



Surveying the extent of involvement in online academic dishonesty (e-dishonesty) related practices among university students and the rationale students provide: One university's experience

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ABSTRACT

This study reports data from a Midwestern university, investigating the extent of involvement in online academic dishonesty practices (e-dishonesty) among students and the rationale they provided. Involvement in and rationale for e-dishonesty was studied across individual variables including academic level, primary field of study, taking the university's academic integrity tutorial, and taking online and hybrid courses. A total of 1153 students participated in the study by completing a 44 item questionnaire. The findings indicate that the extent of involvement in e-dishonesty practices was significantly greater among freshmen than graduate students in most of the subscales of the survey. In addition, the primary field of study demonstrated a significant relationship between involvement in e-dishonesty and the rationale for e-dishonesty. Students in education and the social sciences reported of the least involvement in e-dishonesty; engineering and physical sciences the most. Completing the university's academic integrity tutorial did not significantly affect e-dishonesty practices while taking online or hybrid courses had some significant effect on e-dishonesty. The results highlight the need for early intervention concerning academic integrity followed by an ongoing and consistent effort throughout students' undergraduate and graduate experience.

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1. Introduction

The technological developments occasioned by the rise of the Internet have enabled increased ease and access to information. The resources made available through the Internet open a world of possibilities for use or misuse. Studies in the past decade indicate that the use of the Internet facilitates academic dishonesty (Akbulut et al., 2008; Odabaşı et al., 2007); Academic dishonesty includes such behaviors as fraudulence, plagiarism, falsification, delinquency and unauthorized help. Recent studies also highlight a new phenomenon called electronic dishonesty or e-dishonesty (Akbulut et al., 2008; Namlu & Odabasi, 2007). As the authors of these studies describe, e-dishonesty employs online resources to facilitate the same five unethical behaviors of all academic dishonesty. The main characteristic that differentiates e-dishonesty from traditional academic dishonesty is the ease of the use of Internet

services for such misconduct as buying academic works from online "paper mills," getting unauthorized help online, or copying and pasting easily from Internet resources (Odabaşı et al., 2007).

Various factors affect e-dishonesty such as the invisibility factor (Moor, 1985), the ease of misuse (Odabaşı et al., 2007), and a lack of awareness and education about the expectation of academic integrity (Odabaşı & Uysal, 2006). Much is written about academic dishonesty, but the literature provides limited studies about e-dishonesty. Even fewer studies exist that details the rationales provided by students for their e-dishonesty. This present study responds to this need by reporting and analyzing data collected at a university in the Midwestern United States. It is critical to determine the extent of university students' involvement and their rationale for e-dishonesty for prevention and to establish the common acceptance of academic integrity as a desirable value.

1.1. Academic dishonesty in higher education

For decades, many studies have been conducted about academic dishonesty in higher education. Bowers (1964) undertook a major study investigating students' involvement in academic misconduct, sampling of more than 5000 students from

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approximately 100 US campuses of all sizes. This study highlights that 75% of participating students admitted one of the 13 behaviors considered unethical, including using unauthorized crib notes, copying from other students during a test, using information resources not in the bibliography, or collaborating on assignments that were supposed to be done individually.

In a second comprehensive study, McCabe and Trevino (1993) surveyed 6000 students in 31 campuses in the US. They studied 14 unethical behaviors, 10 of which were identical to those of Bowers (1964). The results indicated that approximately 66% of students engaged in one of these misbehaviors. Both studies pointed out that student engagement in unethical behavior decreases whenever academic misconduct is socially unacceptable or strictly monitored. Bowers' (1964) study indicated that disapproval of cheating by peers reduces cheating. McCabe and Trevino's study underlined the importance of institutional structures for prevention. In their study, only 29% of students enrolling in schools with honor codes participated in academic misconduct far less frequent than the 53% of students in schools without an honor code.

McCabe (2005) reported the results of his longitudinal study conducted on 50,000 undergraduates representing more than 60 US campuses. On most of the campuses, 70% of the students admitted to cheating in some way. Approximately one-quarter of all students admitted serious cheating on a test in the previous year and fully half of all participating students admitted engage in academic misconduct at least one time. McCabe's study also reports on comparing changes in the incidence of academic misconduct. He highlighted that the number of students reporting unauthorized collaboration increased from 11% in 1963 to 49% in 1993. Similarly, between 1990 and 1995 McCabe reported an increase from 30% to 38% in a study that included 31 universities. McCabe demonstrated that honor codes seemed to lessen the extent of academic misconduct from 33% to 50%. In the preliminary results of Hughes and McCabe (2006) study, the findings about Canadian university students were similar to those about US university students. As the study reports, the Canadian students revealed that, at least once, they worked with others when asked for individual work (45%), they obtained test questions and answers from someone who has already taken the test (38%), they copied from the Internet without footnoting (35%), and they fabricated or falsified lab data (25%).

In summary, the literature indicates a considerable concern about academic dishonesty in higher education. As the range of studies demonstrates, this remains an ongoing challenge for universities as they seek to develop academic honesty in their post-secondary students.

1.2. E-dishonesty in higher education

Findings of recent studies indicate that the use of computers and Internet services enables the spread of academic misconduct (Hansen, 2003; Mercuri, 1998; Ross, 2005; Underwood & Szabo, 2003), particularly involvement in e-dishonesty (Akbulut et al., 2008; Odabaşı et al., 2007). The earlier examples of e-dishonesty practices were mostly related to plagiarism. McCabe's (2005) study demonstrated that 77% of undergraduate students in the US do not believe that 'cut & paste' plagiarism is a serious offense. In recent years, fraudulence has also been increasing (Davinson & Sillence, 2010) and becoming more pervasive; this includes downloading and using a complete work (Austin & Brown, 1999) without making acknowledgment or seeking permission.

Little research has been published about falsification in the online environment. Cheating, plagiarism, and falsification overlap conceptually, that is, cheating and plagiarism tend to result in data falsification in academia as noted by Marsden, Carroll, and Neill (2005). Hughes and McCabe's (2006) study conducted at 11 Canadian

higher education institutions noted fabrication or falsifying lab data in student writings.

Delinquency and unauthorized help are similar infractions; unauthorized help refers to illegal collaboration with others, whereas delinquency emphasizes individual misconduct. In their study, Hughes and McCabe (2006) highlight the importance of accepting unauthorized help, such as working on an individual assignment with others, getting questions and answers from individuals who have taken the test already. Similarly, Akbulut et al. (2008) point out that delinquency and unauthorized help were significant factors in online academic misconduct.

In summary, literature analyzing this issue is still in the early stages. What is becoming clear is that the ease of access provided by Internet services makes it easier for students to engage in academic dishonesty and affects the types and extent of their involvement.

1.3. Factors affecting involvement in academic dishonesty

The literature indicates several factors affecting students' academic dishonesty practices including individual and institutional variables (McCabe & Trevino, 1993, 1997). Individual factors include academic achievement, age, social activities, and field of study (Gerdeman, 2000). Antion and Michael (1983) point out that having a lower GPA tends to increase the likelihood of cheating and involvement in other types of academic dishonesty among community college students. Crown and Spiller (1998) found a significant negative relationship between GPA and academic dishonesty practices. Whitley (1998) highlighted that compared to high achieving students, students with low grades relied more on academic dishonesty. Results of a study by McCabe and Trevino (1997) revealed a positive correlation between involvements in social organizations and academic dishonesty. Peer behavior or pressure could be considered as another factor affecting involvement in academic dishonesty (McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Odabaşı et al., 2007).

The literature indicates several institutional factors affecting students' academic dishonesty practices. Studies conducted by Crown and Spiller (1998) and McCabe (2005) highlighted that establishing institutional policies against academic dishonesty and clearly explaining sanctions and penalties may help to decrease the extent of involvement in academic dishonesty. Providing guidelines and tutorials for academic integrity can also be considered institutional factors for preventing from academic misbehavior (Hughes & McCabe, 2006). Types of course taking such participating in fully online or hybrid courses could be another factor in the degree of involvement in academic dishonesty since the medium comes with its own contextual factors. For example, integrating online social media in online or hybrid courses may facilitate unethical behaviors as Ewbank, Kay, Foulger, and Carter (2010) noted.

1.4. Research questions

Even though the literature provides studies related to academic dishonesty in higher education, there are few studies focused on e-dishonesty and the investigation of personal and institutional factors looking at one university's experience. Aligned with this notion, this study is focused on the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of university students' involvement in e-dishonesty practices?
 - a. Are there any significant differences in the level of involvement related to students' (a) academic level; (b) primary field of study; (c) types of course taking (online, hybrid), and (d) exposure to the academic integrity tutorial?
2. What rationale do university students provide for their involvement in e-dishonesty?

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