Ethics in academics

Ethics in an Academic Environment Ethics in an Academic Environment Introduction Cheating University policy. Universities have developed set policies covering the appropriate uses of technology in an academic setting because electronic devices have evolved to the point that cheating is far easier now than it was in the past. Personal Data Assistants (PDA's) are a very common factor in everyday life, MP3 players are found in almost everyone's pocket or backpack, and the use of the internet opens up a whole new world for academic learning, and consequently, cheating.

Most Colleges and Universities seek to promote academic ethics and to prevent cheating with a formal policy. Whether a school puts forth a code of conduct in its student handbook or uses an honor code signed by all students in freshman orientation, official regulations are commonly employed (Olsen, 2008). Many of these policies are stated in broad terms. The University of Phoenix: Student Code of Academic Integrity (2008) is typical with its regulations.

The policy begins with a mission statement and relates the importance of honesty to the statements realization (University of Phoenix, 2008). Some schools do specifically mention the misuse of technology in their code of conduct, but in similarly general verbiage. For example, the Syracuse University Code of Conduct (2008) prohibits " misuse of computer software, data, equipment, or networks". The Code of Conduct (2008) also mentions the one use of technology that is specifically prohibited in many codes: using the Internet to purchase or copy prepared papers for submission.

As stated in the University of Florida Honor Code (2008), the source of these documents " includes …a commercial vendor of research papers, [or] a file

of research papers or tests maintained by a student organization or other body or person". The University of Phoenix Code of Conduct (2008) states: The student must rely upon their own abilities and refrain from obtaining assistance in any manner the faculty does not explicitly allow. This includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving answers to an exam, use of faculty materials or answer keys, or a student having someone take his or her exam. p. 1) These codes of conduct and policies are in place in many schools. From high schools to universities, the aspects of cheating have been adequately addressed. With technology readily available, academic dishonesty is much easier to achieve than in the past. The Texas Technical University, in their Codes of Conduct (2008), describes Dishonesty as anything that gives a student an unfair advantage. Prevention To find examples of methods used to prevent particular acts of cheating, one must turn to available sources of information intended to assist individual professors.

The recommendations of the District Academic Senate Academic Integrity Task Force range from disallowing cell phones to requiring " any students who may depend on the use of hearing aids or other devices to submit documentation from a physician to confirm this need" (2007, p. 5). The Provost's Task Force at SUNY Albany warns of " an array of fairly exotic electronic devices that the student determined to cheat on an exam might find available" (2006).

They go on to recommend that faculty change the way in which exams are administered to better facilitate close monitoring of students and that they provide a clear and pronounced statement of expected ethical standards in

the classroom (SUNY Task Force, 2006). Further examples of prevention techniques are more likely to be found in anecdotal statements regarding the individual methods of college and university faculty. To prevent cheating when students' computers are used to take tests, the UCLA School of Law requires that students run software that restricts the user from accessing anything but the test (Glatter, 2006).

Glatter also reports that one professor rearranged the classroom to allow himself a clear view of student's screens (2006). Professors at UC Davis are advised to direct that all electronic gadgets be powered off and stowed away during exams (UC Davis, 2006). The effectiveness of prevention techniques will depend upon the vigilance of the professor employing them. Once item that is noted to have a positive outcome is the development of honor codes (Cole, & McCabe, 1996).

The SUNY Task Force also notes the importance of both faculty and students taking an active role in enforcing a code as well as his or her involvement in promoting understanding of its provisions (2006). It was also noted that faculty must be willing to report and discipline students who violate the Honor Code. Research presented by the SUNY Task Force indicates " 44% of those who were aware of student cheating in their course n the last three years, have never reported a student cheating to the appropriate campus authority" (2006).

This data is also confirmed by a US News & World report indicating that " 1/3 of faculty from 21 different campuses" (Unknown, 2007) also did nothing when they encountered cheating. Reasons to Cheat What would make a good and honest student cheat? One major contributor is the stress one feels

while furthering his or her education. Academic performance can create these pressures because high scores are difficult to achieve. University and college students are placed under an enormous demand to execute by parents, professors, and themselves.

The peer pressure experienced when a student may be competing with another student over grades or academic status is another source of stress. Another contributing factor is lack of preparation and ineffective time management. Times are changing in the academic world and typical students are no longer " just students". One often finds students who work full or part-time, or who are parents and attend classes in the evenings. This means they have less time to dedicate to their studies.

Without a proper schedule, including time set aside specifically for school, even good students may find themselves falling behind. As a result, they may well turn to cheating to help them regain lost time. Regardless of the reason, these individuals are not abiding by the rules put in to place by the colleges and universities they are attending. It may be possible that some cheat only because they think they can get away with it, but the fact of the matter is: people cheat on a daily basis. The availability of technology has only worsened the epidemic of cheating.

In the past students had to be much more resourceful because electronic devices were not conducive to academic cheating. Now documents can be purchased online or copied from the Internet, answers for an exam can be acquired via text messaging, or one can easily print voluminous crib notes using tiny fonts. Newer, more innovative ways of cheating include some of today's common devices in unusual ways. Creativity of students has made

the classroom an unwelcoming environment for most handheld electronics. Devices " Cheating is not a new phenomenon" (Ma, Lu, Turner, & Wan, 2007, p. 9). It has occurred as long as there have been students. The high tech world of today lends itself well to change as smaller and more advanced gadgets are developed and introduced. Students can use many devices to cheat in a classroom environment, from digital media players, such as iPods, to cell phones and PDA's. In an online environment, where direct instructor supervision is not possible, the methods of cheating available to the student grow exponentially. Individuals can purchase work, such as term papers and program code, online.

Furthermore, with the Internet, plagiarism has become a bigger problem than before. Many educators have recognized the risk posed by high tech gadgets and the proclivity of some students to use them dishonestly. At the same time " educators agree that, used properly, these devices can be valuable study aids" (Monzingo, 2007). In fact, the author further states that " an audio player can be helpful in learning, say, a foreign language, and tutoring centers like Kaplan and the Princeton Review now offer SAT-prep tools for iPods" (Monzingo, 2007).

Educators must judge the value of these devices considering both their ever-increasing use by dishonest students and the benefits they provide. Many school districts are now emplacing policies that forbid the use of iPods after " school official[s] realized some students were downloading formulas and other materials on to the players" (Kinnaman, 2007). Kinnaman, a former teacher and current school administrator, goes on to say that iPods and similar media devices can still be used if cheating is redefined and the tests

are modified to an " open book" format to accommodate the use of these devices (2007).

If the tests were " focused more on process over product, and on thinking over simple product" (Kinnaman, 2007) the students will learn more and be better prepared for the world that awaits them. Media devices such as iPods are not the only things being used to cheat. Students are using cell phones, PDA's, pagers, and even calculators in the same manner. Richardson explores several of these methods and states that each of these devices can be used to store complex formulas and files, and to send and receive email and instant messages with test answers (2007).

The devices can also connect to the Internet during tests to obtain information regarding answers. Through the use of cell phones and some PDA's, audio and video clips can be stored for viewing or listening to during tests. The use of calculators in school has been debated for decades. In today's schools, the use of calculators is generally accepted, especially in higher learning institutions where mathematical computations can be lengthy and time consuming if done without a calculator. However, calculators have become extremely sophisticated and are used more frequently for cheating since having one does not constitute cheating.

In 1995, Marliyn Tipp, a mother from Nebraska, found a magazine that her son had which contained an ad regarding the Sega IR 7000. This ad stated the calculator is capable of " organizing schedules, converting currency, and translating languages, among other things" (One Parent's Message, 1995). This was 13 years ago. The capabilities of calculators have far surpassed the Sega IR 7000 and now include the ability to store text and numerical

formulas for recall during a test. Conclusion Cheating has not gone away over the years.

It has indeed grown to be a bigger problem than it was in the past. Technology and its many advances only contribute to the issue. In an academic setting the rules and guidelines of what constitutes cheating and what is deemed appropriate are clearly stated and enforced. Some penalties consist of an " F" for the entire course, or can warrant an " F" for only the assignment in question. The seriousness of the issue has caused some institutions to create a letter grade of " XF", which indicates a failure due to violation of academic integrity (West Los Angeles College, 2008).

If used in the correct manner, technology can prove to be a valuable study aid. The question should not be how schools can ban students from using electronic devices to aid in study, but how the students can use the resources available to improve their learning. Seeking this answer will maximize the benefit of technology in education. References Cole, S. , and McCabe, D. L. , (1996). Issues in Academic Integrity. New directions for student services. 73, 67-77. District Academic Senate Academic Integrity Task Force Conference, Valley College. 2007). Best Practices for Promoting Academic Integrity in the Classroom Executive Summary. Retrieved May 15, 2008 from

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