BELIEFS AND PRACTICES ABOUT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN ONLINE TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA.

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Abstract

Remote teaching has challenged both students and instructors since March 2020 when, unexpectedly, we all had to move classes and evaluations online. Much time, sleepless nights and anxiety has been spent adapting to this new teaching and learning environment, by both students and instructors. Much of that anxiety revolved around evaluations, the length, formats, content, and tech that evolved around planning, creating, studying for, and taking online evaluations. A new experience to most, we all had to adjust to an online world that worryingly, seemed offer that much more possibility for academic fraud.

Many of us were already aware that for decades now, studies on the prevalence of fraud, the types of academic fraud committed, and the culture around academic integrity indicated some increase in academic fraud year after year. Donald McCabe's research group on academic integrity is particularly notable, with several seminal studies conducted over several years, including one on the state of academic integrity in American and Canadian colleges and universities (McCabe, 2005). We therefore modified and adapted Donald McCabe's survey to determine students' and instructors' beliefs and knowledge about academic integrity when courses are delivered remotely and to determine how remote learning may have affected students' beliefs and behaviours and instructors' beliefs and practices.

These surveys were created in SurveyMonkey and participants were recruited at the University of Ottawa, Canada, in June 2021. The University of Ottawa is a French and English bilingual university, and the participants could choose their language of preference, but the French and English data were pooled for analysis. Overall, 389 students and 225 instructors consented to participate, which were demographically representative of the students' and instructors' population at the University of Ottawa, except for part-time or contracted instructors, which were less represented than regular faculty.

Comparing in person and online learning behavior and beliefs regarding academic fraud.

Most students (55%) and instructors (75%) believed there were more incidence of academic fraud in online courses, and 25% of instructors worried that their course grades were compromised. However, most instructors (83%) used 'traditional' type exams in their online course, even if these were considered the least effective in mitigating academic fraud. A study by Hughes and McCabe (2006) had shown that 18% of Canadian students, in 2006, thought that academic fraud was a problem at their university (Hughes & McCabe, 2006). In our study, 46% of the students thought academic was a problem at the university, a major increase from 2006. Nearly 80% of students self-reported having committed at least one act of academic fraud in one course, be it during an exam or other types of evaluations, which is comparable to other studies conducted by McCabe ((McCabe & Trevino, 1993)(McCabe et al., 1999)(McCabe, 2005).

Students' and instructors' opinion differs on academic fraud deterrents. Whilst both instructors and students believe fair evaluations and open-book exam or the use of a cheat sheet are a good deterrent against academic fraud,

they mostly disagree on what they consider effective deterrents. Students (80-90%) believe having the choice for the type of exam, having the opportunity to retake an evaluation, or having a take-home exam are good deterrents. Instructors (70-80%) believe students are deterred when they know the instructor is actively monitoring and pursuing cases of academic fraud, when students know the penalty, they could incur and having online timed exams, randomly ordered questions, or preventing the students from going back.

Promoting academic integrity on campus will require support for students and instructors. Although most students (>80%) self-report knowing about academic integrity, there is doubt whether they actually do and much more to be done to instill a culture of academic integrity. Many students do not believe that academic integrity is all that immoral and wrong; 35% do not believe it is morally wrong to work together on an individual assignment, 37.5% do not think it is wrong to download course material or evaluations from unauthorized sources (Chegg, CourseHero), and nearly half of the students (49.2%) believe students do not take cheating seriously. Importantly, 85% of instructors find the process of pursuing academic fraud emotionally draining and laborious, which will require thinking about the process and administrative support instructors could benefit from to help them uphold high standards of academic integrity.

If we wish to make the most of our newly found remote learning skills, digital learning tech, and better design evaluations that test learning in the most flexible way with the confidence that our students can be accountable for their learning and their integrity, we will need to further understand and regularly take stock of student and instructor beliefs locally and more widely. These types of study can also set a baseline by which programs for promoting academic integrity on campus can measure their effectiveness.

References

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