Building and Sustaining a Culture of Academic Integrity

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> What's important is getting ahead. … The better grades you have the better schools you get into, the better you're going to do in life. And if you learn to cut corners to do that, you're going to be saving yourself time and energy. In the real world, that's what's going to be going on. The better you do, that's what shows. It's not how moral you were in getting there. (Pavela, 2008)

This quote by a self-confessed cheater in a CNN interview suggests that there is a real need to build and sustain a culture of academic integrity in our institutions of higher education. But, as my major professor was fond of saying, "One example does not a theory make."

The purpose of this paper then is to set forth the facts that show why it is imperative to build and sustain a culture of academic integrity on our campuses and to provide some clues to create building blocks

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for that structure. My colleagues will elaborate on more specific factors that can contribute in positive ways toward the building and sustaining of a culture of academic integrity.

Cheating in our institutions of higher education has been studied since the mid-1960s (Bowers, 1964). Since then the topic has received intense scrutiny including what percentage of students self-report cheating, who cheats, why they cheat, contextual factors that either enhance or inhibit the behavior and what happens to those who are disciplined for violating our academic integrity policies (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2001; Sacks, 2008). Cheating has been studied not only on four-year campuses, but also at the K-12 level (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Stephens, 2004) and at two-year colleges (Callaway, 1998). The phenomenon has also been investigated internationally (Diekhoff, LeBeff, Shinohara, & Yasukawa, 1999; Gitanjali, 2004; Marsden, Carroll & O'Neill, 2005; Rawwas, Swaidan, & Isakson, 2007; Lin & Wen, 2007).

What these studies show is that cheating is rampant in our schools (Merritt, 2008) and on our campuses with 70% to 80% of our students self-reporting that they are engaged in the behavior in one form or another (Roig & Caso, 2005; Whitley, 1998; Callaway, 1998; Marsden, et al., 2005). Plagiarism seems to be the most popular form of academic dishonesty (Sacks, 2008; Whitley, 1998). Cheating begins in high school (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Fisher, 2007) and

carries over to college (McCabe, et al., 2001) and graduate school (Wajda-Johnston, Handal, Brawer & Fabricatore, 2001). The really tragic thing about these data is that it is estimated that only 3% to 7% of those who cheat are actually caught (Wright & Kelly, 1974; Singhal, 1982; Bunn, Caudill & Gropper, 1992)! One can only speculate what happens to those who cheat in college when they enter society.

Although studies show that men cheat more often than women (Marsden, et al., 2005; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Roig & Caso, 2005), McCabe (2001) has indicated that the differences between men and women seem to be "eroding over time"(p.41). However Whitley (2001) has found men more comfortable with their dishonesty.

As one would expect, students with lower GPAs are more likely to cheat (Cizek, 1999) as are students with lower SAT or ACT scores (Kelly & Worell, 1978). It has been suggested that students with lesser academic abilities may engage in cheating because they are not prepared for college level work (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005) or " have more to gain and less to lose" (McCabe & Trevino, 1997, p. 381).

Younger students seem to engage in acts of academic dishonesty more often than older students (Callaway, 1998; Cizik, 2003; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Whitley, 1998). Age seems to be a better predictor than class standing, although the effects of age "…

are difficult to detect [since] in most studies age is restricted to a five-year span" (Crown & Spiller, 1998, p. 689). Personal attitudes toward risk-taking (Blankenship & Whitley, 2000; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005), impulsivity (Angel, 2004), and deviant behavior (Bolin, 2004) each have been found to be related to cheating. There is no agreement about the relationship of cheating to major area of study (Bates, Davies, Murphy & Boone, 2005; Bowers, 1964; Iyer & Eastman, 2006; Marsden, et al., 2005; McCabe & Trevino, 1993); however, it has been suggested that majors in which there are right and wrong answers and less interaction with faculty actually foster cheating (Pullen, Orloff, Casey & Payne, 2000).

International students have been studied by several scholars (Burns, Davis, Hoshino & Miller, 1998; Diekhoff, et al., 1999; Lin & Wen, 2007; Marsden, et al., 2005), and most believe that they should be studied separately as their concept of what constitutes academic dishonesty may be culturally different. Having taught in China and El Salvador, I would agree with this methodology. In El Salvador it was the norm for two or more persons to write a single thesis and submit it for credit for everyone. Plagiarism is thought of very differently in China than it is here.

Although it is important to have well written policies prohibiting academic dishonesty, policies standing alone do not seem to deter cheating (Callaway, 1998; Cole & McCabe, 1996; Wajda-

Johnston, et al., 2001). However, the more faculty know and understand the policy and the better informed they are of the process for dealing with academic dishonesty the more likely they are to try to prevent it and report it (Hard, Conway & Moran, 2006). But, the fact is that most faculty are unaware of institutional policies related to academic dishonesty and have not had any training in how to deal with such behavior (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2001). This is a clue for us in developing a culture of academic integrity. An additional clue is students' fear of punishment (not a very high level of moral reasoning), which seems to be a deterrent to cheating (Eskridge & Ames, 1993; Leming, 1980), but one that is a "dubious approach in a place called school" (Wire Side Chat, 2008).

McCabe and Trevino (1993) found that while there was less cheating at schools that had honor codes, one of the lowest levels of cheating took place at an institution that had no honor code and one of the highest levels of cheating took place at a school with a long tradition of an honor code. The authors found the school without the honor code had built a culture that conveyed the beliefs of faculty and administrators about the seriousness of cheating, communicated high expectations of integrity and encouraged students to become aware of academic integrity policies and conform to rules of proper conduct. At the honor code school on the other hand, the faculty and administrators failed to communicate the essence of its policies to

students and to indoctrinate students to the honor code culture (Pavela, 2008). Gallant and Drinan (2006) argue that there is an "overemphasis on honor codes" (p.856) and they constitute a "blind alley" (p.856). This may well be, but our clue is in setting the high expectations and standards of honor codes and actually communicating those standards and expectations to students and faculty. As McCabe and Trevino (1993) observed:

> An institution's ability to develop a **shared** understanding and acceptance of its academic integrity policies has a significant and substantive impact on student perceptions of their peers' behavior…Thus, programs aimed at distributing, explaining and gaining student and faculty acceptance of academic integrity policies may be particularly useful. (emphasis added) (pp. 533-534)

Another clue for us in building and sustaining a culture of academic integrity can be found in the reasons why students cheat. Bowers (1964) found that peer approval and the academic environment had the strongest relationship to cheating. The latter factor is evident in the McCabe and Trevino (1993) study finding that

the honor code school that failed to communicate its policies had one of the highest levels of academically dishonest behavior. These two factors are also supported by the research of Stephens (Fisher, 2004) who suggested that the strongest predictor of cheating in high school is the student's moral disengagement. Students who cheat neutralize personal responsibility by displacing it onto teachers and other students. Students rationalize by blaming teachers for being poor teachers or giving unfair tests and peers by saying "everyone is doing it". Stephens stated that students don't see cheating as a big thing "in a world filled with ongoing moral atrocities …" (Fisher, 2004, p.2). Evidence our self-confessed student cheater who believes cheating and cutting corners is the way it is in the real world.

Thus, it is imperative to build and sustain a culture of academic integrity and the research has provided us with several clues with which to construct this culture. A failure to attend to this imperative will simply encourage dishonesty in our institutions of higher education and our in our society.

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