

Student Cheating: Facing Facts

This month *Taptalk* looks at a problem that most teachers will have to deal with sooner or later--academic dishonesty. The ways of violating the academic integrity code are many--copying homework, cheating on exams, plagiarizing, buying papers, sabotaging lab experiments, fabricating data, stealing exams, using another student's computer work, altering answers on a test for re-grading, etc. The means are limited only by the imagination of the student. Cheating is a fact of university life. According to a recent study completed at Camden, 78% of the students surveyed had cheated at one time or another during their years at Rutgers--that is, 2/3 of the students admitted to cheating, with 95% of them saying that they had cheated more than once. These figures may amaze you, appall you--or merely confirm what you've suspected all along. In any case, they will probably cause you to evaluate your own classroom practices in order to minimize the possibility of academic dishonesty.

Students offer a variety of reasons for cheating: pressure for high grades; difficulty of the course; inability to master the material; teacher's unrealistic expectations; and on and on. A significant number of students offered as their only defense the fact that everyone else does it, and many said they cheat simply because they can get away with it.

What do these percentages and excuses demonstrate? Do they mean that Rutgers' undergraduates are overwhelmingly dishonest and morally corrupt? Or that teachers must spend more time policing their students, watching them constantly for breaches of the academic integrity code (see page 2-3 for a detailed discussion of Rutgers academic integrity code). Or, should the teachers recognize cheating as merely a reflection of the society--a society where many people in government, sports, business, and even religion demonstrate little respect for truth or fair play--and make allowances for this?

Dr. Luis Garcia (Psychology-Camden), co-author of a book on ethical behavior, offered his opinion on this vexing problem. Although not involved in the study of Rutgers undergraduates cited above, Dr. Garcia is familiar with its methods and results and, overall, considers the conclusions fundamentally sound. However, Dr. Garcia recommends that the figures be put in perspective: cheating, for the purpose of the survey, had been defined very broadly, ranging from collaboration on homework assignments to stealing exams. In addition, Dr. Garcia points out that societal influences must be considered. He suggests that students today feel a greater pressure to make high grades than students a decade ago, and the ethical climate of the time does little to discourage students from cheating to achieve these grades.

The high incidence of cheating cannot be viewed merely as a failure on the part of the students, but, more importantly, Dr. Garcia says, it is a failure on the part of the university, which needs "to do a better job of educating students in terms of ethics." Students must be educated so that they can recognize the inadequacy of their excuses for cheating and realize that they are offering rationalizations rather than justifications for their dishonest acts, although dishonesty is usually hard to justify. Students trained to think criti-

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Workshop Focuses on Issues of Testing

"College Teaching: Critical Issues in Testing and Grading," a workshop for TAs, was held on October 11 at 4:30 in the Busch Campus Center. This informal discussion by a group of Rutgers faculty members, deans, and teaching assistants covered some of the general issues involved in developing tests and methods for scoring them. The five panelists were Jeffrey Smith, Associate Professor of Educational Measurement, Graduate School of Education, Rodney T. Hartnett, Director of Educational Policy Studies, Carolyn Rovee-Collier, Professor of Psychology, Seth Gopin, Dean of Freshmen, Rutgers College, and Joseph Cammarano, Ph.D. candidate in Political Science.

Dr. Smith opened the discussion by describing what he considered the four reasonable goals for any grading program. He suggested that a grading system should be communicable and communicated; objective; efficient; and in harmony with the instructional intent of the course. Much of the ensuing dialogue revolved around these four goals, with participants offering individual solutions for achieving them.

Professor Hartnett stressed the importance of regular testing so that teachers are able to get a reliable assessment of student knowledge, emphasizing the fact that "all tests, even the best of them, are flawed instruments." He also made the point that the single most common criticism that

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Dealing with Academic Dishonesty

by Dennis F. Benson

While Rutgers University is comprised of individuals with diverse backgrounds and interests there are certain shared values which establish us as a community. Academic integrity is one of those values and a necessary precondition to the freedom of inquiry and respect for others that we as a community so value. Put in its simplest and most direct terms academic integrity means intellectual honesty, that one's work and ideas are indeed one's own, and that any assistance in one's work and thought is clearly acknowledged and properly cited. Our community and our work together at the university are based upon this assumption.

Teaching assistants are in a position similar to that of faculty members in being charged with evaluating the academic work of students. This duty carries with it the responsibility of not only evaluating the quality of any work submitted, but also of assuring that standards of academic integrity are followed. Any suspicion of academic dishonesty should be investigated, and, if found to have basis, reported to the proper office for resolution.

Teaching assistants should be aware that there are resources available to help them when a case or a question arises. Any suspected instance of

academic dishonesty should be referred to the faculty member with whom the teaching assistant works. It is not appropriate for a teaching assistant to try to resolve the matter on his/her own. Any questions or concerns about instances of academic dishonesty can also be referred to Barbara Bender, Assistant Dean (x7747), John Creeden, Assistant Provost (x7688), or to Dennis Benson, Director of Student Rights Compliance and Discipline (x7255).

Once a case of academic dishonesty arises a number of steps should be taken. The first step is to determine if there is basis for a charge. Next the matter is referred to the faculty member with whom the TA works. If the TA is the person in charge of the class the next step is for him/her to refer the matter to the Dean of Students Office at the college in which the charged student is enrolled. The Dean or an Assistant Dean will then conduct a preliminary review to determine if formal charges should be brought, and at what level. Once a TA refers a case to a Dean his/her responsibility is simply to provide the Dean with the evidence supporting the charge of academic dishonesty. In some cases the TA will also need to testify at a college or University hearing. The Dean will handle all procedural matters, advising all concerned parties of their rights and responsibilities.

The two principle documents which govern academic dishonesty matters are the New Brunswick Academic Integrity Policy (AIP) and the University Student Disciplinary Hearing Procedure (USDHP). The USDHP describes the procedures and due process rights connected with pursuing the most serious charges of academic dishonesty, that is, those which upon conviction can result in a student being suspended, or in extreme cases expelled. Less serious matters are handled at the

college rather than at the University level. The USDHP is available upon request from the Office of Student Rights Compliance and Discipline. See page 3 for a summary of AIP.

Workshop *(continued from page 1)*

students raise about tests are that they do not have "content validity," that is, they do not really test what the course, text, and the teacher led them to expect. Professor Smith suggested that one way of insuring test validity is to provide a test blueprint, two weeks before the exam, giving students an outline of the material for which they are responsible and the point value of each section. The actual test would be based upon this blueprint.

Professor Rovee-Collier cautioned TAs about some of the pitfalls in composing test questions. Long, complicated questions often become traps for the students, so tests should be designed in as simple, clear, and concise fashion as possible. Professor Smith reminded TAs that students taking tests are nervous and under pressure, and the questions that seemed crystal clear to the teacher making up the exam seem much more complex to the anxious students.

One issue that elicited some concern was the problem of student cheating. Dean Gopin warned TAs that cheating goes hand in hand with testing. The teacher must accept the fact that "people will cheat. It is your obligation to take note of it." Joseph Cammarano agreed with this, and remarked upon the reluctance of many TAs to admit that students in their classes do cheat. The need for TAs to acknowledge the existence of cheating among students and to understand the correct university procedures for dealing with it was stressed repeatedly.

TAP TALK is a monthly newsletter produced by TAP, the Teaching Assistant Project, The Graduate School-New Brunswick. Letters and suggestions for articles should be directed to the editor:

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Academic Integrity Policy: A Summary

The AIP describes how the community views academic dishonesty and how different levels of academic dishonesty will be treated. What follows is a brief summary of certain key aspects of the policy. The complete policy is available from the Office of the Assistant Provost for Student Affairs.

LEVEL ONE:

These violations may occur because of ignorance or inexperience on the part of the person(s) committing the violation and ordinarily involve a very minor portion of the course work.

Examples: Improper footnoting or unauthorized assistance on academic work.

Possible Sanctions: Make-up assignment at more difficult level, or assignment of no-credit for work in question, or required attendance at a workshop on ethics.

LEVEL TWO:

Level two violations involve incidents of a more serious nature and affect a more significant aspect or portion of the course.

Examples: Quoting directly or paraphrasing without proper acknowledgement on a moderate portion of the assignment, failure to acknowledge all sources of information and contributors who helped with an assignment, submission of the same work for more than one course without permission from the instructor.

Possible Sanctions: Probation, a failing grade on the assignment, or a failing grade in the course.

LEVEL THREE:

Level three offenses involve dishonesty on a significant portion of course work, such as a major paper, hourly or final examination. Any violation that is premeditated or involves repeat offenses of level one or two are considered level three violations.

Examples: Copying from or giving others assistance on an hourly or final examination, plagiarizing major portions of an assignment, using forbidden material on an hourly or final, using a purchased term paper, presenting the work of another as one's own, altering a graded examination for the purpose of regrading.

Possible Sanctions: Ordinarily the minimum sanction is a one semester suspension from the University.

LEVEL FOUR:

Level four violations are the most serious breaches of academic integrity. They include repeat offenses of level three violations.

Examples: Forgery of grade change forms, theft of examinations, having a substitute take an examination, dishonesty relating to senior thesis, master's thesis, or doctoral dissertation, sabotaging another's work, the violation of the ethical code of a profession, or infractions committed after return from suspension for a previous violation.

Possible Sanctions: Expulsion from the university and a permanent notation on the student's transcript.

Notes From the Field

Is cheating a problem? How do you deal with it? Below, some TAs comment on their own experiences.

Cheating is a real problem in large, "auditorium" sections. The instructor must walk around the room . . . a lot. Don't leave the students alone in the room. . . . If I catch a student with notes I take the notes and the exam and fail the student on that exam. . . . When I assign essays, I make the questions very specific, so it's tougher to cheat.

Yvonne Chilik
Political Science

You don't have to be mean. Just be firm. . . . I tell students at the beginning of the semester that cheating is morally reprehensible and absolutely unacceptable in my classes. It will result in immediate failure. . . . I give exams which are very hard to cheat on. . . . I have never found any evidence of student cheating in my classes.

Lynn Berrettoni
History

My department gives students a handout at the beginning of the semester telling students, this is what cheating is, here's what happens if you cheat. Cheating's like speeding. You can't catch everyone, but when you do catch one, you have to give them a ticket.

Daniel Arena
Computer Science

COPING SKILLS:
SURVIVING AS BOTH TA
AND GRADUATE STUDENT
NOVEMBER 10
25 BISHOP PLACE
12:00-1:00

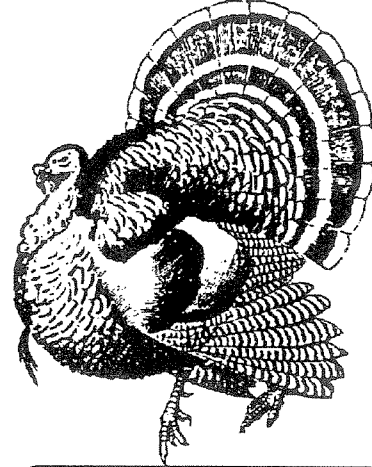
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cally about ethical issues would be forced to confront and evaluate their own system of values. In order to facilitate this, Dr. Garcia would like to see the university institute a required freshmen course on ethics.

Until such a requirement exists, however, the responsibility for educating students about these issues rests with the individual departments and, ultimately, with you, the instructor. The student must be made to understand the seriousness of academic dishonesty; a discussion at the beginning of the semester and, when necessary, during the semester will help to impress this on the students. Make sure that your students understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. They need to clearly understand what plagiarism is, and when and how to cite materials properly. It is also imperative that all episodes of cheating be dealt with swiftly and appropriately; your words about aca-

demically must be backed by action. Fairness to all of your students requires that you hold everyone to an equal level of honesty.

Prevention is always better than cure, so teachers should try to establish a classroom atmosphere where it becomes difficult, both physically and psychologically, to cheat. Make sure that tests and exams are carefully proctored. Keep all exams and grade books in a secure place. Explain university policy on cheating to the students so they understand that teachers are required to take action when the academic integrity code is violated. Discuss the ethical issues involved. By taking the time to explain the issues, you place the responsibility squarely on their shoulders. You are obliged to inform and enforce; students who still choose to cheat, therefore, do it knowingly and must, of course, accept the penalty if they are caught.

DATES TO REMEMBER**NOVEMBER**

- 4 Last day to register for Nov. 20 language exam
- 8 Election Day
- 24 Thanksgiving Day-no classes
- 25 No Classes
- 30 Requests for course withdrawals no longer accepted. Instructors must assign final grade.

Teaching Assistant Project

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THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER