DIGITAL TEXT, DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT
This study examined administrator and faculty perceptions of the frequency and pervasiveness of student academic dishonesty, including their perceptions of the personal and contextual factors that affect whether a student is likely to engage in any form of academic dishonesty. One important contextual factor examined in this study was the extent to which the respondents thought that using the Internet in a course, delivering a course via distance education, or the availability of digital text through the Internet impacted the prevalence, prevention, and detection of academic dishonesty.

KEYWORDS
Academic dishonesty, cheating, academic integrity, honor codes, cheating in distance learning

I. INTRODUCTION
Academic dishonesty is an issue of serious concern within the academy. A summary of the past 30 years of research on academic dishonesty indicates that it is a “chronic problem” that affects all levels of education and involves significant numbers of students [1]. For example, several studies indicate [2–4] that, when asked, students self-report that they cheat at a high rate (i.e., more than half of the students surveyed reported cheating at least once during their academic careers) at both the secondary and post-secondary level. In view of the high reported frequency of cheating and the need to find deterrents for the problem, much of the literature on student cheating behaviors [5–13] focuses on the reasons students cheat, specifically, the personal or situational factors that affect the likelihood that individuals will cheat.

Among the research studies that focus on organizational or situational factors that influence student cheating behavior, certain patterns emerge. For example, students consistently identify the behavior of their peers as one of the most important situational factors influencing their level of academic honesty [14]. Another important situational factor is the students’ relationship with the faculty members [5, 6, 15]. Previous studies report that students consider the quality of their relationships with their faculty members as one important deterrent. Further, students report that their perception of the faculty members knowledge of and acceptance of the campus’s academic integrity policies also lessens the likelihood they will cheat [2, 9, 14].
A. Research on the Faculty Perspective

While the issue of why students cheat is the primary concern of the majority of research on academic dishonesty and integrity, a few studies [4, 16–18] have examined faculty attitudes about student cheating behaviors. Studies of faculty perceptions about academic dishonesty tend to focus on faculty responses to student cheating rather than examining the faculty members’ perceptions of the personal or situational influences that influence students’ cheating behavior [15]. Additionally, studies of faculty members’ attitudes about academic dishonesty have tended to focus on one or only a few campuses, and there is little research using a national sample of faculty from diverse disciplines and institutions [11, 19–21].

There are two notable exceptions in faculty-centered research on academic dishonesty and integrity that do survey a large, diverse faculty population. In 1993, Donald McCabe conducted a study that surveyed 789 faculty members at 16 geographically diverse institutions. McCabe’s study examined faculty reactions to student cheating and whether honor codes did or did not influence faculty responses to student cheating. McCabe hypothesized that at institutions with honor codes, faculty would be more likely to report incidents of cheating. However, contrary to this hypothesis, the McCabe study did not find that the presence of an honor code resulted in a significantly greater likelihood of reporting the violations formally, although, at code institutions, “faculty…show a much greater willingness to use established procedures” [7].

A second large-scale study of faculty, academic integrity and honor codes was conducted in 2003. In the more recent study [15], McCabe, Butterfield and Trevino examined a randomly selected sample of 803 faculty members at 17 non-honor-code and honor-code institutions to see if the presence of an honor code affected faculty responses to suspected academic dishonesty. The authors found that, as they hypothesized: 1) faculty members at institutions with an honor code were more likely than their non-code counterparts to believe students should be held responsible for peer monitoring; 2) non-code faculty were more likely to take actions designed to catch cheaters; 3) non-code faculty were more likely to deal with cheaters one-on-one; and 4) code faculty were more likely to perceive their institution’s academic integrity policies to be fair and effective.

There is one recent study [22] that examined faculty perceptions of the impact of delivering courses entirely on the Internet and the likelihood of academic dishonesty among students. The Kennedy study [22] found that faculty and students both believe it is easier to cheat in distance learning courses. Interestingly, faculty respondents thought the problem was greater than did the student respondents, and faculty concerns that cheating was easier online were higher if the individual had no prior experience teaching in the online environment. Male faculty members in particular were significantly more likely to report that cheating would be greater online if they had not previously taught online. However, once a faculty member actually taught an online course, his or her perceptions of the ease of cheating significantly decreased. The Kennedy study provides some insights on faculty perceptions of the likelihood of online cheating prior to and after teaching online. However, additional and larger scale studies are needed to validate the initial findings presented in the Kennedy study.

B. The Current Study

The current study was a survey of a large faculty population at a group of diverse colleges and universities, a survey population similar in size to the one used by McCabe, Butterfield, and Trevino [7, 15]. This study had a slightly different research focus than the McCabe et al. studies in two distinct ways. First, this study examined both faculty and administrator attitudes about academic dishonesty to determine if there were any significant differences between the two populations. We chose to survey both
faculties and administrators because we were interested in determining if faculty members’ and administrators’ perceptions of why students cheat would be similar to each other, and if their responses to cheating would mirror student perceptions (as reported in the literature mentioned above) of how faculty handle occurrences of academic dishonesty. Second, there is much speculation about the role of the Internet and distance education in influencing or facilitating student cheating behavior. Therefore, we chose to examine whether this survey population perceived that digital text, the Internet, or teaching online were significant situational factors that contribute to the problem of student cheating and plagiarism (see http://www.umuc.edu/distance/odell/cip/vail/faculty/survey_ai.pdf for a copy of the survey instrument used in this study).

In this study we asked the faculty and administrators whether: 1) they viewed digital text or digital distance education as contributing to a rise in the occurrences of academic dishonesty; and 2) whether the availability of digital text or distance delivery make it more difficult to prevent or detect occurrences of academic dishonesty. We wanted to determine if our empirical research findings would support or refute previous assertions [22–25] that the ready availability of digital text and the delivery of education online may contribute to the likelihood of students engaging in academically dishonest behaviors [22].

II. METHODOLOGY

The survey sample population for this study was randomly selected from 45 of the 140 institutions who were members of the Sloan Consortium (see Appendix A for the institutions included in this study). Sloan Consortium institutions were used for this study for two primary reasons. First, our survey focused on whether faculty and administrators perceived that digital text available via the Internet and/or digital distance education contributed to the problem of academic dishonesty among students. Therefore, we wanted a sample population of individuals who were employed at institutions that offer courses or entire programs online. In our experience, faculty and administrators at institutions that offer online courses or deliver programs at a distance are more likely to have faculty who have been exposed to online teaching, have used the Internet to support their teaching, and/or have themselves taught online. Further, institutions with a significant commitment to online education are also more likely to have faculty and administrators who have used online detection services such as EVE2 or turnitin.com or who have been exposed to the purposes and uses of these services. In our view, it was more likely that the faculty and administrators at a Sloan-C institution would have some prior experience with digital text and online education and would have developed some opinions about their impact on academic integrity.

Second, we wanted to ensure that the institutions we surveyed were diverse in their size and mission and represented both independent and state-supported institutions. The Sloan Consortium member institutions included in this study are a diverse group of campuses that represent all types of higher education institutions. In selecting our sample population, we made an effort to ensure that the study population represented diverse institutions and individuals who were more likely to have been exposed to digital resources and virtual classrooms.

The 45 Sloan Consortium member institutions chosen for our sample came from a database maintained by a marketing service, MKTG Services. The authors obtained a random sample of 2,500 faculty and the contact information for the Provost at the 45 institutions that are part of the Sloan Consortium and whose contact information was in the MKTG Services database. Additional e-mail contact information for faculty and the Provost was obtained by the authors to supplement the information provided by MKTG Services.
III. RESULTS

A. Response Rate and Final Sample
Twenty-five hundred (2500) surveys were distributed to the survey population. Four hundred and seventy-one (471) surveys were returned representing an 18.8% response rate. Respondents were given the option of mailing in their survey or logging onto a secure server to submit their survey responses electronically. Of the 471 total responses to the survey, 306 (65.2%) were of the paper and pencil variety and 163 (34.6%) were submitted through the secure server. In the final sample, 63.2% (N=296) of the respondents reported they were faculty members and 28% (N=131) were academic administrators. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the respondents had been employed at their institutions for 10 years or more. Eighty-seven percent (87.5%) of respondents reported that they taught at least one course per year.

B. Pervasiveness of Academic Dishonesty and Responses to the Problem
We examined the respondents’ perceptions of the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty from two perspectives. First, we asked respondents their opinion as to whether academic dishonesty was pervasive. We then asked respondents some frequency questions to determine if their reported individual experience with academic dishonesty would suggest that the problem was or was not pervasive. Our purpose was to see if a faculty or administrator’s personal experience with academic dishonesty resembled his or her perception of the extent of the problem. Sixty-three percent (63.3%) of respondents reported that they had at least one student in their course commit an act of verifiable academic dishonesty. Thirty percent (30.5%) of respondents reported that they had heard of at least 10 cases of plagiarism within the last 12 months. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of respondents reported hearing of at least one instance of plagiarism within the last 12 months, and 78.9% reported hearing of at least one case of cheating on a quiz, test or exam within the previous 12 month period. When we asked whether they were aware of any cases of entire papers being obtained from a paper mill and submitted, 45.7% of respondents indicated they had heard of cases of students obtaining papers from commercial paper mills via the Internet.

When we asked faculty who were confronted with an occurrence of verifiable academic dishonesty how they responded, the majority of respondents indicated they either lowered the grade on the assignment or gave the student a failing grade in the class (61.1%). The second most frequent response was to report the problem to their department chair (45.2%). Our findings mirror previous studies [7] that reported that instances of academic dishonesty rarely result in formal action against a student but instead are more often handled by the faculty member approaching the student involved on a one-on-one basis. Previous studies have shown that students are more likely to be deterred from cheating if they think the faculty member knows the policies and will take formal action. However, our findings do not provide evidence that there is any greater likelihood that faculty members will formally report an incidence of academic dishonesty than they would have 10 years ago. It is interesting that faculty responses have not changed significantly in the 10 years since the McCabe study was completed.

When we asked respondents if they thought that letting faculty handle instances of academic dishonesty was an academic freedom issue, 50.1% indicated they did believe that allowing faculty to handle academic dishonesty occurrences as they saw fit was an issue of academic freedom. Faculty and administrator responses to this question may provide some insight into why incidences of academic dishonesty may not be reported formally. If the respondents thought that dealing with academic dishonesty was an issue of academic freedom, then they would see it as their responsibility to deal with the students themselves.
C. Reasons Faculty and Administrators Give for Student Academic Dishonesty

Respondents ranked their top three choices for the reasons students cheat as: 1) grade pressure, 2) uncertainty about what constitutes academic dishonesty, and 3) laziness. These perceived reasons closely mirror previous studies [7, 15] that asked faculty about their attitudes on why students cheat. Interestingly, the top choices of our respondents were personal factors, not contextual factors. Previous studies providing students’ self-reports also typically include these personal factors as the top reasons that students report engaging in academically dishonest behaviors. What differed in this study from previous research was that we offered respondents a new category to rank: “easy access to digital text via the Internet.” The new category about the Internet was ranked as the eighth choice (out of 12 possible choices) as a reason students cheat. We expected that our faculty and administrator respondents would consider digital text and the Internet to be a greater problem than our findings demonstrate. Although digital text is often mentioned in the literature as a serious concern among faculty and administrators, because of its perceived importance in making inadvertent or purposeful academic dishonesty easier, our respondents ranked other reasons much higher and did not consider digital text to be one of the top contributors.

D. The Presence of Honor Codes or Academic Integrity Policies

Forty-two percent (42.6%) of our respondents indicated their institutions had an honor code or honor pledge. Further, eighty-six percent (86%) of respondents indicated they had read their institutions’ honor code or pledge. Seventy-nine percent (79.7%) of respondents indicated their institutions had an academic integrity policy and 88.7% indicated they had read the policy. These findings suggest that the majority of respondents knew their institutions’ policies and guidelines for handling academic dishonesty. Therefore, lack of knowledge about their institutions’ policies and procedures does not appear to be an important factor affecting whether faculty are more or less likely to formally report instances of verifiable academic dishonesty.

E. Perceptions of the Pervasiveness of Academic Dishonesty

When we examined question four (i.e., in your opinion, how pervasive is academic dishonesty among students at your institution?) for the entire sample, 62.6% of respondents reported that academic dishonesty was either not pervasive or only somewhat pervasive. This finding was surprising in view of previous studies of faculty attitudes that report high levels of concern about academic integrity and our own anecdotal experience on our campuses. Therefore, we decided to measure the perception of the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty against several variables to see if respondents’ perceptions of dishonesty influenced their responses to questions of central interest to the study.

First, we examined whether respondent perceptions of pervasiveness influenced whether respondents would report that the availability of digital text contributed to academic dishonesty. There was a significant relationship between perceptions of the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty and whether a respondent thought the availability of digital text contributed to the problem. Those respondents who thought academic dishonesty was not pervasive were significantly more likely to report that the availability of digital text had only a minimal impact on academic dishonesty ($\chi^2=54.9$, p<.000). Conversely, we found that those respondents who thought academic dishonesty was pervasive were significantly more likely to report that the availability of digital text contributed a great deal toward academic dishonesty ($\chi^2=54.9$, p<.000). Second, we examined whether perceptions of the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty influenced whether a respondent had used a plagiarism detection device (e.g.,
turnitin.com or EVE2). Again, we found a significant relationship. Those respondents who considered academic dishonesty to be pervasive (69.4%) were significantly more likely to have used a plagiarism detection device ($\chi^2 = 6.0, p < .05$) than those respondents who did not consider academic dishonesty to be pervasive. These data explain, to some extent, our finding that 81.4% of respondents in this study had never used a detection device. Those respondents who reported that they had used the detection services were also the respondents who were significantly more likely to perceive that academic dishonesty was pervasive at their institutions.

The respondents’ perceptions of pervasiveness were also important when examining their attitudes about whether reporting academic dishonesty was time consuming and whether they considered academic dishonesty to be serious in their own class. Those respondents who considered dishonesty to be pervasive were also significantly more likely to report that academic dishonesty procedures or policies were overly time consuming to enforce ($\chi^2 = 29.6, p < .000$) and were significantly more likely to consider academic dishonesty to be a serious problem in the classes they taught ($\chi^2 = 46.4, p < .000$).

F. Faculty and Administrator Differences

The majority of respondents in this study were faculty members (63.2%). However, we had a large proportion of respondents who were administrators at the institutions we surveyed (28%, N=131). When we examined faculty and administrator responses and their perceptions of academic dishonesty, we found that the faculty respondents were significantly more likely to perceive academic dishonesty to be a pervasive problem than their administrator counterparts ($\chi^2 = 19.1, p < .000$). Further, faculty respondents were significantly more likely to have heard of reported cases of academic dishonesty ($\chi^2 = 26.5, p < .000$) and to have been informed of plagiarism problems ($\chi^2 = 26.5, p < .000$) than the academic administrators in the study. There is an apparent discrepancy between the actual reported incidences of academic dishonesty and respondent attitudes about the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty. Sixty-three percent (63.3%) of respondents reported having personally experienced at least one (1) act of academic dishonesty in their class at some time in their academic career, and 79% of respondents reported hearing of at least one (1) case of plagiarism within the last 12 months. While these findings do not provide definitive evidence of the pervasiveness of the problem, they do suggest that academic dishonesty is not a minor problem. However, the majority of our respondents consider academic dishonesty to be a minor problem (62.6%).

G. Distance Education, Digital Text and the Internet

Faculty and administrators reported that digital text was not one of the more important contextual factors contributing to student cheating. We also asked several other questions about this issue in an effort to gain some insights into faculty and administrator perspectives on whether the Internet, digital text or digital distance education were perceived to be contributors to academic dishonesty or to make detecting dishonest behaviors more difficult.

Question 44 asked respondents whether they had ever used the World Wide Web (web) as a teaching tool to supplement a course or as a tool to teach a course entirely online. Of our respondents, 52.2% reported they had used the web in their courses or had taught online. We then asked whether respondents thought that using the web as a resource, or teaching online, had increased the amount of academic dishonesty they saw in their courses. Sixty-six percent (65.6%) stated that they did not perceive an increase in the amount of academic dishonesty in their courses. Only a very small percentage, 8.3%, thought that academic dishonesty increased. We then asked if using the web or teaching online made it more difficult to identify academic dishonesty. Forty-four percent (44.3%) reported that it was not more difficult to
IV. CONCLUSIONS

The majority of our respondents did not perceive academic dishonesty to be a pervasive problem. In view of this, it is not surprising that the majority of faculty and administrators also reported that they tend to handle academic dishonesty issues with the student individually, and they do not pursue the issue further through formal channels. At the same time, we found that when faculty and administrators perceive that academic dishonesty is pervasive, they have significantly different attitudes about and responses to the problem. Those faculty and administrators who perceived academic dishonesty to be a pervasive problem were significantly more likely to: 1) perceive that the availability of digital text was a problem, 2) have used a detection device, 3) consider the procedures or policies for pursuing formal charges of academic dishonesty to be overly time consuming, and 4) report that academic dishonesty was a serious problem in their classes. These findings suggest that once a faculty member perceives the problem is significant, he/she changes his/her behavior and takes a more proactive stance toward deterring academic dishonesty.

Previous studies have demonstrated that academic dishonesty among students is prevalent and unlike the perception of the majority of our faculty and administrators, pervasive. These divergent findings suggest there is a need for additional research to examine whether actual occurrences of academic dishonesty are high enough to merit greater vigilance and stronger responses to the problem than those reported by the faculty and administrators in this and previous studies.

Also, our respondents’ tendency to handle academic dishonesty issues individually with students suggests that students’ perceptions about faculty responses to cheating may be accurate. In previous studies, students reported that the likelihood of getting caught, or being formally sanctioned, is very small and as a result, cheating is a low-risk activity [9]. Our findings support student perceptions because we also found that faculty members rarely pursue formal sanctions against a student. In view of this, it would appear that using formal sanctions as a deterrent has not been effective because it has not been adopted by the majority of our respondents or by the majority of faculty surveyed in previous studies. We suggest that for formal sanctions to be an effective deterrent, the majority of faculty would have to voluntarily pursue all cases consistently through formal channels. The urgency of adopting such a policy, however, is directly related to the extent of the problem. If the problem is insignificant, there would be less urgency to make any policy change. If the problem is more prevalent than it is perceived to be, then a more consistent commitment to take formal action would be needed before any appreciable impact could be measured.

We also found that faculty and administrators attitudes about academic dishonesty do not converge. Faculty respondents were significantly more likely to have knowledge of instances of academic dishonesty, to have experienced academic dishonesty occurrences personally, and to have heard of plagiarism cases. These findings suggest that faculty members are the most affected by academic dishonesty. It would follow, therefore, that ensuring their involvement in developing the policies and procedures for addressing academic dishonesty is essential because, as those most affected by the problem, they need to be involved in developing sanctions for and proposing solutions to lessen the problem.

Our findings did not demonstrate that faculty and administrators perceive that digital text, the use of the Internet, or using the Internet to enhance or deliver a course were major contextual factors contributing to an increase in student academic dishonesty. Instead, our respondents gave the same reasons for student
cheating as reported in previous studies. These findings suggest that faculty perceive that the reasons students cheat are fairly constant and that a new avenue for research (the Internet) or new modalities for delivering education (via the web) are not perceived to be a serious problem resulting in an increase in the incidence of academic dishonesty. It may be that there is such a high level of concern about the potential problem created by the Internet that there is greater vigilance, which results in the perception that the Internet and distance education are bigger contributors to the problem than is actually the case.

Our findings, and those of the Kennedy study, also suggest that having experience with the new modality (i.e., the Internet) considerably lessens faculty concerns about online cheating. Our research results show that among a survey population characterized by a high level of experience with using the Internet, respondents do not perceive that academic dishonesty increases when using the Internet. An important next question follows. Is experience with using the Internet or teaching online an important factor that affects faculty perceptions of whether using the Internet is a major contributor to academic dishonesty? Although our findings suggest this may be the case, there is a need for additional research to determine the extent to which actual experience with the Internet changes faculty and administrator perceptions about the extent of the problem of academic dishonesty in the online environment.

V. REFERENCES


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**VI. APPENDIX A**

1. California State University  
2. Colorado State University  
3. Drexel University  
4. Duquesne University  
5. Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University  
6. George Washington University  
7. Georgia Institute of Technology  
8. Indiana State University – Terra Haute  
9. Indiana State University – Main Campus  
10. Kansas State University  
11. Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
12. Michigan State University  
13. New York University  
14. Nova Southeastern University  
15. Pace University  
16. Pennsylvania State University  
17. Rochester Institute of Technology  
18. Rutgers University  
19. Salish Kootenai College  
20. Seton Hall University  
21. Southwest Missouri State University  
22. St. Joseph College  
23. St. Leo University  
24. Stanford University  
25. Stevens Institute of Technology  
26. State University of New York Institute of Technology – Utica  
27. Texas Tech University  
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29. University of California – Berkley
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35. University of Illinois
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37. University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

38. University of North Carolina
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42. University of Wisconsin – Stout
43. Upper Iowa University
44. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
45. Washington State University

VII. APPENDIX B

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