2Redo

The Importance of Academic Honesty Policy 2

The learner read and understood academic integrity which refers to the school's or institution's

directives against forms of cheating and inappropriate behavior. Academic integrity is proposed

to uphold academic honesty, and discourage dishonesty. Whitley & Keith-Spiegel (2001)

emphasize that institutions have a major role in fostering academic integrity. Therefore, in their

view, "Every college and university must develop an academic integrity policy that fits its

mission, its study body and faculty" (p. 325). They present the following outline delineating the

essential elements of an effective academic policy that include statement of agreement.

The learner understood that the policy development-there should be policies developed for

students, faculty and student personnel administrators. And Students should be a part of the

development process and any modifications. This policy also begin with a statement informing

all members of the institution why academic integrity is valued.

The learner also agreed with specification of prohibitions and behavior--specific and clear

outlines of unacceptable behavior including cheating & plagiarism.

There’re specification for responsibilities-- of students, faculty, members and administrators-

obligations to promote academic integrity. Students must avoid acts of dishonesty. Faculty must

promote academic integrity in all areas including their syllabi. Administrators responsible for

conducting university business in a way that makes a commitment to integrity.

The other area mentioned is specification of resolutions--procedures is set forth in guidelines for

resolving suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

Specification of penalties--policies brought specific penalties imposed for policy infractions.

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An excerpts from education & remediation-provision must be made for educational sanctions for

students judged guilty of violations (Whitley, & Keith-Spiegel, 2001, pp. 326-329).

Honesty has often been viewed as the cornerstone of moral development upon which an

individual's moral character can be judged. It is the beginning of the slippery slope because as

we are often told, if you lie you cheat and if you cheat you steal. It is a no brainer that honesty is

preferable to dishonesty, cheating and stealing, at least in the usual context that we consider

them. The issue is that when we consider these concepts or precepts in relationship to academia

we are inferring moral implications. The problem of honesty whether it is in academia or in

general is that the phrase and concept is fraught with moral implications, interpretations and

limitations. Morality is yes or no; black or white; right or wrong. This understanding rather

takes away the contextual considerations that might be at play when we consider academic

honesty. Maybe the terms of the conversation should be about integrity and authenticity in

academia rather than honesty with its implications of moral affirmation and condemnation.

Integrity and authenticity are terms that imply a dynamic concept that is able to engage and deal

with the shades of grey inherent in a developmental concept.

Most educators would tend to view academic honesty/integrity as essential to the mission of

education. Integrity allows educators to validly assess and vouch for student learning and

academic progress. It is a way for academic institutions to protect its product both the

intellectual property of others and the quality of education they offer which would benefit both

the student and society. Speaking of education as a commodity may upset some academics who

sometimes endow the process of education and its institutions with almost sacred attributes,

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hence the conversations and upset surrounding the topic of academic honesty and integrity. The

challenge is to discover ways to protect institutional identity. This leads us to view this topic as

white and black – good vs. evil – honesty vs. dishonesty. Yet in the midst of the discussion of

academic honesty, one has to admit that social mores change. That attitudes and cognitions

concerned with moral issues do not remain the same from year to year or generation to

generation is not a startling reality. Times change and our attitudes about what constitutes a

moral life also changes much to the chagrin of those responsible for keeping the lines drawn in

the sand clear. Though it is hard to argue from a moral perspective, let alone from a psychosocial

one, that honesty, integrity and authenticity are not good inter and intra personally and socially it

is also hard to argue that societies perspective and understanding of these issues are not

continually changing. Both external and internal forces are shaping our understanding of

honesty and what is required to be an honest learner in life and in academia. In other words, we

can question the effectiveness of questioning the place of honesty and integrity in academia as if

the issue is divorced from the need for honesty and integrity in our private, social and civic lives.

We could also question whether to some degree colleges and in fact, all academia has to adapt

their honor codes to fit present realities and have a responsibility to not only educate students

along those lines but to aid their formation as responsible citizen (Iyer, Eastman, 2008). It may

not be enough to have codes of conduct that tell the student that honesty is good and cheating is

bad without defining the terms and conditions and teaching the desired behaviors. Academic

dishonesty or lack of academic integrity has included such behaviors as academic fraud, cheating

and the theft of intellectual property and ideas. These categories of academic dishonesty are not

new however, the internet has made the methods employed to achieve them easier and because

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of easy access made them seem less serious. Digital theft, fraud and plagiarism is seen as less

serious somehow than the theft from hard-copy sources. Briefly, the definition of plagiarism

involves the unauthorized and unacknowledged use of another's words or ideas. Cheating

involves the gaining of advantage through the use and possession of unauthorized materials.

Fraud is to misrepresent or fabricate data in academic writing and research. Another form of

dishonesty that often makes the list is the resubmission of work that has already been given

credit. Finally, is knowingly aiding and abetting another's dishonesty or engaging in illegal

collaboration. It is generally acknowledged that incidents and percentages of student dishonesty

have been on the rise in both on traditional and on-line campuses (Iyer, Eastman, 2008). Resent

research puts the figure at 90% of college students who admit to having committed some serious

(self-determined) act of academic dishonesty and that these flaws in moral reasoning are apt to

continue forward into the student's future careers. The upshot is that we as a society, as a

culture, loose insofar as we become a culture that places less value on honesty or personal

integrity.

Academic dishonesty is not a black or white issue. It is contextual to the extent that there is no

singular circumstance, cognition, attitude or method of moral reasoning that accounts for

academic dishonesty in all institutions and students. The reasons and the nuances of those

reasons are as varied as the students and their individual differences. Among them are the need

to educate students and provide guidance concerning what is academic integrity and formation as

to what that should look like in the academic life of the student. Educational institutions cannot

assume that all students know and adhere to a single standard of academic honesty and must take

some responsibility to educate and provide formational opportunities that at least make them

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aware of the standards and how they are to be applied to academic life (Larken, Francis, 2012).

In order to insure compliance students must be provided with the opportunity to understand and

accept the standards as they apply to them.

The sanction system must be carefully crafted and applied and one would have to ultimate

question its effectiveness. Like with most things in life that affect individual's cognitions, beliefs

and attitudes, system that rely heavily on negative sanctions instead of positive sanctions and

reinforcement the compliance results will be mixed. Students should be provided with enough

information to understand that academic integrity is in their personal best interest, for example,

the need to ensure that the resultant degree is not devalued by dishonest academic behavior.

Ethical guidelines regarding academic integrity need to be enforced with both the carrot and the

stick. Another consideration in academic dishonesty is the climate that exists in the institution.

Research shows that students are more likely to be dishonest if there is a perceived climate that

accepts dishonesty on the part of administrators, faculty and peers (Comas-Forgas, Sureda-

Negre, 2010).

It would also behoove us to consider the erosion in how honesty is viewed in our present culture.

Often honesty is seen as a personal weakness in a culture that values winning at all cost.

Dishonesty is often viewed as an acceptable means to success in the business world. Dishonesty

becomes just another tool to success and informs students' attitudes and cognitions about the

place and need to be honest in their personal and academic lives. Academic integrity is also

being challenged by the changing moral values of our culture as a whole. For example, these

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days it is not unusual for parents to protect and go to bat for dishonest students. We regularly

hear about and experience unethical business practices that are justified based on the favorable

outcomes for the individual (Comas-Forgas, Sureda-Negre, 2010). Part of the real problem is

that honesty is not a principal that is as highly valued as we presume it once was and personal

and academic integrity is being redefined continually on a situational basis. It is questionable

whether you can legislate or codify morality in such a way as to guarantee compliance or

conformity. Finally, this issue is not influenced by the moral development of the students.

Studies indicate that students are just as likely to engage in what are viewed as dishonest

practices whether they are at Kohlberg's pre-conventional or post-conventional stage of moral

development and reasoning.

What we may have to face is that the informational rich internet age in which we live has had a

profound effect on how we view the value of words and other intellectual property (Larken,

Francis, 2012). When we can broadcast and publish our thoughts at the push of a button and

have access to not only a seemingly endless stream of information and the thoughts of others,

there may be a tendency not to consider plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty with the same

seriousness as students once did (Comas-Forgas, Sureda-Negre, 2010). The same is true for

intellectual and emotional privacy when technology has the capacity to take our lives viral.

Universities in establishing codes of ethics concerning academic integrity have the daunting

challenge of trying to engage students on these topics who actually may have no visceral

connection to the content. The times have changed and for the most part, students view our

concepts of academic honesty as throwbacks to another time.

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There is no doubt, as stated earlier, that academic integrity is vital to the educational process.

There are compelling reasons that affect the interest of academic institutions, students and

society to encourage pro-social behaviors and attitudes and that includes a level of honesty in our

interactions that can assure trust in our relationships. Universities have a serious interest to

safeguard the integrity of the educational process and to ensure the value of the degrees it

confers. One would think that students would share this interest having invested thousands in

their education. The question remains what can be done to bridge the gap between the academic

institutions need to ensure academic honesty and integrity and students cognitions, beliefs and

attitudes about these concepts.

The two most often used approaches seem to be the use of sanctions that range from affecting

student’s grade to suspension or dismissal depending on the seriousness of the infraction and the

implementation of honor codes that attempt to garner student compliance and conformity.

Neither of these approaches fully addresses the problem nor in general lead to significant

advances in the adherence and understanding to the principle of academic integrity among

students. Some students spend energy and time finding new ways to circumvent these

approaches. There are approaches that show promise which are formational and educational.

One is to engage in the development of what Kohlberg calls just communities where institutions

as a whole grapple with questions of justice as it applies to academic integrity but also life itself

(The Just Community approach to moral education in theory and practice, 1985). Students are

engaged in the development of a social contract that defines academic and personal values, rights

and responsibilities. Authority, control and moral thinking become an internal process that is

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directed and shared outwardly with the wider community. This may be more effective and

preferable to honor systems that are developed and directed from the top down. It may also be a

way of students and institutions taking into account and/or challenging changing moral values

holding on to what is best and necessary and letting go what has become obsolete (The Just

Community approach to moral education in theory and practice, 1985). What may be important

is to open the dialog and make the concept of academic integrity one that is important, fluid,

relevant and worthy of everyone's, in the educational community, interest and commitment. It

reinforces the need, even on the university level, to teach behaviors.

In the end, the old saying that if you lie you cheat and if you cheat you will steal probably holds

some truth. It is important for many significant reasons to draw a moral and ethical line in the

sand. However, if we expect compliance in the least or to aid in the student's formation and

education on this important ethical issue, we must be willing to change our approach and admit

that morality and ethics may not be etched in stone and a matter of black or white responses. We

will learn to adjust our thinking to new realities, times and circumstances and see the shades of

grey.

Thus, student’s plagiarism may be becoming less common as more and more colleges and

universities adopt plagiarism-detection software, such as Turnitin, a product of a company

named iParadigms. Thousands of colleges both in the United States and abroad have acquired

licenses, at an annual cost of about 80 cents per enrolled student, to use the program. The

program digitizes each student's paper, uploads it into the Turnitin database, and searches the

database for matches. The Turnitin database is actually a collection of databases. One, the

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equivalent of Google's database, is a complete and continuously updated copy of the World Wide

Web. Others contain archived materials from the Web, contents of other publicly available

databases-and all the student papers that have been submitted to Turnitin for a plagiarism

check (p.81).

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