Academic Dishonesty: An International Student Perspective
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Background

- The number of international students in the US increased by 9% during the 2010/2011 academic year, bringing the total amount of international students studying in the US to 723,277 (Institute of International Education, 2011).
- Definitions of academic dishonesty vary from institution to institution (Butterfield & Trevino, 2006; Maramark & Maline, 1993; Witherspoon, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2010). Broadly defined, students are expected to produce academic work independently and must appropriately acknowledge any outside sources of information mentioned in their work.
- In 1964, Bill Bowers published the first report on academic dishonesty and college students. Bowers asked over 5000 students from 99 American colleges and universities whether they had ever engaged in academically dishonest acts; three-fourths of the population indicated they had performed dishonestly in at least one situation (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001).
- In 2006, the International Journal for Educational Integrity was established to address academic dishonesty and help scholars educate and acclimate international students to new standards of academic integrity (Cohen, 2006).
- Organizations, such as the Center for Academic Integrity, provide resources to students, teachers, faculty, and administrators that discuss academic dishonesty in higher education and promote academic integrity across college campuses (Center for Academic Integrity, 2012).

The Problem

Institutions are increasing their efforts to recruit international students, but just recruiting international students to study in the US is not enough for them to succeed academically.

With the changing demographics of colleges and universities, faculty and administrators must revisit how institutional policies, including academic dishonesty policies, serve our students’ needs.

If policies are going to accurately serve the needs of all students, policy makers must ensure policies are up-to-date, inclusive of a diverse student population, and supportive of the student body as a whole.

Differences in what represents academic dishonesty can lead to difficulties (Lang, 2010; Maramark & Maline, 1993; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1999; Roberts and Rabinowich, 1994; Whitley, Jr. and Keith-Spiegel, 2002). For example, how does a student fully understand academic dishonesty when his/her professors contain conflicting views on what is dishonest? Or, who is correct in a situation where a student truthfully perceives nothing wrong with his/her behaviors, but the professor thinks the student engaged in plagiarism?

The Solution

According to Hulstrand, “the first thing administrators need to plan for is how to facilitate the transition for students coming from countries where the academic system is often very different from the one in the United States” (2009, p. 96).

Helping international students adapt to the academic standards of higher education and addressing academic dishonesty concerns should be included within the new student orientation process.

It is up to institutions to develop clear codes of conduct, policies, and procedures for identifying academic dishonesty and work towards a shared understanding of academic dishonesty among all members of the campus community (Maramark & Maline, 1993).

As mentioned by McCabe, Feghali, and Abdallah (2008), “the most important policy implication is ‘one size does not fit all’ when it comes to academic integrity” (p. 466).

Faculty members should also support students in understanding academic dishonesty through including policies and examples in course syllabi and discussing dishonest behaviors early and often (Lupton, Chapman, & Weiss, 2004).

Developing academic integrity as part of the greater campus culture can also divert academic dishonesty. Whitley (1998) and McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (1999) suggest when students feel a sense of connectedness to their environment, they are less likely to engage in academically dishonest behaviors.

Conclusions

- Scollon states, “the concept of plagiarism is fully embedded within a social, political, and cultural matrix that cannot be meaningfully separated from its interpretation” (1995, pg. 23).
- In some cultures, repeating the thoughts of another author is considered a form of flattery when a student copies the work of an expert rather than expressing his/her own ideas (Scollon, 2005; Song-Turner, 2008).
- Stemming from cultural differences in understanding plagiarism, students also come to college with different perceptions of what behaviors are dishonest. For example, “collectivist cultures are more likely to tolerate cheating, as helping other students during exams is accepted and may even be encouraged” (McCabe, Feghali, & Abdallah, 2008, p. 465).
- International students may differ in how they value relationships with their instructors, which could impact their engagement in academically dishonest behaviors (Cammish, 1997). For instance, in some cultures individuals are raised to give upmost respect and obedience to others who show knowledge or authority, especially when the figure is an elder. This respect is demonstrated through not making eye contact and asking questions, whereas in other cultures asking questions and making eye contact denotes one is listening and showing respect.
- Expressing oneself through a formal writing style can be a challenge for students whose first language is not English and do not have the appropriate skills to conform to Western standards of writing (Cammish, 1997; Song-Turner, 2008; DeJager & Brown, 2010).
- International students, similar to domestic students, experience stress and pressure from living in a new environment and from peers and family to perform well; however, there is added stress and pressure for international students specifically derived from a cultural context (Teodorescu & Andrei, 2009).

Recent Findings Involving Int’l Students

- A recent study at the University of Windsor found international students violate standards of academic integrity three times more than their domestic peers (N/A, 2011).
- At the end of April 2008, 38 Duke University students were discovered cheating on an exam and charged through the institution’s judicial process and 16 of the students filed that cultural differences led to their cheating on an exam and charged through the institution’s judicial process and 16 of the students filed that cultural differences led to their
- Roughly 62% of college students studying in Taiwan reported engaging in academically dishonest behaviors (Lin & Wen, 2006).
- 84% of students studying in Poland reported cheating during their studies (Lupton, Chapman, & Weiss, 2000).

References

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