

# CHANGES IN ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Bob Ives<sup>1</sup>, Ana-Maria Cazan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Nevada, Reno, United States of America*

<sup>2</sup>*Transilvania University, Braşov, Romania*

## RATIONALE

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Over the last two months, scholarly articles about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic have exploded. For example, an Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) search two months ago found ten articles, and a search at the time of this writing found 635. However, only four of those articles addressed cheating, and those four do not collect data directly from

students. Other sources, such as the blog posts of the International Center for Academic Integrity, also raise concern about increases in academic misconduct related to the pandemic, based on the experiences of administrators working in Students Conduct offices, but do not offer empirical and generalizable evidence or evidence derived from students.

## PURPOSE

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The purpose of the study presented in this proposal is to investigate the beliefs and experiences of students

in higher education regarding academic misconduct before and after the beginning of the pandemic.

## METHODS

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Our participants were post-secondary students from five of the stronger universities in Romania ( $N = 480$ ) and 11 universities and colleges in the United States ( $N = 414$ ). The sample included 119 first year students, 213 second year students, 214 third year students, 120 fourth year students, and 121 graduate students. Participants reported their gender identities as 255 male, 627 female, and 28 other. Specialties/majors included Generic 6, Education 110, Arts/Humanities 73, Social Sciences 175, Business 188, Natural Sciences 75, Information Tech 22, Engineering 139, Agriculture 22, Health/welfare 84, and Services 8. Participants completed a single survey that required about 15 minutes of their time. We asked participants three questions about their beliefs and experiences regarding three different types of academic misconduct. The three different types of academic misconduct were cheating on examinations

in class, cheating on assignments outside of class, and plagiarism. The three questions about beliefs and experiences asked what percent of their peers they believed were engaging in each of three types of academic misconduct, how many times they had witnessed a peer engaging in each of three types of academic misconduct, and how many times they had engaged in each of three types of academic misconduct themselves. Using a retrospective pretest design, we asked each of these questions twice – once with respect to the year before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and once with respect to the year since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, we asked a total of 18 questions about student beliefs and experiences: 3 types of misconduct X 3 beliefs or experiences X before and after beginning of the pandemic = 18 questions.

## RESULTS

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Differences between mean scores across countries were analyzed using ANOVA. Before and after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, mean responses from Romanian students were significantly higher than mean responses for US students across all three questions and all three types of academic misconduct, with a few exceptions. Comparisons between mean reported scores before and after the pandemic were analyzed using paired sample t-tests. Almost all of these means were greater during the

past year than they were during the year before the pandemic. More interestingly, Romanians reported a reduction in cheating on assignments since the start of the pandemic, while US students reported an increase in cheating on assignments. Students from both countries reported a decrease in plagiarism since the beginning of the pandemic, with a greater drop reported by the Romanian students. Results are discussed in terms of effect size measures.