INTERNATIONAL MBA STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC MALPRACTICE: A QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

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Abstract:

This paper presents the findings of quantitative research conducted between March 2011 and February 2012 with 182, predominantly South-Asian, students drawn from four cohorts of a UK Masters of Business Administration (MBA) programme. It builds upon previous investigations into malpractice amongst international students following the discovery of high incidences of plagiarism and collusion, amongst this student group (Wellman and Fallon 2012). A survey utilised a self-completion questionnaire administered under controlled conditions and aimed to identify students’ views on giving and receiving help from others, collaborative working, use of source material and their own, and others’ engagement in various malpractices. The findings suggest that individual peer support is largely held to be acceptable, but group collaboration less so but also that a value system is in place which, for instance, endorses support for weaker colleagues but condemns group “free-loaders” and receiving outside support. Respondents generally knew what constituted unacceptable practices and denied engaging in them. However, the reportage of malpractice in others suggests a higher occurrence than self-reportage suggests, with unreferenced copying of source material and group working on individual assignments being most commonly cited. Whilst the data presented is quantitative and we are further explore it qualitatively, they will be of value to those working with similar international students, as they highlight some of the attitudinal issues which must be addressed to help such students adapt to and succeed in what for some is an alien social and educational culture.

Introduction

This research stems from our experience at Cardiff School of Management (CSM) in 2008 when 93 MBA students, predominantly from India, were investigated for breaches of academic practices, predominantly plagiarism and collusion. The investigation quickly identified that many saw “copy-pasting” from academic and other sources without references to be acceptable and that seeking and giving help to fellow students was both natural and expected. As it became clear that many students were unprepared for independent study at M-level in the UK, we addressed this issue by re-vamping the initial Induction and Study Skills modules (with considerable effect). In addition, we decided to research the problem in order to better understand the issues (Fallon & Wellman 2012). The literature, interviews and focus groups suggested that much of what we had called unfair practice (UfP) was often nearer to what Errey (2002), Carroll (2007), and Magyar (2009) observed to be innocents straying into malpractice due to misunderstanding the UK’s academic practices and conventions. In particular, we found that students had often only experienced what Timm (2008a) observed to be rote learning with little exposure to independent study and had been assessed primarily by short knowledge based tests and exams. We also found that students often shared their knowledge and expertise to support each other, this ranging from altruistic support and cooperative collaboration to collusion. Apocryphally,
sharing ideas and material was found to be common with one student stating that as they didn’t know anything about the subject they went to others who did (with no mention of learning) and another that it was “…right that the seniors” [students from previous cohorts] “should support the juniors” (Personal communication 2010).

Research objectives

As a result of the earlier research we decided to further investigate the situation in order to learn more about problems and their causes and to identify remedial strategies. This is an ongoing project which involves both qualitative and quantitative elements.

This paper reports on a quantitative strand with three objectives:

1. Study and assignment preparation methods
2. Views regarding various practices regarding giving and receiving help, working in groups and use of source material
3. Views and practices regarding students own and others’ engagement in poor academic practices

This paper reports on survey findings in relation to objectives 2 and 3, drawing from findings from four samples of MBA students, totalling 182, during 2011 and 2012. The survey is part of an ongoing project and it is intended to administer it on a regular basis to all MBA cohorts as part of the induction process.

Literature Review

There is an extensive body of literature covering the topics under consideration and, some of the most informative are included here. These cover research into cultural and educational differences and their experiences of studying in the UK. Leading contributors include, Hayes and Introna (2005), Bennett (2005), Handa and Power (2005) and Timm (2008a) all of whom have written about South Asian students in particular. Other useful insights have been found within Bailey (2006) Campbell-Evans and Legget (2007), McCabe, Banwell (2003), Dukerich and Dutton (1993) and Flynn (2003) who all report similar issues with other cultures.

Interestingly, Banwell (2003) reports on how some cultural values encourage peer support, a phenomenon also noted by Timm (2008a) and Hayes, Introna and Whitley (2006). Whilst seeking others’ help on an assignment may be valuable and encouraged, Barrett & Cox (2005) state, the line between collaboration and collusion is unclear.

The problems faced by students adapting to the UK (and other Western) styles of education are discussed by many authors and a major difficulty is often with writing and language. This has been explored by a number of authors including most notably Errey (2000), Carroll and Appleton (2001), Barret & Malcolm (2006), Hayes and Introna (2006) and Carroll (2007). One coping strategy, coined “patch-writing” by Howard, is the practice of loosely linking together sections of text drawn from disparate sources into what Dryden describes as a “beautiful patchwork” (cited in Introna and Hayes (2005:4), or has also been called by Barrett and Malcolm (2006) an “incoherent
“whole”. However, Introna and Hayes (2005) endorse Shi’s earlier view that such “grey plagiarism”, is a natural part of international students’ development whilst Schmitt (2007), Carroll (2007), Magyar (2009) and others, express concern that this may lead to accusations of plagiarism.

The predicament is, as Yeo (2006) notes, in the interpretation of line between paraphrase and plagiarism and as Alam (2004) suggests, this is particularly so for international students. Many authors suggest this is due to students’ past educational experience with, for India, Banwell (2003) Hayes, Whitley and Introna (2006) and Timm (2008a) reporting that there are often rote taught courses with in the main, reliance on a single text and little requirement to read more widely. Plagiarism is often not a concern, observe both Park (2003) and Timm (2008a) whilst among Chinese students Introna and Hayes (2005), expressed the view that repeating respected academics’ words is expected.

Nevertheless, Park (2003), Johnston (2003) and Clark (2008) fear that intentional malpractice exists in the form of inadvertent plagiarism but that this cannot be the case for collusion (Johnston 2003). Nor perhaps is purchasing assignments accidental, for as Lancaster and Clarke (2009) state that assessments are often purchased from commercial websites/essay mills or obtained from current or past students, family and friends. Indeed, Introna & Hayes (2005) discovered that 60% of Asian students admitted to preparing work for others and 60% admitted to having submitted other’s work.

There are many previous surveys of both domestic and international students’ views of and participation in various potential malpractices. Useful examples include the work of Brown and co-authors (See Brown 1999, Brown & Choong 2005, Brown & Weible 2006 and Brown & McInery 2008). These demonstrate a large body of research about the occurrence, attitudes and motivations regarding academic dishonesty amongst a number of populations, spread over two decades. Consequently, Part D of this survey’s questionnaire is based on Brown’s.

Other influential sources include Miller, Shoptaugh and Parkerson (2008) and Megehee and Spake (2008) whose research identified underreporting of malpractice by respondents. Butterfield and Skaggs (1988) also suggest that asking for the believed transgression rate of other students help obviate this problem; a solution incorporated into the survey.

Research Method

A quantitative approach was adopted using, as others have done (see literature section) and as Miller, Shoptaugh and Parkerson (2000) advise, a survey to gather statistical benchmark data. As recommended by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), Bryman and Bell (2007) and Jankowicz (2007), parallel strands utilising quantitative techniques will explore the findings to gain greater insights and understanding.

The survey instrument

The survey was a four part questionnaire with Part A gathering demographic and assessment experience data and Part B data on study and assignment practices. However, this paper focuses on the findings for:

- **Part C:** This aims to gather data on giving and receiving help, working in groups and use of source material. A five point Likert scale measures agreement with 14 statements.
  
  Whilst the initial questionnaire (version Ca) also included tick-box questions asking whether respondents and others had participated in each practice, they were later removed. The reason for this was because it was felt that the survey should focus on gathering general opinions and due to feedback regarding the questionnaire's complexity and length (version Cb).

- **Part D:** This aims to identify the frequency with which students and others had engaged in, and their views on the efficacy of, various practices, again using Likert scales (the first of six, the second five). Questions were adapted from Brown's (1999) survey but with the addition of one asking whether respondents believed others engaged in each practice.

The survey is presented (and titled) as investigating MBA study practices with an introduction explaining that it is anonymous, that individuals may opt-out and that it aims to inform the School's study skills programme. Similar to Megehee and Spake (2008), questions (other than the last two) avoid using pejorative terms like the words dishonest which were seen as problematic because they would influence answers. Instead, all were simple statements of behaviour, albeit some blatantly unacceptable, with no attached value judgements.

Megehee and Spake (2008) suggest that respondents may be unwilling to incriminate themselves by admitting to malpractices and cite Brass et al’s (1988) opinion that reportage of others' behaviour is a better indicator of the individual's than self-reportage. In support, they cite Zey-Ferrell et al, (1979); Erikson,(1988); Underwood and Szabo, (2003) and other’s work on social contagion theory which suggests that, as individuals tend to both conform to and reflect group norms, this is a good proxy for their actual behaviour. This technique was also utilised by others, including Chapman and Weiss (2000) and Miller et al (2008) who suggest that otherwise, under-reportage occurs.

The questionnaire was piloted in January 2011 with 21 students following which some minor adjustments to wording were made (findings are not included in this paper). To ensure that questions were clear and to give guidance, a PowerPoint presentation was used to project each question with responses recorded on a simplified answer sheet.
This is the preferred method of administration although hard-copy paper versions have also been used when necessary.

*Administering the survey and data analysis*

Convenience sampling was taken, based on the opportunity to administer the survey to students within plenary sessions. To date, the survey has been administered with four samples, as:

- March 2011, 84 students: administered en-route from Cardiff to Heathrow airport at the start of a field trip to Budapest (paper version Ca)
- April 2011, 22 students: administered in Budapest during a second trip (paper version Ca)
- July 2011: 55 students: administered during a plenary session (PowerPoint version Cb)
- February 2012: 22 students: administered during a plenary session (PowerPoint version Cb)

Coded answers were entered into individual sheets within a Microsoft Excel database. Whilst each sample and demographic measure is identifiable, thus facilitating correlation analysis, this paper presents only summary data. Excel utilities were used to compute totals, means, indices etc. and to generate tables of findings and charts. Initial findings, based on the first two samples, were presented at two HEA seminars in 2010 where they aroused considerable interest and positive comment.

*Research limitations*

It is acknowledged that the method may be criticised in several ways. Firstly, the sample, at 182, is relatively small. Nevertheless, this represents 9.6% of the 1894 full-time MBA students for the period surveyed; thus suggesting a confidence interval of 6.5% at the 95% level (http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm retrieved on 11 February 2013). Similarly, the sample is skewed toward young adult male South Asians who have not previously studied in the UK. However, this accurately reflects the, then, MBA student population (the emphasis on South Asians has since reduced).

Secondly, if as Penshaw, Straughton and Albers-Millers (2001) (cited in Megehee and Spake 2008) suggest, students tend to overestimate others' malpractice, this would infer that such data may be exaggerated. Nevertheless, we feel that such differences, whilst being treated with caution, are significant.

Thirdly, some questions appear ambiguous (e.g. that others may help “...in any way they can”). However, this is intentional as we aim to measure broad perceptions and the propensity for established behaviours to lead to transgression rather than to admission of fault, and, as Lupton, Chapman and Weiss (2000) suggest, rely on students’ interpretation of the acceptability of practices.

Finally, that questionnaire results may not be reliable, especially as there may be a tendency to tick Likert scales “down the middle” or randomly. However, the
findings refute the former with no set of data having the mid-point scoring highest and responses varying in a way that suggests that thought was given to the answers.

However, the biggest criticism is that the findings reflect almost exclusively the attitudes and practices of South Asians and therefore only reflect that group. This is acknowledged and it is proposed that further research, should be undertaken to gather similar data for other groups, including those with UK educational experience.

**Findings and discussion**

The following section presents and discusses the findings for the Parts C and D of the questionnaire. Detailed tables of findings are given in Appendices A and B.

**The sample**

The total sample was 182, made up as shown in Table 1.

As noted, the sample was predominantly South Asian (89.6%; mainly Indian and Pakistani), male (75.8%) and aged 20–27 (93.4%). Similarly, the majority (95.5%) attained their highest academic award outside of the UK, again mainly South Asia (86.6%), presumably in their home country. As it is overwhelmingly skewed, the findings clearly cannot be generalised to other student populations and is, effectively a survey of South-Asians. As such it allows direct reference and comparison with the findings of the literature regarding the same population's cultural and educational experiences and the difficulties they face when moving from one educational setting to another.

The majority (64.7%), held BAs or BScs with some holding others, such as BCom, a common Indian award. Others (30%) held unspecified higher awards and a few (5.4%) M-level qualifications; none held doctorates. Half (50.3%) studied business, management or related subjects and a further 11.1% other social sciences. Similarly, 11.1% had studied IT and the remainder (27.5%) science subjects with a significant number (18.7%) having studied engineering (again, popular in South-Asia). Such a profile is again typical of CSM's MBA population with many, as Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2007 Benchmarks (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Subject-benchmark-statement)
recognise, seeing it as building upon their previous award, whether business related or not. However, the substantial minority who have not previously studied business, or other social sciences, are likely to experience difficulties in moving between disciplines and one can empathise with a South-Asian engineering graduate coming to terms, not only with a new country, culture (an weather!), but also with new pedagogical approaches and academic expectations.

Part C: Views on and participation in potential malpractice

This section asks 14 questions regarding views and engagement in a range of practices which, at their extreme, may be construed as malpractices. Statements were asked about three sets of practices, (although “scrambled” within the questionnaire), as:

- receiving and giving help for individual assignments;
- working in groups on individual assignments;
- using source material.

Three questions were asked in relation to each statement:

- A tick-box to indicate whether the respondent had done this;
- Whether the practice was acceptable (“OK”), utilising a five point Likert style scale (1= very much agree to 5 = very much disagree.
- A tick-box to indicate whether the respondent believed that others do this.

Note: Questionnaire version Ca, including all three questions, was administered to the first two samples (n = 106); subsequent samples used version Cb (n = 77), with only the scale question.

As noted, statements were ambiguous in asking whether others help “...in any way they can”. Whilst this may lack precision, our aim is to identify tendency or propensity rather than answers to blunt questions such as “do you cheat?” , thus inevitably inviting the answer “no”. Furthermore the response scale is sufficient wide to suggest that replying “very much agree” suggests a very different attitude from “very much disagree”. We therefore maintain that a low mean or index allows for nuances of interpretation and is thus sufficient to suggest broad agreement and vice versa.

Appendix A shows summary data with the key findings discussed below. Whilst the tables contain raw data the charts below have been adapted to allow more direct comparison of the data; notably the “OK” scale is reversed (from 1–5 to 5–1) to express the level of agreement with the statement and the means indexed to x/100. As the “very much disagree” ranking thus equal 1, a mean of 1 or an index of 20 would therefore denote complete disagreement, a mean of 3 or index of 60 the mid-point and 5 or 100 total agreement. For the purposes of this discussion 40 (mean 2) is taken to be the critical threshold. The reportage of self and others undertaking the practices are percentages.
Receiving and giving help on individual assignments

Six value-free statements (c1–6) were given about working with others on an individual assignment (see, Figure 1 for indexed scores).

As the level of acceptability for all types of peer support score above the 40 threshold we infer that it is many who consider it acceptable to get from, or give help to, others. This appears particularly so when little is known about the subject (c1: 61.7) or it is found difficult (c2: 65.0), both of which exceeded the 60 mid-point (the highest indices in Part C). Acceptability is slightly lower for receiving help from seniors, giving help and receiving help from outsiders (c5: 53.9; c4: 53.2; c6: 47.0) and to just above the 40 threshold if due to running out of time (c3: 42.4). With a range of 42.4–61.7 and a mean of 53.9), the findings tend to support our own and the literature’s observation that South-Asian students expect to give and receive peer support.

Self-reportage rates display a varied pattern (range 5.0–14.2%, mean=8.45%) with receiving help due to difficulty, poor knowledge or from seniors, and giving help when asked again being the most frequently reported (14.2%, 9.9%, 7.7%, 8.9%). Receiving help due to time-management from outsiders again scored less (both 5%). As one may expect from Butterfield and Skaggs (1988), the reportage of practices by others, is generally higher (range of 5.0–17.1%; mean = 13.5%) although the increase for some is
quite low. Indeed reportage due to difficulty and poor knowledge remained the same (checks confirm that this is not a recording error). In contrast, reportage of seeking help due to time constraints increased by a factor of 3.42 and that for gaining help from outsiders by 2.66, perhaps reinforcing Brass et al’s (1988) thesis.

The low acceptability indices and self-reportage rates for these two statements (c3, c6) contrasts with their relatively high rate of reportage in others. This is reinforced by inspection of the data (Appendix A) where they jointly have the greatest skews towards unacceptability. This perhaps indicates that, whilst felt to be least acceptable, they nevertheless occur, and if Butterfield and Skaggs are correct, at rates nearer 13.3% and 17.1% than 5%. Such findings are intriguing and may lead one to suspect that some value judgement is being made about these practices being less acceptable than the others.

Whilst we do not suggest that the data are conclusive, they nevertheless support the proposition that peer collaboration is acceptable to a significant portion of the sample with a small but significant number reporting that they and others have done so. It is notable that the two statements receiving greatest support (c1; c2) may be interpreted as reflecting an ethic of mutuality and altruism.

Working in groups on individual assignments

This section comprised four statements concerning group working on individual assignments.

With a range of 44.0–61.3 (mean = 49.6), group working is apparently less acceptable than individual collaboration, the only exception being when it provides support to weaker colleagues (c8: 61.3). By comparison, all other practices received relatively low support, little above the 40 threshold and broadly equivalent to the indices for c3 and c6.
Use of source material

This comprised four statements regarding whether source material is re-ordered and/or worded to “... make it your own work.”

The results suggest that acceptability is low, ranging between 30.1–44.9 (mean = 36.7) with only re-working internet (c11) and text sources (c12) reaching the 40 threshold and adapting work from current (c13) or past (c14) students being significantly below it. This strength of feeling is borne out by the numbers who felt such practices to be totally unacceptable (see Appendix A), where for the latter 44.8% and 67.8% respectively answered very much "disagree" for them being “OK”.

Self-reportage ranged from 2.8% to 8.3% (mean = 5.7%) with only adapting material from internet and text sources (c11: 8.3%; c12: 7.7%) falling into the mid-range of self-reportage. Nevertheless, all practices were felt to be significantly more common in
others, with a range of 12.2% to 16.1% (mean = 14.0%) with the adapting past students’ work (c14: 16.1%) receiving the second highest overall score (after c3’s 17.1%).

That these four practices were amongst the six felt to be least acceptable (see Figure 4) is perhaps unsurprising since the dangers of incorrect use of sources and poor referencing have been continually stressed. However, significance may be attached to the unusually high self vs others differentials (x4.13 and x4.93) for adapting the work of others (c13/14) which, if Butterfield and Skaggs are correct, suggests that the rates of this are higher than self-reportage suggests.

Ranking of practices’ acceptability

Figure 4 shows all practices ranked by their index together with the percentages for self-reportage, reportage of others and the differential between the two (S – O).

As can be seen, most practices rate above the 40 threshold with only two (c13/14) falling below it and three (c8/1/2) above 60. However, there are clear groupings, with practices relating to plagiarism least acceptable (c13/14/11), working in groups taking centre-field (c10/9/7) and receiving and giving individual help the most acceptable (c4/5/1/2). Major variations to this pattern are, asking for help due to running out of time (c3) which is lower than others in its category and working in a group to help weaker students (c8) which is higher. It is noticeable that the five most acceptable practices (c2/1/8/4) all relate to collaboration, perhaps again supporting the view that peer-support is perceived as a natural and desirable trait.
Ranking of practices by self-reportage

The Figures below compare self-reportage with reportage by others, Figure 5 ranked by the former and Figure 6 the latter, with acceptability ranking on the right.

Self reportage ranged from 2.8% to 14.2% (mean = 6.9%) along a fairly constant gradient which broadly mirrors practices' acceptability, with five of the top seven (c1/2/4/5/8) are also the most acceptable. Whilst unsurprising respondents more readily admit to what they perceive as more acceptable, there are some anomalies. Notably, adapting material from the internet (c11) is seven points higher than its acceptability ranking and working in groups to share the workload (c9) is six lower.

Ranking by reportage of others shows greater rates, ranging from 9.9% to 17.1% but with less variation around the mean of 13.7%. However, they fail to correlate with acceptability, notable variations being that practices felt to be least ethical (c3/14) are reported as relatively common and others felt to be more acceptable (c1/4/8) less so. Furthermore, in what seems a reversal of Brass et al's (1988) hypotheses, the three least reported practices (c4/8/1) are amongst the most commonly self-reported, and in the upper range of what is deemed acceptable.

Whilst the sample is relatively low (106 compared with 182 for the rankings), the data suggest that all practices occur, and if one is to believe Brass et al, at levels between 10% to 17% rather than 3% to 14%. Furthermore, as Figure 5 shows, self-reportage rates both vary more than that for others (SD 3.071, mean=6.9 vs SD 1.687, mean 13.7) and that they more closely matches overall perceptions of acceptability.

Figure 5. Ranking of practices by self-reportage (% stating self/others do it; n = 106)
Part D: Participation and views on unfair practices

Part D contained questions aiming to elicit students’ views and participation in ten unfair practices. These were based on Brown’s (1999) 16 questions but were modified to adapt them to the MBA context. In particular, his questions regarding examinations were deleted as they do not apply and questions 5/8/9 regarding the use of social network sites and paper-mills and online translation were added to reflect current practices.

Three questions were asked in relation to each practice:

- Whether the respondent had carried out the practice, utilising Brown’s six point Likert scale (1 = frequently to 6 = never);
- Whether the practice was acceptable (“OK”), again utilising Brown’s five point Likert style scale (1 = not at all OK to 5 = perfectly OK);
- A tick-box to indicate whether the respondent believed that others do this.

Appendix B gives summary data and the main findings are discussed below. As with Part C, data used in the charts below have been adapted by the scales being indexed to x/100 and the self-reportage scale reversed and adjusted from 1–6 to 1–5 to make the indices comparable with others. Thus, as in Part C, a “score” of 20 denotes complete disagreement 60 the mid-point and 100 total agreement; again, 40 is taken as the critical threshold. The reportage of others is a percentage of respondents believing that others participate in such practices.

Figure 6 gives summary findings for each question.
Practices’ acceptability

Whilst the practices do not directly match those in Part C, there are sufficient similarities to make comparison worthwhile. Firstly, the “OK” indices are lower (range 22.0–33.6, mean = 25.8: cf. Part C mean = 47.7). Why this is so is unclear although many questions express unequivocally unacceptable, practices (compared with the ambiguity of Part C) and thus more readily attract low scores.
Amongst these, submitting work which is not one's own (d2: 22; d8: 22.5) and poor use of sources (d6: 23.6; d7: 23.4) received the lowest scores along with taking undue credit for group-work (d10: 23.6) which perhaps represents the dislike of “free-loading” as the flip-side of collaboration.

The highest scores were for working with others (d1: 33.6) and showing work to others (d4: 29.9) were the most acceptable, it perhaps significant that, as with the higher scores in Part C, they relate to collaborative working. Otherwise, asking to see others’ work or for help via social networks received low ratings, perhaps reflecting low ratings for similar questions in Part C (c13/14).

Using translation software (d9) merits explanation as it relates to Jones’ (2009) “back-translation”; where e-translation converts source material to a second language then back again to create text which is untraceable by plagiarism software such as Turnitin (and often unintelligible). Whilst this was judged to be the third most acceptable practice (27.3) and we have encountered back-translation on the MBA, we are also aware of students drafting material in their own language and then e-translating it to English. As the question could be construed to mean either, we do not attach significance to these data.

Reportage of practices

In contrast to Part C, the indices of self-reportage of practices (reversed to show participation and adjusted to a scale of 1–5) are relatively high with a range of 22.9–30.3 and a mean of 26 with all close to or exceeding their acceptability rating. Even discounting Brown’s (1999) last two scale-points (5–6) still results in 20.4% acknowledging that they have undertaken such practices more often than “rarely”. Reducing the criteria still further by measuring just 1–3 equates to 14.6%. Thus, even with such liberal interpretations, self-reportage substantially exceeds Part C’s mean of 6.9% and maximum of 14.2%. Figure 7 shows similar computations for other questions (taking self-reportage at 1–4 and acceptability at 3–5).
The higher scores for self-reportage are of interest as whilst working with others (d1) rates highly (30.3: 32.2%) the highest index is for unreferenced copying (d7) at 36.1, although due to its marks distribution it rates only 29.4%. In Figure 7. Whilst all other indices are above the 20 mark, none are significantly so and none reach the 40 threshold. However, reference to Figure 7 shows that significant portions of the sample felt that some practices are acceptable (at the 3–5 level), most notably asking to see other’s work (d3: 21.6%), showing others one own work (d4: 26.4%) and using text translation software (d9: 22.1%).

As the reportage of other scores represent straight percentages, the thresholds of 20 and 40 are not relevant. It is therefore clear that a substantial number feel that others do act in the ways given with all being above reportage rates in Part C where none scored above 13.7%. The most common are taking undue credit within group-work (d10: 42.2%) and working with others (d1: 35.7%). Other scores over 30% were for seeking for help on a social network (d5: 30.5%), copying without referencing (d7: 32.2%) and using online translation (d9: 30.7%).

As Figure 7 clearly shows, working with others (d1) stands out with all measures above 30% perhaps corroborating the earlier evidence that this is felt to be generally acceptable. That the second highest self-reported practice is copying material without referencing (d7) is surprisingly, not for being common, but rather for the candour of respondents. That freeloadning in groups (d10) is felt to be unacceptable but common is again unsurprising; what is surprising is that it receives slightly higher ratings than purchasing work (d8) for both acceptability and self-reportage.

Comparison of findings with Brown’s surveys

Although Brown’s survey asked some different questions with USA samples, it is valuable to compare his and our findings for similar questions. Figure 8 does this, showing the means from the various surveys reported by Brown et al (1999, 2005, 2006, 2008) compared with questions from our surveys (utilising Brown’s methodology of counting all who admitted to each practice [1–5] with the “never” point [6] excluded so that low means indicate higher rates of occurrence).

Differences range from −0.75 to +0.19 and are therefore not great, and largely reflect the range of means found within Brown’s own surveys. Whether significance can be attributed to the fact that most results are marginally below Brown’s (indicating higher occurrence) is moot. Whilst statistical tests may be applied (e.g. chi2), we contend that the sample is as yet insufficient to support this, and even if it did, the differences are not substantial. Further sampling may prove more conclusive.

Conclusions

We have presented a large volume of data, not all of it internally consistent or comparable. Notably, reportage of all factors within Part D is significantly higher than in Part C. Nevertheless, we feel that the data, combined with experience of working with and interviewing students, enables us to draw several broad conclusions.
• Working with peers is largely considered acceptable but with individual peer-support being more so than working in groups. Whilst Part C (c1–6; c7–10) suggests relatively low occurrences of both practices, Part D (d1/3/4) suggest that it is in fact more common. This finding largely corroborates the literature and our own qualitative research.

• There is some evidence to suggest that gaining help due to time constraints, from outsiders (c3/6) and freeloading within groups (d10) are held to be unacceptable whilst joint working to support weaker students or due to low subject knowledge (c1/2) are more so. This suggests that value judgements are at play with the former being viewed as vices and the latter as virtues.

• Part C (c11–13) suggests that students are aware of the unacceptability of using source material incorrectly and few admit to having done so although they believe it more common in others However, Part D less suggests a higher degree of acceptability and significantly more occurrences by all parties. This variations cannot easily be accounted for and merit further investigation.

• Whilst Part C found most practices to be more common in others than respondents (means 6.9% vs 13.7%), Part D reported both higher rates of each (means 20.5% vs 34.4% at the 1–4 level) and also much narrower gaps, with d7, copying without referencing higher. Whilst the variations require exploration, if Butterfield and Skaggs are correct, the practices shown in Table 2 are the most and least prevalent.

However, we acknowledge several caveats. First, as the research is quantitative it provides only a surface impression. Secondly, that the statements in Part C contain ambiguities which make interpretation problematic. Both will be addressed within further qualitative research, notably focus groups, to explore the issues and gain greater understanding. Thirdly, the samples are relatively small: and they are skewed to young adult, male South-Asians. These we accept but the ongoing programme of surveying will build the sample and, due to the gradual widening of our MBA recruitment, gradually resolve issues of skew. Finally, we only surveyed MBA students. Whilst we do
not currently intend to extend our research to other populations we invite colleagues who wish to do so to contact us.

References


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Moon, J. (1999), How to... stop students from cheating The Times Higher Education Supplement September 3, 1999


### Appendix A: Summary data

**Part C: Views on and participation in potential malpractice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree very much</th>
<th>Disagree very much</th>
<th>% I do</th>
<th>% Others do</th>
<th>OK OR NOT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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**QUESTION KEY:** The practice is “OK”, I have done this; Others do this.

- **c1**: It is OK if I don't know much about the subject of an individual assignment for others (students, seniors, friends, family) to help in any way they can.
- **c2**: It is OK if I was finding an individual assignment difficult for others to help in any way they can.
- **c3**: It is OK if I was running out of time to submit an individual assignment for others to help in any way they can.
- **c4**: It is OK if I am asked by another student for help with their individual assignment, to help in any way I can.
- **c5**: It is OK for “seniors” and past UWIC MBA students to help current students with an individual assignment, in any way they can.
- **c6**: It is OK for people outside UWIC (friends, family students at other Uns etc) to help current students with an individual assignment, in any way they can.
- **c7**: It is OK to work on an individual assignment as a group as by sharing everybody stands a chance of getting a better mark.
- **c8**: It is OK to work on an individual assignment as a group as the stronger students can support the weaker ones.
- **c9**: It is OK to work on an individual assignment as a group as members can share the workload and thus save each other time.
- **c10**: It is OK if asked by other students to work in a group and share material for an individual assignment.
- **c11**: It is OK to copy material from the internet then re-order it and or change some of the words, as the changes make it your own work.
- **c12**: It is OK to copy material from a book or article then re-order it and or change some of the words, as the changes make it your own work.
- **c13**: It is OK to copy material from a current student then re-order it and or change some of the words, as the changes make it your own work.
- **c14**: It is OK to copy material from a past student, senior or friend then re-order it and or change some of the words, as the changes make it your own work.
Appendix B: Summary data

Part D: Participation and views on unfair practices

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QUESTION KEY: I have done this; Others do this; It is OK to do this.

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