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Report from the Templeton Fellows (conclusion)

The ASJA *Law and Policy Report* and our sister publications have been invited to publish recent findings from a group of accomplished researchers supported by the John Templeton Foundation and the Center for Academic Integrity. We conclude our coverage with commentary from Scott A. Wowra, Ashley Mouberry-Sieman, and Jason M. Stephens. Pertinent abstracts are reprinted before each set of responses. Readers may also want to refer to the researchers' "practical advice for educators" essays published in 246 *LPR* 07.12.

Moral Identities, Social Anxiety, and Academic Dishonesty among American College Students

By Scott A. Wowra, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The present investigation examined how reports of academic cheating related to students' emphasis on their moral identities and their sensitivity to social evaluation. Seventy college students at a large southeastern university completed a battery of surveys. Symptoms of social anxiety were positively correlated with recall of academic cheating. Additionally, relative to students who placed less importance on their moral identities, students who placed more importance on their moral identities recalled significantly fewer instances of cheating. In summary, these findings suggest that students are less likely to cheat on their school work when they place greater emphasis on their moral identity and are less sensitive to social evaluation.

Pavela: Have you encountered any programs or initiatives that have been successful in moving any significant numbers of students from the "Expedient" to "Principled" groups? If so, how do those programs work? Is helping students make such a transition a reasonable goal?

Wowra: Most moral training seems to occur earlier in life, through parent-child interactions, socialization with peers, religious practice, and civic involvement. By the time students enter college, we tend to assume that they have already received enough moral education and shift focus to their professional development. Professional ethics, such as how to avoid plagiarism, often receive cursory review, if they are addressed at all. I think ignoring moral education at the post-secondary level is a mistake. By explicitly engaging college students in ethical dialogue, they will continue to grow as moral citizens. Helping students transition from expediency to principled thinking is a reasonable goal, and I believe it is one of the basic mandates of a liberal education.

Pavela: You identify collateral patterns of behavior associated with cheating. How is this information useful to classroom teachers? College administrators?

Wowra: Deceptive coping tactics, such as stealing to impress a friend or cheating on a test to avoid embarrassment, are open to cognitive-behavioral intervention. College professors and administrators should engage students in constructive dialogue regarding the motives for deception, such as greed, pride, fear, and sympathy. This activity is often referred to as "cognitive labeling." By creating a cognitive interpretation of a deceptive event, students are better able to understand the reasons they use deception to cope across social contexts. I recently presented data to high school students illustrating a positive correlation between academic dishonesty and lying to avoid embarrassment. A member of the audience confided to me later, "I never thought about that before, that lying to my friends and cheating are connected." Armed with this knowledge, teachers and administrators can guide students through a process of replacing deceptive coping strategies with honest coping strategies.

Pavela: We might be able to convince students at the cognitive level that academic dishonesty is socially and individually harmful, but how can this message be given any emotional or affective impact likely to change behavior?

Wowra: Guilt is a moral emotion tied to empathy, according to social psychologist June Tangney. We tend to feel guilty, for example, if we unjustly harm another person. A student who violates a moral prescription, such as cheating on a test, is likely to experience guilt if he or she believes that action harms others. Students often neutralize their guilt over cheating by thinking, “no one will ever find out.” Professors and administrators should confront these neutralization tactics by requiring students to write essays that force them to consider the emotional consequences of their actions. Essay questions along this line include, “How would my parents feel if they found out I cheated on a test?” “How would I feel if my parents found out I cheated on a paper?”

Pavela: What are the implications of your research for the development of academic integrity programs and initiatives, like honor codes?

Wowra: A school honor code creates and reinforces a collective moral identity. That is, students who embrace an honor code perceive that they are part of a larger moral community that holds them accountable for their actions. My research focuses on how a moral identity develops and is personally experienced. We still don't know much about what a “moral identity” represents or how to measure it. My research conceptualizes the moral identity along a continuum of expedient to principled beliefs, and I have worked with other psychologists to create a survey that quantifies the moral identity into something we can measure. If we can generate a reliable and valid measure of the moral identity, we can compare colleges with an honor code against colleges without an honor code to see whether these codes make a difference in the development of students' sense of moral self.

Academic dishonesty across the transition from high school to college.

By Ashley Mouberry-Sieman

ABSTRACT

Much of the existing research on academic dishonesty is focused on examining high school or college students' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors at one fixed point in time. Longitudinal cohort-based research on academic dishonesty is virtually non-existent due to the fact that longitudinal research is costly, time consuming, and difficult to manage. However, despite these inherent challenges, the insight gained from longitudinal analysis is unique in that it sheds light on how student attitudes and behaviors change over time and across educational settings. This study was unique in that it examined the issue of academic dishonesty across the transition from high school to college. This study was conducted in three phases. The first phase consisted of a 21-item pre-test questionnaire, which was administered during the spring of 2004 to a cohort of 240 high school seniors attending an elite public residential high school on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Phase one yielded a response rate of 15%. Phase two consisted of an identical 21-item questionnaire, which was administered to the 36 respondents from phase one, during the fall of 2005 after they had completed one full year of college. This phase yielded a response rate of 58.8%. Phase three consisted of a small pool of 5 students who agreed to participate in individual qualitative follow-up interviews late during the fall 2005.

This study found that some of the students included in this study changed their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to academic dishonesty as they made transition from high school to college. Additional research in this area will serve to fill a key gap in our existing knowledge base and will increase our understanding of age appropriate strategies for addressing dishonesty and promoting integrity within all levels of our educational system.

Pavela: Beyond what you've already told us, what else do college teachers need to know about the attitudes of new students (fresh from high school) toward academic integrity?

Mouberry-Sieman: First and foremost, college teachers need to know that not all first year students arrive at college with a common understanding of what constitutes academic dishonesty. Furthermore, not all students share the same attitudes and beliefs about the value of academic integrity.

The college setting may provide some students with their first introduction to an honor code or to an official set of standards related to academic conduct. Therefore, institutions need to provide clear and detailed expectations for students about proper academic conduct early in the college experience.

Georgetown University provides a great model for how to send a clear and consistent message to all members of the academic community through the use of its "Scholarly Research and Academic Integrity" tutorial. This tutorial can be found at:

<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/resource/tutorials.htm>.

This tutorial not only states the rules and expectations for proper academic conduct but also shows students how to use campus resources such as those that are provided by the library. Student mastery of important concepts is measured through a series of multiple-choice questions that are based on realistic situations that a college student may encounter.

Georgetown requires all freshmen and transfer students to successfully complete the tutorial before they are allowed to register for a second term of classes. A tutorial like this one is a great first step towards creating a shared understanding of the campus's commitment to academic integrity.

Teachers should also know that, in general, most college students want to be honest in their academic work. Most academic cheating occurs during a point of desperation. College students, in general, and first year students, in particular, feel so much pressure to succeed that they can easily become overwhelmed and tempted to engage in behaviors that they know are wrong. As educators we should not only work to educate our students about our policies and expectations but we should also work to help students develop essential skills (i.e., time management, critical thinking, etc...) that will help them to avoid going down the path towards desperation. The sooner we acknowledge warning signs (i.e., absences from class, improper citation in drafts, late assignments, etc...) the sooner we can steer students back on the right track toward success.

Educators should also work to help develop student confidence in their ability to produce quality and meaningful academic work. Many of the first year students I've talked with have expressed

feeling paranoid or fearful during that first semester of school. They are constantly reminded of the academic integrity policies and the severe consequences associated with breaking the policies. As a result, in their attempt to comply with the expectations put forth, they go to an extreme and over use citations in their work. While I agree that setting clear expectations is important, I do not advocate for motivating students by fear. While this may be the only approach that works for some students I do not think that it is an effective approach for the majority of them, especially if student learning is the goal that we are trying to achieve. We need to make it more understandable for students, especially first year students, to fail or to make a mistake. I think that the way that assignments are structured and evaluated can have a large impact on how students perceive success. For example, a professor could ask students to submit un-graded drafts of papers or un-graded problem sets for feedback (by teachers or peers) prior to submitting an assignment that will be counted towards the final grade.

Teachers must also take into consideration that first year college students are typically developmentally different from upperclassmen. Research on moral reasoning among college students has generally found that moral reasoning abilities are positively correlated with school classification (i.e., students at higher grade levels have higher levels of moral reasoning than students at lower grade levels). Therefore, instructors should work to provide students with developmentally appropriate challenges. Teachers should take every opportunity to engage students in discussions about the implications of academic dishonesty and challenge students to think critically about how dishonest behaviors by one person or a group of people can negatively impact others.

Finally, research has shown that students may not think that academic dishonesty in non-major courses is as serious of an issue as it is in major courses. Most first year student course loads consist of general college/ non-major courses. Knowing this, teachers of first year students should work to address the importance of academic integrity in all courses. The teachers should also work to help student realize how the learning in a general college/non-major courses is applicable to other areas of coursework and life.

Pavela: Are most students who fall into the habit of cheating in high school destined to repeat that pattern in college?

Mouberry-Sieman: While research has shown that prior academic misconduct is a strong predictor of future academic misconduct (Whitley, 2002), I do not believe that students who cheat in high school are necessarily destined to repeat the same pattern in college. Old habits may be hard to break but they can be broken.

Many students will argue that cheating is simply a crime of opportunity. Students who cheated in high school may not cheat in college if the opportunity to do so is not available. Therefore, college teachers should work to remove obvious opportunities for students to engage in dishonest behaviors.

Another factor that comes into play here is social norms. Research suggests that a major predictor of academic dishonesty is students' perceptions of social norms that support dishonest behaviors (Whitley, 2002). During the transition from high school to college there is a great opportunity to introduce students to a new set of standards and social norms. Messages about the norms of the campus community can be sent in a variety of ways. Many institutions choose to send a copy of the honor code and community standards to the students along with their admission materials, while others choose to introduce the honor code or integrity policies during

orientation or at convocation. Whatever the method of communication, students do not only need to hear from administrators, they also need to hear from students. Students may have cheated in high school because cheating was an accepted behavior in their peer group. In college, students often form new peer groups. If students immediately get the message from their peers that academic dishonesty is not acceptable in college it is likely that this will have a positive impact on their behavior.

Pavela: What is the faculty role in promoting academic integrity, given the importance of peers in shaping student perspectives?

Mouberry-Sieman: Teachers need to lead students by example. Teachers not only need to communicate expectations clearly they need to make academic integrity an integral part of class discussion. Teachers cannot simply include the honor code on a syllabus and hope that students get the message. Students need to see and understand that teachers take the honor code and academic integrity seriously. If students perceive that teachers do not take it seriously (i.e., by not holding students accountable or by structuring exams poorly) then students have no incentive to take it seriously themselves. For an honor code to truly take root it needs to be supported by the entire campus - teachers, students, and administrators.

Institutions should also educate students about *their* role in promoting academic integrity. Students have a responsibility to not only act with integrity themselves but to promote integrity among their peers. The biggest obstacle for students is peer accountability. It is extremely difficult for a student to confront a peer about inappropriate behavior. It simply goes against the peer culture and norms. As educators we need to help students understand why integrity is a value worth standing up for, even if it requires confronting a peer's negative behavior. We need to help students understand the importance of peer accountability and help them develop the skills necessary to engage in difficult conversations with one another.

Pavela: We might be able to convince students at the cognitive level that academic dishonesty is socially and individually harmful, but how can this message be given any emotional or affective impact likely to change behavior?

Mouberry-Sieman To answer this question I will again refer to a program that is being implemented by Georgetown University. As part of their judicial process, Georgetown students who are found responsible for academic dishonesty are given the opportunity to participate in a sanction reduction program. Last spring, I had the opportunity to hear a student speak who was participating in this program. One of the steps in her sanction reduction program was to publicly accept responsibility for her actions and to discuss with her peers the consequences of her past behavior and the resulting lessons learned. The student talked about the circumstances surrounding her decision to engage in an academically dishonest behavior, the experience of going in front of the judicial board, and the immediate and personal impact that being found responsible for engaging in academic dishonesty had on her life. She not only had her diploma withheld, she also lost a fellowship that she had been awarded and she had a job offer that she had already accepted rescinded. Hearing a student talk about the real consequences she felt as a result of her decision to engage in dishonest behaviors was very powerful. I believe that if more students were given the opportunity, perhaps during orientation or a first year seminar, to hear from a peer about the real consequences of academic dishonesty they would certainly think twice before engaging in dishonest behaviors.

I also think teachers should engage students in conversations about how academic dishonesty in college translates to dishonest behavior in the professional world. This is something that is not done often enough. By providing real examples of situations where people have been harmed

(i.e., loss of jobs, loss of life, loss of reputation, etc...) because of an employee's decision not to act with integrity teachers will help students understand the importance of integrity in all aspects of life.

Pavela: Students often weigh the perceived costs and benefits of cheating or plagiarism. How can that “weighing” process be used to promote academic integrity?

Mouberry-Sieman: Educators need to work to help students broaden how they define costs and benefits. Students often fail to recognize the costs associated with the loss of personal integrity. Students also fail to consider the costs associated with the negative social impact of academic misconduct. At the same time, students do not give appropriate weight to the value of honest work. Adding these factors into the equation will help to tip the scales in this decision making model towards acting with integrity, even when the risk of getting caught is close to zero (i.e., homework assignments, unproctored exams, etc...). In the end, we want our students to make the decision to act with integrity even when no one else is looking.

References

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Missing Links in Academic Integrity: Educational Implications and Future Directions

ABSTRACT

By Jason M. Stephens, Ph.D.

The present study provides a comparative analysis of students' beliefs and behaviors related to six analogous pairs of conventional and digital forms of academic cheating. Results from an online survey of undergraduates at two universities (N=1,305) suggest that students use conventional means more often than digital means to copy homework, collaborate when it is not permitted, and copy from others during an exam. However, engagement in digital plagiarism (cutting and pasting from the Internet) has surpassed conventional plagiarism. Students also reported using digital “cheat sheets” (i.e. notes stored in a digital device) to cheat on tests more often than conventional “cheat sheets.” Overall, 32% of students reported no cheating of any kind, 18.2% reported using only conventional methods, 4.2% reported using only digital methods, and 45.6% reported using both conventional and digital methods to cheat. “Digital only” cheaters were less likely than “conventional only” cheaters to report assignment cheating, but the former was more likely than the latter to report engagement in plagiarism. Students who cheated both conventionally and digitally were significantly different from the other three groups in terms of their self-reported engagement in all three types of cheating behavior. Students in

this “both” group also had the lowest sense of moral responsibility to refrain from cheating and the greatest tendency to neutralize that responsibility. The scientific and educational implications of these findings are discussed in this study.

Pavela: The Internet apparently enhances opportunities for academic dishonesty, but does it also convey any explicit or implicit message about whether academic dishonesty is acceptable or normative? Is there an Internet “culture” academics must address? If so, how?

Stephens: The Internet, and digital technologies more generally, have created faster, more effective, and, in some cases, novel tools for students seeking to plagiarize or cheat in some manner. These tools, of course, do not cause academic dishonesty but they do greatly facilitate its commission. I don’t think this conveys any direct message about the acceptability or morality of academic dishonesty. However, the fact that the Internet and other digital technologies (cameral phones, graphic calculators, and other PDAs) greatly expedite the execution many forms of dishonesty, especially plagiarism, may affect students’ moral perception, judgment and behavior. For example, many students do not attribute the same authorial or copywrite status to Web sites and resources as they do printed books and journals. This may then obscure students’ judgment about the acceptability of using this material without proper attribution. To some extent this is part of the Internet “culture” that academics must address. Although the Internet has “grown up” considerably over the past fifteen years and with it the level of discourse about “intellectual property” and “proper use,” there are still many people who view the Internet (or, more precisely, all the content on the Internet) as “free”; free, that is, of intellectual ownership and copyright protection. This is the kind of attitude that faculty need to address; they must help students understand that Internet has become a legitimate, even indispensable, tool in teaching and scholarship. They must also give students the “tools” – such as effective search techniques/engines (like Google Scholar) and proper citation procedures – for using the Internet.

Pavela: Are there ways to turn the power and reach of the Internet to our pedagogical advantage?

Stephens: I think this already happening. Companies like Google, who have created Google Scholar, are making the Internet an easier and more effective academic tool. WebCT, Vista, Blackboard, etc. are also contributing to the revolution in online teaching and learning. With respect to combating the downside of the Internet (i.e., cut-and-paste plagiarism), programs like Turnitin.com are making detection of dishonesty quite simple.

Pavela: We might be able to convince students at the cognitive level that academic dishonesty is socially and individually harmful, but how can this message be given any emotional or affective impact likely to change behavior?

Stephens: The supposition in your question – that affect is more important than cognition in determining behavior – has been supported by numerous studies. With respect to academic dishonesty, many students believe that cheating is wrong but report doing it anyway. Part of this disconnect between the (cognitive) judgment that “cheating is wrong” and the enactment of the behavior is explained by the fact that students no longer feel guilty about cheating. What happened to the guilt? Well, there are a number of explanations that involve both cognitive and

affective processes (it is, in reality, very difficult to disentangle thoughts and feelings). First and foremost, students get habituated to cheating and doing so become de-sensitized to it. I have had many students tell me (in individual interviews and focus groups) that they felt guilty when the first started cheating (often in middle school) but no longer do. Over time, with repeated cheating, these students develop a vast repertoire of “neutralizing” techniques. Neutralization is essentially another name for rationalization. Psychologically speaking, the primary function of neutralization or rationalization is to neutralize (displace, minimize or negate altogether) any sense of personal responsibility (and ultimately guilt) that one might feel for violating societal conventions or moral principles. Research indicates that the most common technique that students employ is displacement of responsibility; they blame their teachers for their cheating (usually with charges of poor instruction or unfair assignments/assessments). Cheating is also neutralized or rationalized through diffusion of responsibility; students say everyone else is doing it and that schooling (the quest for high grades and college or graduate school admissions) has become a “cheat or be cheated” game. It’s important to note here, that these neutralizing techniques are not completely baseless rationalizations. Poor instruction, unfair tests, the fierce competition for grades, and widespread cheating are features of today’s educational landscape. The question you ask is how can educators, in the face of this reality, engender (or revive) in students a strong sense of personal responsibility for refraining from cheating. The single best approach is through the development and implementation of institutional honor codes and councils. When done well, these create a community of learners that understand, value and respect academic integrity. They also provide a fair, clear and often student-governed process for addressing academic dishonesty when it does occur.

Pavela: What are the implications of your research for honor codes and other efforts to involve students in resolving academic integrity allegations and educating their peers?

Stephens: Much of my own research has focused on the thought-action problem described above. And, as alluded to above, I think the best way close the gap between students’ beliefs and behaviors related to cheating is to create a community of learners that understands, values and respects academic integrity. The biggest challenge we face in ameliorating cheating is not students’ belief that it is right but rather their tendency to neutralize any personal responsibility for doing so. Honor codes and related efforts are effective because they clearly communicate what constitutes cheating, that it is wrong to do, and that students are personally responsible (and “on their honor” at institutions with traditional honor codes) to refrain from cheating. At some institutions, students are not only responsible for their regulating their own cheating but also that of their peers; that is, they must confront (though not necessarily report) students whom they suspect of or have seen cheating. I should point out here that it doesn’t necessarily take the creation of a formal honor code to change the culture of an institution so that embodies and reflects a shared valuing of and commitment to academic integrity. What is necessary is a gathering of the whole community, with all stakeholders (students, faculty, and administrators) having a voice and investment in the process. Students need to play a central role in creating, implementing, and governing any policies and procedures related to the promotion of academic integrity and the sanctioning of its violation. This includes educational or inculcation efforts designed to bring newly matriculated into the fold.

Pavela: To what extent does the broader American culture promote academic dishonesty?

Stephens: Many scholars and commentators have lamented the changes in social and moral

values (e.g., increases in individualism and materialism accompanied by decreases in social commitment and political participation) that have occurred over the past several decades. The most comprehensive barometer of these shifts among adolescents comes from the nearly 40 year old Cooperative Institutional Resource Program conducted by Alexander Astin and his colleagues at UCLA. Their research indicates that the vast majority of today's students entering college are oriented toward becoming "very well off financially" (approximately 80% say this is a "very important" or "essential" goal) while only a minority are seeking to "develop a meaningful philosophy of life" (approximately 35% say this is a "very important" or "essential" goal). This pattern is almost a perfect mirror image of the goals of entering Freshmen in late 1960s, when the majority regarded higher education as a journey of personal, intellectual and moral growth and not merely a means to social status and material wealth. These shifts are important because goals and values serve to motivate (direct and energize) behavior, and there is little doubt that growth of academic cheating over the past four decades can be at least partially attributed to this broader shift away from developing "meaning" and toward acquiring wealth. Cheating, after all, is a viable strategy for students who are primarily interested in the extrinsic goals or rewards (e.g., grades, degrees, money, status, etc.) associated with academic success. Conversely, cheating makes little sense for students who are primarily interested in developing their understanding or mastering new skills. Extrinsic and intrinsic goals are not mutually exclusive and many students value and pursue both simultaneously. These distinct goals, however, can conflict and produce dilemmas. As noted above, many students believe that cheating is wrong but make a conscious choice to do it anyway in order meet the pressures to keep up or get ahead. For many students today, getting an A is more important than morality. Their intrinsic understanding and acknowledgment that cheating is wrong is trumped by their pursuit of A's and the extrinsic rewards associated with academic "success." This value orientation or ordering, and the widespread problem of academic cheating associated with it, is not simply a product of "bad" students who don't know right from wrong. There are broader social and cultural forces at play that affect the behavior of both adolescents and adults in our society. From the real-life trials of Martha Stewart, Andrew Fastow, and Ken Lay to the televised tribulations of popular reality shows such as Joe Millionaire (a man who masquerades as a multi-millionaire in hopes of marrying a fetching young woman who, it seems, wouldn't otherwise have him), we live in a culture where lying, stealing, and deceiving have become the commonplace means that our icons of success use to advance their personal wealth and power. The message to our children and adolescents seems clear: *material success comes before moral integrity; doing well is more important than doing good.* This disconcerting message – its evolution and affect on the norms and practices of broad range of sectors in our society (education, business, politics, etc.) – is well-described in David Callahan's recent best seller, *The cheating culture: Why more Americans are doing wrong to get ahead.* As Callahan's work reveals (and daily news releases remind us), cheating is not a problem that is confined to nor created by adolescents. It is a complex sociological and psychological problem that seems to pervade nearly every aspect of our society. With this in mind, academic cheating among students at all levels is best understood as a reflection and not determinant of societal trends and cultural values. Accordingly, schools alone cannot remedy the problem. They can and must, however, act to ameliorate it.

"Hear the case before you decide it."

-Alfred P. Murrah, (Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit and Director of the Federal Judicial Center)
