

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN THE AGE OF COVID-19: THE CASE OF THE TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN GREECE

Yiannis Kiouvrekis^{1,2,3}, Angelika Kokkinaki³, Giorgos Andrikopoulos⁴

¹*School of Business, Chios, Greece*

²*University of Thessaly, Kardista, Greece*

³*University of Nicosia, Cyprus*

⁴*University of Thessaly, Larissa, Greece*

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The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a major readjustment on university educational practices through employment of online mode for the delivery of courses, assessment of students' assignments and supervision of final exams (Yorke et al, 2020). The case of Greece is of particular interest given that out of its 26 universities in total, only one provided online courses on a bachelor level prior to the pandemic.

Effectively, this resulted in an unprecedented situation when almost 20,000 faculty members together with a considerable number of adjunct faculty members were called upon to organize and hold online courses, assignments and exams on practically every single subject matter. As a result, many of the weaknesses of this forced transition from live to online education came to light. This paper focuses on the processes followed and the tools used for online exams. A number of incidents of deviant behavior, both attempted and successful, during the exams has been isolated.

During the winter semester exam period of 2020, faculty members in various Universities were already aware of this practice, announcing countermeasures and promising more complex exams in order to discourage cheating. At the institutional level, the Statistics Section of the Department of Mathematics at the University of Athens called for a postponement of the exams. In a similar vein, the School of Economics at the University of Athens decided to hold mathematics exams at the very end of the exam

period, while it is still undecided whether the exams will be held for all students or solely for those pending graduation (Harper et al, 2021). This is due to the fact that more than 1,200 students have applied for the exam; this number is unprecedentedly high, and faculty members are wary that students have devised new ways of cheating (Dawson et al, 2020).

The Greek government and the Ministry of Education have taken measures as well. In January 2021, a new disciplinary action law was submitted in a bill proposed by the Ministry of Education concerning changes in higher education. The bill contained provisions for disciplinary action in instances of cheating and damages to university property. Penalties range from exclusion from exams and suspension of student status to permanent expulsion and withdrawal of student status (Comas-Forgas et al, 2020).

This study will at first present findings from a survey conducted among faculty members of Greek universities to assess their views on the issue of cheating in exams, both prior to and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, it will present an analysis of structured interviews conducted with faculty members and administrators in academia, including program coordinators and Heads of Departments, thus covering a wide range of scholarly disciplines.

Interview findings are revealing, demonstrating the difficulties faced by faculty members regardless of subject. The interviews outline the means employed

by students who attempted to cheat in the exams. Furthermore, the interviews illustrate the various types of cheating in addition to the ways in which informal institutions (namely providers of private tutoring for students, known in Greek as “frontistiria”) provided contract cheating services to students – and how the academic community attempted to deal with this practice.

The topic examined in this context, despite focusing on findings from data analysis from a specific area, is actually relevant to academic settings in many other countries (Khomami, 2017; Marsh, 2017). The research presented focuses on the analysis of breaches of academic integrity during exams from the perspective of faculty. The main research objectives are listed below:

1. Collect data relevant to breaches of academic integrity in higher education in Greece during the pandemic period.

2. Identify possible factors motivating students to breach academic integrity.
3. Compare findings in relation to other similar surveys.
4. Assess teachers’ views on the issue of cheating in the context of e-learning modules.
5. Attempt to find out whether exam cheating saw an increase during the pandemic.

Our methodological approach is based on qualitative research (qualitative and non-numerical data) as well as quantitative research (quantitative or numerical data). Therefore for this study, the methodology chosen is that of the mixed method – we designed a survey that would collect data for both quantitative and qualitative study. The survey was conducted based on a questionnaire to make a systematic investigation of the characteristics, opinions and the relationship between the variables of the questionnaire. The sampling method chosen is group sampling, with a minimum of 76 teachers.

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