tests, plagiarism, and making false excuses), more specific differences between students were found.

In terms of gender, men were more likely than women to plagiarize or make false excuses, results that support the findings of Thorpe, Pittenger, and Reed (1999) and Caron, Whitbourne, and Halgin (1992) on these dimensions. There were no gender differences in the undifferentiated academic dishonesty category or the cheating on tests subcategory, similar to what some scholars (e.g., Yardley et al. 2009) have found but in contrast to studies that indicate a higher prevalence of academic dishonesty, overall, and cheating on tests among men (e.g. Jensen et al. 2002; McCabe and Trevino 1997). The fact that gender differences emerged for two particular forms of academic dishonesty may partly explain some disparity among results in the literature. It will be important for future studies to define what form of academic dishonesty is being considered when assessing differences, as overall measures and specific subcategories are likely to have unique relations to various attributes.

For course enrollment, students in a study strategies course were more likely to have plagiarized or made false excuses than students in a prerequisite science course. Although it is possible that students in the prerequisite science course, on average, had fewer writing assignments during the six-month period measured by the survey, our results suggest students may plagiarize or seek additional time to complete assignments due in part to weak academic skills or self-regulatory strategies. This explanation is consistent with findings that students with ineffective study skills are likely to engage in academic dishonesty (Whitley 1998) and procrastinators are likely to plagiarize, in particular (Roig and DeTommaso 1995).

As for grades, students with low grades reported they engaged more in academic dishonesty, overall, than those with high grades. This finding supports the notion that students seek to compensate for lower grades with cheating behaviors, though it is unclear whether the underlying reason is a lack of ability and/or effort. We specifically found that students who were not top achievers were more likely to make false excuses than were the highest-achieving students. Further research on goal orientations and other underlying factors may help explain these differences. Performance goals have been correlated with high rates of dishonest behaviors
among students enrolled at Australian universities (Marsden, Carroll, and Neill 2005), and, for men only, performance-avoidance goals have been identified as a predictor of test cheating (Niiya et al. 2008). For students with the lowest grades, the motivation for academic dishonesty may be to avoid failure. For students with modest grades, the motivation may be to approach success. As only one student in the highest-grade quartile reported excuse-making behavior, our findings await replication but raise questions as to the perceived functionality of excuses for different students.

**Educational and scholarly significance**

Our findings add to the growing evidence that academic dishonesty is widespread and comprised of numerous behaviors. More than half of the students reported participating in some form of academic dishonesty in the six months prior to the completion of the survey, suggesting faculty and administrators face a more extensive problem than simply a few misbehaving students. Cheating on tests, in particular, seemed to be an equal-opportunity form of academic dishonesty; no between-student differences emerged for the characteristics explored in this study.

Certain behaviors were notably more widespread than others, however. Within subcategories, behaviors that might be considered minor (e.g. finding out questions in advance and copying several sentences) were more common than behaviors that might be considered acts of total substitution (e.g. having another student take one’s test and purchasing a paper online). Students and faculty may have different thresholds for what constitutes academic dishonesty (Craig, Federici, and Buehler 2010), though it is noteworthy that viewing one's intent as altruistic may cause a student’s threshold to shift (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, and Armstead 1996). Among the individual items in the survey, students most frequently engaged in behaviors involving other students, reflecting the possibility that interpersonal factors create normative contexts that endorse academic dishonesty (Yardley et al. 2009). Although these norms may be slow to change, they are based on educational environments and demands (Strange and Banning 2001), thus representing an area that faculty and administrators would be remiss to overlook. As perceptions about academic dishonesty and misconduct vary – across students (Schmelkin et al. 2008), departments (Louis, Anderson, and Rosenberg 1995), institutions (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel 2001), and cultures (Waugh et al. 1995) – policies and educational interventions should address social aspects of academic dishonesty and strive for clear, comprehensive definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

The larger issue is that the college context demands that students engage in effective academic behaviors and strategies, though many students have difficulty meeting these demands (Cukras 2006). Cross-nationally, many students view education from a consumer mindset, with tuition dollars directed toward the purchase of a degree rather than learning itself (Brown 2011). As it bypasses typical self-management and learning processes, dishonesty appears to be a maladaptive response to academic challenge. In the context of such behavioral patterns becoming the norm, pivotal questions arise regarding the extent to which learning truly occurs within the walls of academia (e.g. Arum and Roksa 2011).

That college students have not learned how to learn is often overlooked, placing unreasonable levels of challenge on students, often without corresponding support
Guiding students to respond to academic challenge adaptively may cultivate value for learning. Learning to implement effective self-management and study strategies (e.g., goal-setting and outlining) may lessen the need to make false excuses or plagiarize, which were significantly more likely among students in the study strategies course. Previous research also suggests instructors may discourage academic dishonesty by emphasizing progress (Anderman, Griesinger, and Westerfield 1998), highlighting the course's relevance (Owunwanne, Rustagi, and Dada 2010), and providing multiple forms of assessment (Craig, Federici, and Buehler 2010).

As higher education brings together students from diverse backgrounds and of varied preparation, students need to be instructed on the definition of academic dishonesty at a given institution and on behaviors that can be used to avoid academic missteps. Acknowledging different forms of academic dishonesty and understanding which students may be more likely to engage in certain behaviors may assist instructors, administrators, and policy-makers in determining appropriate audiences and content for interventions. Instruction on integrity can occur during new student orientation (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel 2001), the first days of classes (Broeckelman-Post 2008) or in first-year experience programs (Hutton 2006). For students who transfer from one institution to another, it is important to readdress the topic. Grasping the complexity of academic dishonesty enables faculty to enhance how discussions, lectures, and syllabi frame the issue. Beyond helping students develop adaptive behaviors, proactive efforts may also mute the common excuse of "I didn't know it was cheating" (Johnson and Martin 2005, 50).

Our findings suggest most students self-regulate effectively enough not to participate in blatant academic dishonesty, yet other forms of academic dishonesty seem rampant. Policies and educational interventions may make the greatest impact by considering ambiguous aspects of academic dishonesty. Our study provides support for clearly defining expectations for academic integrity, particularly when assessment and disciplinary actions are contingent upon conceptions of misconduct that may not be held in common. Future research will shed light on the motivation operating beneath the surface of what we have observed in this study.

Limitations

A limitation of the present study is that it identified surface characteristics of students who engaged in different forms of academic dishonesty; it did not measure students' perspectives of why such behaviors occurred. Our inferences regarding gender, course-enrollment, and grade differences are speculative in nature and should be used to promote additional inquiry into academic dishonesty, but we caution against using our results as a basis for assuming which students are engaging in academic dishonesty at a given institution. A second limitation is the dependence on self-report data. Although efforts were made to encourage honest and accurate responses, our data may have been subject to poor memory or social desirability. It is possible that students engaged in greater amounts of academically dishonest behavior than our results indicate. Finally, we conducted our study at a single university. High school students' views of academic dishonesty differ cross-nationally and cross-culturally (Klassen et al. 2009). Such differences will likely exist at the university level, and we encourage replication of the study in broader contexts.
References


