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# **A COMPARISON OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ATTITUDES CONCERNING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

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# A COMPARISON OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ATTITUDES CONCERNING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

## ABSTRACT

*Incidents of academic dishonesty continue to affect every college and university in the United States, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This is also true at institutions of higher education in other countries. At some point during their academic careers, estimates are that 50-70% of all college students engage in various forms of cheating, including plagiarism, group work on individual assignments, improper use of technology, and other forms of dishonesty. The need for action to minimize this problem is evident, especially given the need of employers for highly-skilled and ethical workers in a global economy, and the recent spate of business scandals related to ethical misconduct in many nations. This article describes the perceptions of male and female business students from 20 different nations on 5 continents regarding what specifically they think constitutes academic dishonesty, and what they perceive should be done when infractions occur. The results of the nominal data analysis herein could provide guidance to college professors and administrators as they evaluate incidents of academic dishonesty involving students from different cultures and backgrounds around the world.*

*Keywords: Academic integrity, international, cheating, student attitudes, instructor actions*

## INTRODUCTION

Frederick Douglass (Douglas, 2012) viewed integrity highly and stated, “The life of the nation is secure only while the nation is honest, truthful, and virtuous.” The authors of this article embrace this concept and have extensive, long-term experience as both college professors and management consultants. Over the past several years, they have collected information from business students attending both domestic and foreign colleges and universities on their attitudes toward academic dishonesty and what they do when infractions occur (Frost, Hamlin, & Barczyk, 2007). This paper provides a review of the literature about existing student attitudes towards academic integrity, and an analysis of a survey given to over 200 students in 20 nations about their perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in an academic setting. These perceptions are based on different scenarios given to the students on the survey instrument, and also provides input regarding whether the students themselves have engaged in unethical behavior. It is hoped that, with the results of this paper, faculty and administrators who are involved in adjudicating cases of academic dishonesty will be provided helpful information regarding cultural differences which might impact their decision about how best to discipline those who break the rules.

This paper is organized into four parts. The first describes why the problem of academic dishonesty is important, examining the extent of the problem and describing approaches to control it. The second is a review of the literature, covering current research and findings about

how colleges are dealing with the problem in a multi-national setting. The third is an analysis of our primary research and the tool used to conduct it. The last section provides concluding remarks and assesses the implications for further study in the field.

### **WHY THIS PROBLEM IS IMPORTANT**

While the root cause of academic dishonesty is the subject of much debate, anecdotal evidence suggests multiple factors, including media influence, lack of family training, peer pressure, and changing societal norms. Many undergraduate students in colleges and universities either engage in dishonest behavior themselves; refuse to turn in fellow students who they see cheating; think it is permissible to cheat if the rewards are high enough; or have some other type of unhealthy or unrealistic attitude. These attitudes can result in more dishonest behavior, which in the long run, hurts both the cheater and honest students that do not engage in such acts (ibid).

When considered in tandem with the public perception of increased corporate dishonesty (which has evolved over the past decade as a result of lax ethical practices) and employers' requirements for educated business graduates with a thorough grounding in integrity, the need for a solution to the problem of academic dishonesty has never been greater. Six points highlight the urgency of this issue. First, academic dishonesty occurs frequently in every discipline, as discussed in the next section. Second, there is often no uniform method for dealing with the problem even within the same department, much less between different universities in different countries. Further, administrators are often more concerned with increasing enrollment than with reducing unethical behavior. Thus, individual faculty members can be left to fend for themselves, and most instructors, regardless of tenure status, do not wish to increase their workload by becoming "enforcement officers" in the classroom. Third, non-tenured faculty members have even less incentive to deal with this problem, since student retaliation on end-of-semester evaluations can interfere with the instructor's goal to attain tenure. Fourth, discrepancies and inconsistencies in either policy or implementation can result in legal problems. Fifth, honest students are disadvantaged when dishonest students are not caught and punished, especially if the instructor grades on a curve. Sixth, how the issue is handled is of paramount importance in obtaining a positive outcome from this very negative experience. Academic instructors must foster the perception that integrity policies and enforcement mechanisms are fairly and consistently applied for the benefit of both faculty and students. Even if these points are addressed, dishonesty will remain a problem for colleges and universities. The scope of the issue is so massive that the authors strongly believe that it is their responsibility to at least make an effort to minimize it (Hamlin & Powell, 2008).

Not many schools include vigilance in academic integrity in their promotion and tenure guidelines. This may contribute to the attitude in some universities that what constitutes cheating needs to be redefined. There is often an opportunity to apply personal interpretation. It is interesting to note that students in some cultures often operate under a different "moral code" than American and western European universities, and thus they may not view certain types of restricted behavior as dishonest. This often occurs in collectivist countries where the culture embeds in its citizens an attitude that "one cannot let one's countryman fail." This very perception caused two Eastern European students to engage in cheating in a class taught by one



of the authors in 2011, one of which was expelled from the University in Austria where the class was being taught.

Most research projects and studies of academic dishonesty in the past compare student behavior and/or attitudes from universities within the same country. A few compare trends between two or three countries. This report seeks to expand the scope of the comparison, by using the same survey instrument to compare student attitudes in many nations about the same academic scenarios. Given the fact that American, and especially European, college classes today often contain students from many different nations, such information might help faculty members and administrators in their efforts to both communicate expectations, and handle with empathy and fairness any infractions in the classroom.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In the U.S., academic dishonesty permeates all levels of the educational system. The March 3, 2014 issue of Bloomberg Business Week ran a cover story about the cheating scandal involving student athletes at the University of North Carolina, in which a learning specialist who tutored mostly football and basketball players reported widespread cheating, unearned grades and even credit for non-existent courses (Barrett, 2014). A study by Bushway and Nash (Bushway & Nash, 2007) reported that American students cheat as early as the first grade. Similar studies show that 56% of middle school students and 70% of high school students have cheated in the course of their studies (Decoo, 2002). The first scholarly studies of academic dishonesty at the college level were conducted in the 1960s (Bowers, 1964). This researcher found that in US colleges and universities, 50-70% of students had cheated at least once. In a major study in 1990, rates of cheating remained stable, but differed between institutions, depending on their size, selectivity, and anti-cheating policies (LaBeff, Clark, Haines, & Diekhoff, 1990). Generally, smaller and more selective schools had less cheating. Small, elite liberal arts colleges had cheating rates of 15-20%, while large public universities had rates as high as 75% (LaBeff, Clark, Haines, & Diekhoff, 1990). Klein and others (Klein, Levenburg, McKendall, & Mothersell, 2007) surveyed 268 professional students and found that business students did not report cheating more than the other students. However they were more lenient in their attitude toward cheating.

In Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, dishonesty is also prevalent at all levels. The perceptions about what actually constitutes dishonesty also differ markedly between cultures. In one study, significant differences were found between American and Polish students regarding attitudes, perceptions and tendencies toward academic dishonesty (Lupton & Chaqman, 2002). Donald McCabe, a very well-known authority on academic dishonesty in the U.S., did a study comparing student attitudes and norms from the Middle East (specifically Lebanon) to those of Americans. His results support the view that Lebanese university students are strongly influenced by the norms of the collectivist society in which they were raised, and therefore differ in their attitudes about what constitutes academic dishonesty from their American counterparts, who were raised in a more individualistic society (McCabe, Feghali, & Abdallah, 2008).

The impact of culture on a student's perception of what constitutes dishonesty is illustrated in a paper that appeared in the *College Student Journal* in 1998. This research compared cheating trends of American versus Japanese students, and also what determinants, techniques and deterrents contributed to these trends (Burns, Davis, Hoshino, & Miller, 1998). Another study by Hajime Yasukawa analyzed how cross-cultural differences affected both the quantity of cheating, and the attitudes about whether cheating was actually dishonest. He compared U.S. and Japanese students over time, and found that Japanese students reported a higher incidence rate of cheating on exams, a greater tendency to justify the cheating, and also greater passivity in their reactions to observing other students who cheat (Diekhoff, Shinohara, & Yasukawa, 1999).

In Russia, there is a heavy focus on group assignments in education from a young age. This “muddies the water” about what is or is not permissible when students are expected to do their own work. One study of college business students in the U.S. and Russia found major differences in attitudes, perceptions and tendencies towards academic behavior and dishonesty (Lupton & Chaqman, 2002). Similarly, research about cheating patterns between college students in India and the U.S. showed not only that the impact of growing up in a collectivist culture affects perceptions about what constitutes dishonesty, but even illustrates the differences between the sexes of such perceptions. For example, the data revealed that Indian and U.S. men were more likely to cheat than women of both cultures (Taylor - Bianco & Deeter-Schmelz, 2007).

It is also important to note the motivators for cheating. Simkin and McLeod (2010) noted several cheating motivators in business students. For example, they noted the issue of new opportunities that did not exist twenty years ago. The ability to quickly copy materials verbatim from the internet is very tempting to time-strapped students. This is often coupled with a “winning is everything” attitude in some cultures that can justify doing anything that will give one a competitive advantage. There is also the issue linked to the previous motivator that the reward for excellence may exceed the punishment if caught breaking an academic integrity rule. In fact, these are sometimes only guidelines and these are open for personal interpretation. There is also a major concern for the faculty member's career and/or the classroom environment when noting an issue of academic integrity. Some schools foster an environment that accepts issues in academic integrity and any faculty member that takes a student to task on integrity issues may find their career sidetracked.

The issue of academic integrity and dishonesty in education has also been addressed in recent presentations. In a 2014 paper presented at the 22nd Annual International Conference on Academic Integrity the presenters reported that over half of the students at the two subject schools cheated often (Click & Walker, 2014). There were also similarities in student opinions about the reasons for their dishonesty. The students stated that their main motivations were:

- Taking the easy way out
- Laziness
- Not enough time
- Wanted better grades

The impulses to cheat stated above are countered by a study into the reasons not to cheat and act dishonestly. In an article in the *Journal of Experimental Education*, Miller and others studied the reasons students choose not to cheat. The four reasons were learning goals, character issues, moral beliefs and the fear of punishment. They also noted that punitive consequences are needed when the student has not developed a strong character or moral belief as being important to their success in the goal of education (Miller, Shoptaugh, & Wooldridge, 2011). Another study compared student perceptions to cheating at various schools, and found that traditional honor systems, with specific rules and regulations in place, are more effective at cultivating academic integrity among students. However, they also found that modified honor systems may not be as effective as previous research suggests (Schwartz, Tatum, & Hageman, 2013).

Academicians are apparently confused about who has what responsibility to teach issues concerning academic integrity. Erika Lofstrom and others studied the issue of who teaches such concepts at colleges in New Zealand and Finland. The results of their study showed that the academicians were united in their ideal of the importance of academic integrity; however they were “not of one mind about what it is, how it should be taught, whether or not it can be taught, whose responsibility it is to teach it, and how to handle cases of misconduct (Lofstrom, Trotman, Furnari, & Shephard, 2015).” For example, professors who use group case studies may find that collusion, “free loading,” and other problems arise. Some students will not participate at all and expect full academic reward for being part of the group. This issue was noted by Sutton and Taylor with their comment that “there is often a general absence of clear guidelines as to where the boundary lies between cooperation (commendable) and collusion (unacceptable).” (Sutton & Taylor, 2011). The issue of collusion was a finding in another study where ten scenarios were provided to undergraduate pharmacy students. The researchers noted there was quite a bit of uncertainty on academic integrity decisions when collusion was involved. They recommended training as a method to reduce this uncertainty. Another issue they found involves the concept of a whistleblower. Is the student required to report on other student’s behaviors, especially in absence of a strict honor code explicitly covering that issue? The final issue these international instructors identified was the lack of professional development support to address issues of academic integrity as part of their educational effort (Emmerton, Jiang, & McKaige, 2014).

An recent international study involving 27 European nations was led by Tomas Foltynnek and Irene Glendinning (Foltynnek & Glendinning, 2013). They found inconsistencies between institutions in these countries on issues such as understanding academic integrity, the accountability for decisions made, having clear processes to be followed and the resulting decisions of faculty investigating academic integrity violations. They noted an increasingly disturbing trend for exhibiting a “head in the sand” attitude. Further, the authors of this study saw a variance between the western and eastern European cultural attitudes about collaboration on classroom assignments. Eastern European students tended to feel that plagiarism was a relatively normal thing and often exhibited an attitude of “shoot the whistleblower,” while their western counterparts were more individualistic in their approach to class assignments.

One study focusing on syllabus statements to influence student academic integrity used statements based on prohibitions and academic integrity. They hypothesized that the statements in the syllabus would be an effective method of motivating change in the student’s ethical

behavior. However they found that, while a statement on the issue of academic dishonesty may provide them a measure of guilt, such statements did not change a student's intent to cheat. They summarized by stating that their findings "clearly show that various types of positively viewed syllabus statements that induced cheating-specific guilt did not have any effect on cheating intentions. In addition, different themes presented in the syllabus statements seemed to resonate with different students; some feared the punishment aspect, and others were uplifted by the high sense of personal honor. Based on these findings, we conclude that a variety of university-wide approaches to increasing academic integrity that go beyond single syllabus statement interventions are likely to be the most effective means to academic integrity," (Staats & Hupp, 2012).

## **ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY RESEARCH**

### **Data Analysis**

Data was collected from multiple international business classes over the past three years. Two hundred thirty students participated in a multi-question survey to identify their personal attitudes towards varying issues of academic integrity. These students were international undergraduate students in a business major. The survey was conducted in hard copy with the students circling their selected choices and writing responses to the open question that dealt with their personal attitude/view of academic dishonesty and cheating. We chose to use hard copies as some of the students did not have access to computers to enter responses on-line during class, and the motivation to complete the survey would have been reduced after class time. The surveys were entered into an Excel worksheet and reviewed for accuracy. This involved a hand checking each entry for accuracy combined with computer analysis for error checking. The gender breakout for this survey was 129 females and 101 males from thirty countries. The following table (Table 1) shows the sample number from each population sorted from highest grand total to least:

<b>Table 1: Distribution of Students by Country</b>			
<b>Country</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Austria	28	24	52
USA	10	21	31
France	13	13	26
Indonesia	5	6	11
Canada	8	2	10
Spain	9	1	10
Lithuania	6	3	9
China	7	1	8
Germany	6	2	8
Columbia	1	6	7
Mexico	6		6
Sweden	2	3	5
Finland	4		4
Japan	3	1	4
Slovakia	2	2	4

<b>Table 1: Distribution of Students by Country</b>			
<b>Country</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
South Korea	2	2	4
Czech Republic	2	1	3
Netherlands	2	1	3
Portugal		3	3
Russian Federation	2	1	3
Chile	1	1	2
Italy	1	1	2
Latvia	2		2
Taiwan	1	1	2
Turkey	1	1	2
Belgium	1		1
Brazil	1		1
Croatia	1		1
DR Congo		1	1
Greece		1	1
Holland		1	1
Hungary	1		1
Luxemburg		1	1
UK	1		1

The survey consisted of thirteen questions in three domains:

- *The student's participation in an action of academic integrity*
- *The student's personal view on the action*
- *The student's personal view on what action the instructor should take*

There are a few instances where less than 230 students provided responses. Those were coded NR for no response. The following coding scheme was used to prepare the data for descriptive statistics on the first category of the 13 questions. The authors used this system to establish a general direction of the student's responses.

- e) never and/or a) 1 - 2 times= coded together as Rarely
- b) 3 – 5 times= coded as Occasionally
- c) 6 – 10 and/or d) many times= coded together as Many Times

The questions consisted of these thirteen varying concepts and scenarios of academic integrity.

<b>Table 2: 13 Questions posed to students</b>
<i>1) In the past, I have directly copied another student's homework.</i>
<i>2) In the past, I provided my homework to another student.</i>
<i>3) In the past I worked with another student on an individual assignment instead of working alone.</i>
<i>4) In the past I worked with another student on a take-home exam instead of working alone.</i>
<i>5) In the past, I used a cheat sheet hidden in an ink pen, or on my body, etc., during an exam.</i>
<i>6) In the past, I received exam answers via a cell phone or another communications device.</i>

7) <i>In the past, I collaborated with another individual to receive exam answers during the exam</i>
8) <i>In the past, I reviewed a copy of the actual exam before test time.</i>
9) <i>In the past, I provided answers to another student before they took the exam.</i>
10) <i>In the past, I programmed answers into my calculator, cell phone or electronic device.</i>
11) <i>In the past, I wrote mnemonic helps (a short rhyme, phrase, or acronym for making information easier to recall) on a wall behind the instructor.</i>
12) <i>In the past, I copied text for a school assignment directly from the internet without any citation.</i>
13) <i>In the past, I obtained a research paper from the internet and turned it in for a class assignment.</i>

## **Actions of Students**

The first question set dealt with the actions of the student, things that they were doing themselves that would be questionable in the arena of academic integrity. The following chart (figure 1) of student actions shows all thirteen questions of the first domain. As we investigate the international student responses, we found anomalies from the general trend. We see a strong response (greater than 50% of the students responding rarely) for their personal actions except on questions two and three. The international students often seem to not have a problem in sharing their work or answers with other students, even if this may violate the instructor's wishes. They will share homework and assist another student with individual assignments. It may be a cultural effect that they feel obligated to assist students to boost another student's grades so they may excel as a group.

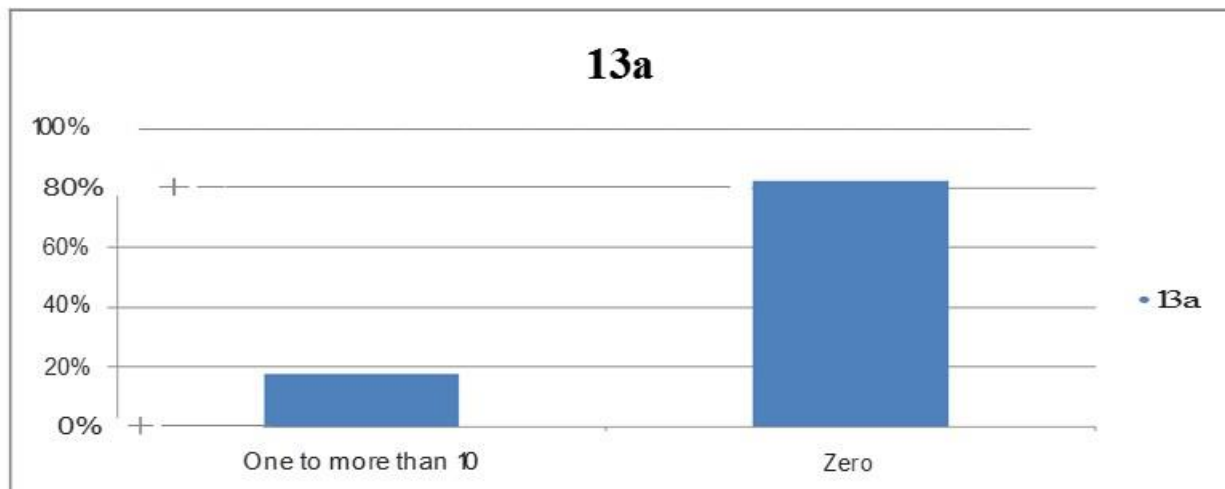
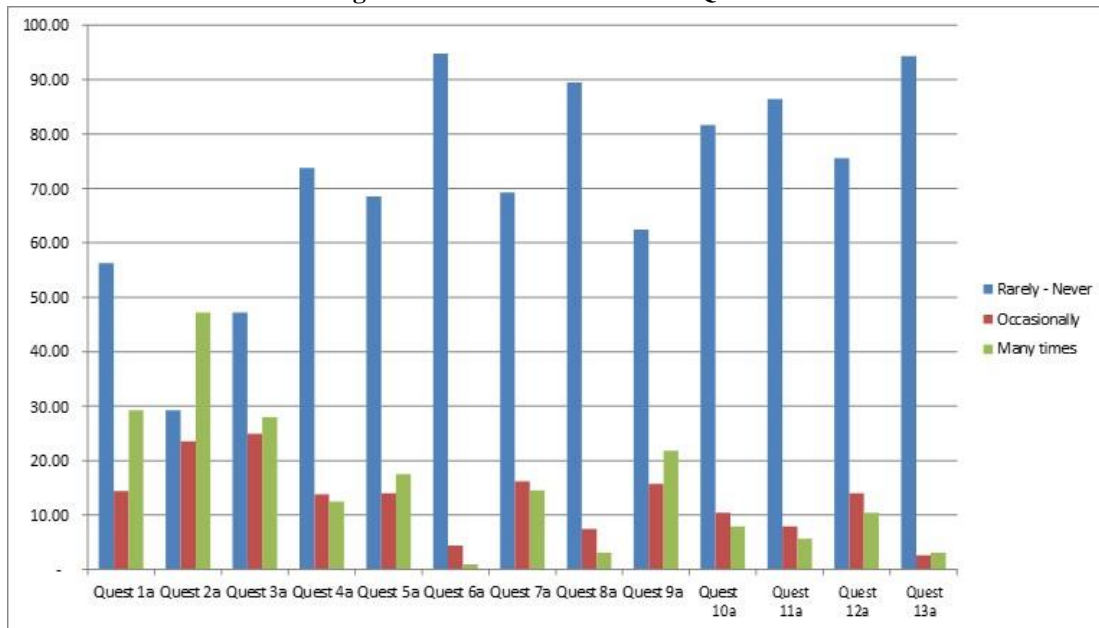
Further examination of the data show that there is strong opposition (90% rarely participating) to certain behaviors in the student's life. Questions six, eight and thirteen show little adoption of the activities of:

- *Using a communications device to receive exam answers,*
- *Providing answers to another student before they took the exam, and*
- *Obtaining a research paper from the internet and turning it in for a class assignment.*

Question six shows an area requiring technical expertise which may limit participation. Therefore the use of high tech may limit participation by international students. However, they also may not be inclined to use this technology or provide answers to another student before the exam. Also, apparently most of the students are unwilling to provide another student answers to an exam. However, perhaps they never gained access to an exam to share with another student.

The final question of the suite of thirteen shows that very few students have downloaded research papers from the web. However, closer examination reveals that 82% of the students have never downloaded a paper (Figure 2 – Question 13a). Our concern is that not many classes are requiring a research paper. A large percentage of students have never downloaded a research paper. However nearly one in five have downloaded at least two research papers in the past. This is a major concern as research papers can form a major portion of the student's grade. It is also an important component of personal development. The critical thinking aspects of research and synthesis of those concepts into a research paper is important for a college student. We view this as a major concern revealed through our research.

**Figure 1: Student Actions on 13 Questions**



**Figure 2: Downloading a Term Paper**

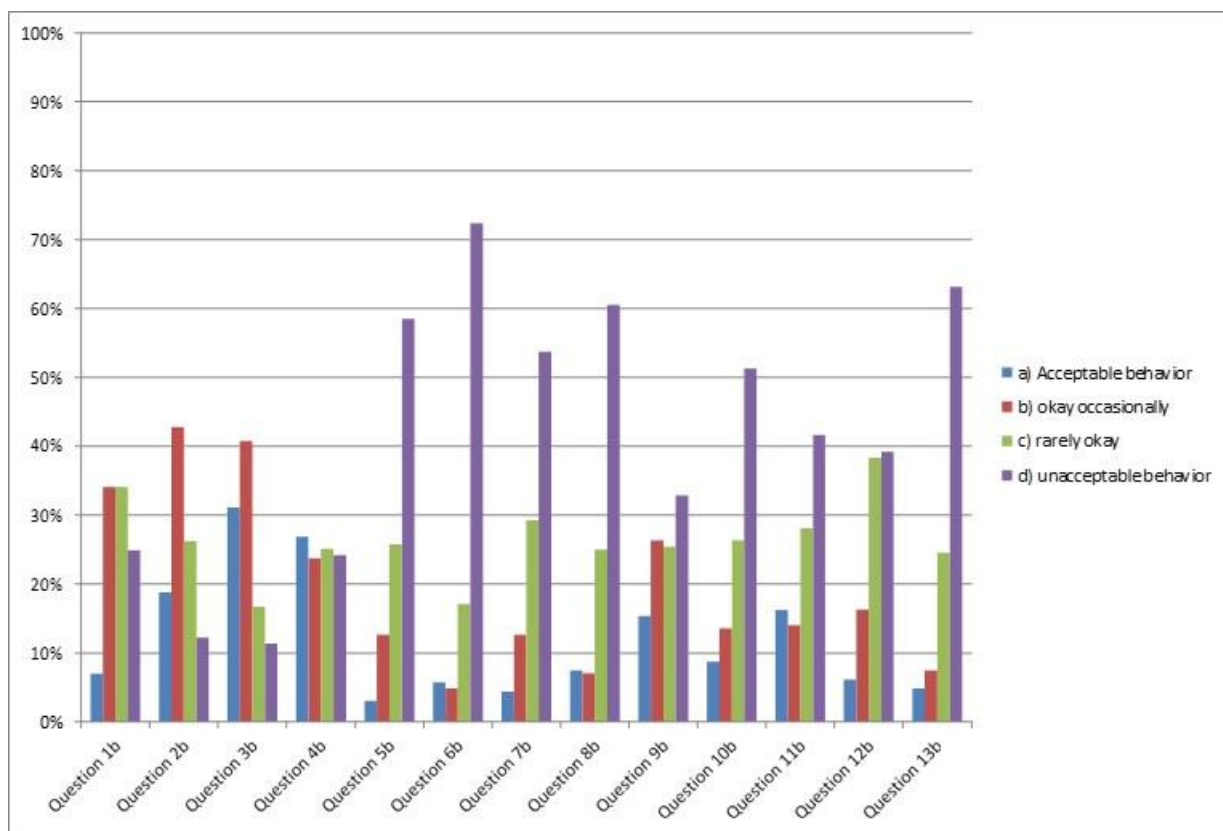
## Student's Views

It is interesting to note the responses of students when it is someone else caught cheating (i.e. not their own personal actions). The second category of responses requested the student to respond to their personal view of the integrity of a specific action. The same 13 questions were

considered as the student was asked, “I view this as” with choices of a) acceptable behavior b) okay occasionally c) rarely okay d) unacceptable behavior. The responses were grouped:

- *Acceptable behavior*
- *Okay occasionally*
- *Rarely okay*
- *Unacceptable behavior*

As we view questions one – thirteen (Figure 3), the response of unacceptable behavior dominates the response set. This is especially evident in questions five through eight, and thirteen, where over 50% of the respondents indicate the issue as unacceptable.



**Figure 3: Student View**

Also, as we view the data the first four questions show students selecting all of the options with no outstanding option. Of this set, questions three and four display the strongest indication for acceptance of an issue of academic dishonesty. These questions are:

- 3) *In the past I worked with another student on an individual assignment instead of working alone.*
- 4) *In the past I worked with another student on a take-home exam instead of working alone.*

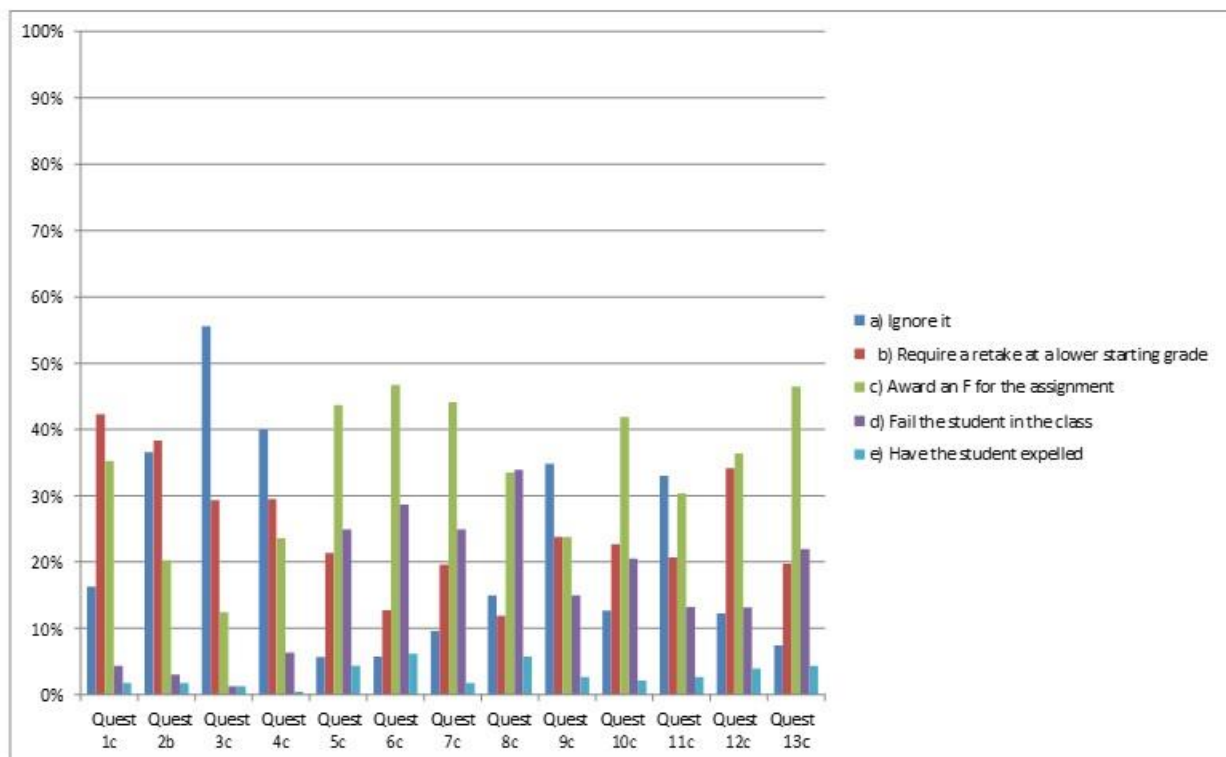


Both of these questions provide a further indication that the international students are amenable to supporting fellow students. This parallels their indications under their personal actions earlier in the survey.

### Student Suggested Instructor Response

The first option for students to choose on the survey from the array of possible instructor responses is to “ignore it (Figure 4).” Those questions where more than 30% of the students choose “ignore it” are as follows:

**Figure 4: Student’s Selected Instructor Response**



2) In the past, I provided my homework to another student (37%)

3) In the past I worked with another student on an individual assignment instead of working alone (56%)

4) In the past I worked with another student on a take-home exam instead of working alone (40%)

9) In the past, I provided answers to another student before they took the exam (35%)

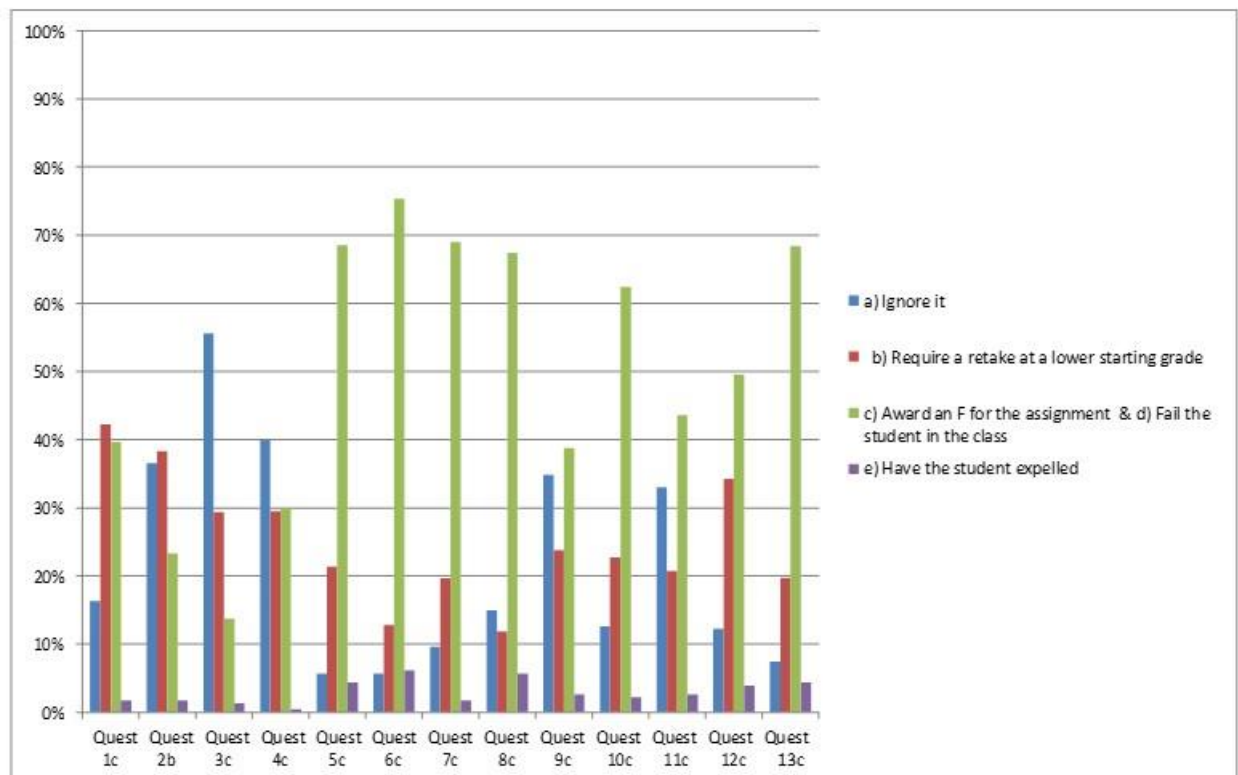
11) In the past, I wrote mnemonic helps (a short rhyme, phrase, or acronym for making information easier to recall) on a wall behind the instructor (33%)

Again, as with the two previous categories, these are conditions where the student is reaching out and assisting a student that needed help (perhaps in their opinion). Number eleven may be viewed as less significant so the instructor could possibly ignore it. This was the highest

response rate for this question, although a nearly equal number (30%) felt the instructor should give the student an F for that exam.

To capture the issues that invoke an F for assignment or F in the class, we combined the responses of c) and d) (Figure 5). The students suggest a severe penalty for those actions described in questions 5-13 below:

- 5) In the past, I used a cheat sheet hidden in an ink pen, or on my body, etc., during an exam (69%)
- 6) In the past, I received exam answers via a cell phone or another communications device (75%)
- 7) In the past, I collaborated with another individual to receive exam answers during the exam (69%)
- 8) In the past, I reviewed a copy of the actual exam before test time (67%)
- 9) In the past, I provided answers to another student before they took the exam (39%)
- 10) In the past, I programmed answers into my calculator, cell phone or electronic device (62%)
- 11) In the past, I wrote mnemonic helps (a short rhyme, phrase, or acronym for making information easier to recall) on a wall behind the instructor (44%)
- 12) In the past, I copied text for a school assignment directly from the internet without any citation (50%)
- 13) In the past, I obtained a research paper from the internet and turned it in for a class assignment (68%)



**Figure 5: Instructor Action “F” Combined**

When categories of c) & d) are combined, in questions five, six, seven, eight, ten, and thirteen a dramatic rise is displayed over the other choices. The first four questions are not excessive; however the others mentioned previously jump to your attention. A large portion of the students are indicating that action should be taken by the instructor in these questions that would be considered more serious than the first four question scenarios. It is also interesting that

questions nine and eleven find support of all five responses by the instructor. Questions six and eight have the strongest selection by students that an instructor should pursue expulsion from school as a penalty for that action.

## CONCLUSION

This international study provides some insights on the in-class behavior and attitudes of business students from various countries and cultures. The students are showing a willingness to reach out to fellow students to assist them in home work and exams. They are hesitant (a maximum of 6% of the students) to select expulsion from school for any of our scenarios. A final serious concern is that 18% of the students (basically one in five) have downloaded research papers from paper mills instead of developing them on their own. Teachers working with international students should be aware of these tendencies and take actions to minimize these infractions.

Also, these international business students are consistent in their responses under all three domains (their personal actions, how they view those actions and their recommendations for actions by the instructor). We designed the academic integrity survey to query the student from least serious (copying homework) to most serious (submitting a purchased research paper). The students demanded stiffer punishments for the more serious infractions and often selected “ignore it” for the lesser offenses.

We do not have a robust enough sample to show indications between countries; however we intend to expand our analysis in two areas. The first is a comparison of responses between the genders in the survey. Can a significant difference on any question be shown between the genders? The second is a content analysis of the written comments from the 230 students. An analysis of the content of their personal responses could establish two issues. What are the student’s primary concerns for academic integrity and are their survey responses confirmed by their open ended responses?

We hope the analysis of the responses of the international students is enlightening and can guide the pedagogic efforts of instructors who teach such individuals. It is imperative that the professor clearly articulate what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior for their classes, both orally and on the syllabus. The instructors may wish to stress the importance of pursuing higher ethical standards in classes where students come from disparate regions. Examples or cases of ethical behavior, or student research on the importance of ethical behavior, may be important to modify the behavior of the students. Also, it may be important for the instructors to adopt a stronger vigilance in detecting issues of academic dishonesty, and apply any penalties fairly and consistently. By adhering to these recommendations, all parties will know what is expected, and how infractions will be handled. This will hopefully reduce the number of incidents of dishonest behavior.

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