

Academic Misconduct among Business Students: A Comparison of the US and UAE

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Published online: 17 January 2014
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Abstract A survey of 345 undergraduate business students from a medium-sized southeastern regional university and 164 undergraduates from a medium-sized university in the United Arab Emirates found that 71 % of all respondents admitted to academic misconduct in a recent 1-year period, a percentage similar to McCabe’s (2005) finding that an average of 70 % of undergraduate students admitted to recent academic misconduct. Business students from the Middle East were significantly less likely to perceive various academic misconduct behaviors as forms of serious cheating compared to business students from the US. Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimension of individualism/collectivism and Ajzen’s (Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes 50, 179–211, 1991) theory of planned behavior are discussed as likely explanations of reported academic misconduct differences between the two countries.

Keywords Academic integrity · Academic misconduct · Cheating · Honor system · Individualism · Collectivism · Culture

Introduction

Academic misconduct at American colleges and universities has been reported to have reached “epidemic” proportions (Hutton 2006; McCabe et al. 2006), and a number of studies have indicated that business students are among the most prevalent cheaters on campus (Baird 1980; Klein et al. 2007; McCabe and Trevino 1995; Rettinger and Jordan 2005). Some studies have suggested that business school education may be to blame for recent corporate scandals, such as Enron and WorldCom (Ghoshal 2005; Mitroff 2004) and for perceived unethical behaviors among managers (Neubaum et al. 2009).

While the preponderance of studies on academic dishonesty in higher education has focused on North American campuses (Christensen-Hughes and McCabe 2006), little research has explored cross-cultural differences in academic misconduct, especially between

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individualistic societies like America and collectivist societies like the Middle East (Hofstede 1980; McCabe et al. 2008; Tadesse and Getachew 2010; UNESCO 2003). This study attempts to contribute a cross-cultural focus to the growing corpus of academic dishonesty literature by comparing attitudes about academic misconduct held by business students at a mid-sized university in the American mid-south with those held by business students at a mid-sized university in the United Arab Emirates.

Cultural Influences on Academic Misconduct

Culture has been shown to have a strong influence on ethical attitudes and decision making (Christie et al. 2003; Swaidan et al. 2004). Hofstede's (2001, p. 225) typology of culture classifies countries according to their individualism, which is evident in "a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after herself/himself and her/his immediate family only" and collectivism, which is evident in "a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty." According to Hofstede (1980), individualists value personal independence, pleasure, individual expression, and personal time; and individualists tend to believe that personal goals and interests are more important than group interests. In contrast, collectivist cultures emphasize cooperation, affiliation, and security; collectivists stress the priority of group goals over individual goals and the importance of cohesion within social groups. Hofstede's (2001) individualism rankings for 50 countries and three regions indicate Americans rate as the highest of any country in individualism, while Arabs (e.g., Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) are rated as collectivistic.

Methodology

This study was designed to answer the following academic misconduct research questions comparing differences between individualistic US and collectivist UAE business students:

1. Does the frequency of reported academic misconduct differ between US and UAE business students?
2. Are there differences in the perceived seriousness of different types of academic misconduct between US and UAE business students?

United Arab Emirates

The UAE sample for this study came from a university that opened its doors in September, 2003, and currently hosts a diverse student body of over 4,300 students representing more than 55 different nationalities. Over 95 % of students are from collectivist societies (86 % from Middle Eastern countries and 10 % from Asian countries). The university offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees based on the American model of higher education, as well as several professional diploma and postgraduate programs utilizing the British system of postsecondary education. The official language of the university is English; however, the university offers degree and diploma programs both in English and Arabic. Since this Arabic university utilizes the American model of higher education, a large number of the faculty and senior staff have American university degrees, as well as experience in the United States,

Canada, and the United Kingdom. The UAE university is organized into three academic colleges (College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business Administration, and College of Engineering & Computer Science) and an English Language Institute. It is licensed by the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

As a part of measures aimed at maintaining an environment characterized with academic integrity, the UAE university revised its academic integrity policy in 2009 and created the Office of Academic Integrity. The broad objective of this office is to promote, foster, and maintain a culture of academic integrity and the highest standards of ethics for all constituents through a process of 1) raising awareness and sensitivity towards issues related to ethics, morality, and personal responsibility and educating the university community regarding different aspects of academic integrity; and 2) implementing the provisions of its academic integrity policy.

As part of its academic integrity policy and under the auspices of the Office of Academic Integrity, the university established a campus-wide honor code in 2009. Each student is required to abide by the tenets of the honor code, and all faculty members, staff, and students are expected to sign a copy of the code, which is then placed in their individual files. Students and others who have been found to have violated the code are held accountable for their actions and receive disciplinary action up to and including termination from employment or dismissal from the university.

United States

The American sample is a public regional 4-year university located in the mid-south and is one of 11 campuses of a state-wide system; it is the fifth largest university in the state with annual enrollment of around 7,400 students. The US university was officially endorsed as a 4-year institution in 2002 and offers applied and traditional baccalaureate degree programs, 1- and 2-year associate and technical programs, and noncredit business and industry training programs. The university is organized into seven academic colleges (College of Applied Science & Technology, College of Business, College of Education, College of Health Sciences, College of Humanities & Social Sciences, College of Languages & Communication, and College of Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics) and one College of Student Success.

Ninety percent of the student population is from the surrounding six-county region with less than 5 % from foreign countries; the student population is over 75 % Caucasian. This university has no campus-wide office for academic integrity and no institutional honor code but does have an established student code of conduct which is accessible to students on the university's webpage and is distributed as part of the student handbook during new student orientations. This code spells out inappropriate student behavior, including issues of academic dishonesty as well as possible outcomes of such behavior.

Measures

The administrators of the business schools at both universities initiated a survey to explore undergraduate academic misconduct concerns between May of 2011 and April of 2012. A total of 509 useable survey responses were collected, 345 (approximately 5 % of the student population) from American business students and 164 (approximately 4 % of the student population) from Arab business students. Of the 345 American business students, 46 % were male, the average age was 22; class representation was 36 freshman, 90 sophomore, 94 junior, and 125 senior. For the Arab business students, 35 % were male, the average age was 21; class representation was 28 freshman, 56 sophomore, 26 junior, and 54 senior.

The 26-item survey instrument was adapted from Broeckelman-Post's (2009) dissertation, which was based upon McCabe's (2003) work at Kansas State and other universities. Questionnaires were intended to determine the frequency of academic dishonesty behaviors and to develop a baseline of cheating perceptions and attitudes.

1. Does the frequency of reported academic misconduct differ between US and UAE business students?

Students were asked how often in the past year they had engaged in the 26 behaviors listed below using the following scale: never (coded as 1), once (coded as 2), more than once (coded as 3). Responses were summed and averaged; higher values indicate increased frequency of the listed behavior. Approximately 70 % of the US business students in this study admitted to some form of cheating, whereas 73 % of the UAE students admitted to academic dishonesty of some type. Overall, the incidence of academic dishonesty averaged 71 % for these respondents. Means, standard deviations, and significance levels for all items are listed below in Table 1. The significance levels are based on tests of means for the two independent samples. As the listed significance levels indicate, almost all the UAE business student response scores were significantly higher than those of US business students.¹ Only "working on an individual assignment with others," "copying few sentences from written source w/o citing," and "copying a few sentences of material from an Internet source without footnoting them in a paper" had higher means for US students than for UAE students; and only "working on an individual assignment with others" was significantly higher. In almost all situations, UAE business students self-reported more academic misconduct in the 1-year period than their US counterparts.

In addition to comparing how frequently business students in a collectivist society reported they engaged in academic misconduct compared to business students in an individualistic society, this study investigated the perceived seriousness of cheating behaviors.

2. Are there differences in the perceived seriousness of different types of academic misconduct between US and UAE business students?

Students were asked the extent to which the 26 listed behaviors were serious forms of cheating using the following scale: 1 = not at all, 2 = to some extent, 3 = moderately, 4 = to a great extent, 5 = extremely serious cheating. Responses were summed and averaged; higher values indicate increased perceived seriousness of the listed behavior. Means, standard deviations, and significance levels for all items are listed below in Table 2. Again, a test of means was performed to determine the significance of the difference in the mean scores. As the listed significance levels indicate, all UAE business student responses were significantly lower when compared to those of US business students. In every situation, American business students were significantly more likely to perceive the listed behaviors as more serious forms of cheating than their Arab counterparts.

Discussion

This study found that business students from a collectivist society in the United Arab Emirates were significantly less likely to view possible cheating behaviors as serious and significantly

¹ In addition to country (culture), the data were examined to determine if other demographic factors (e.g., age, class—freshman, sophomore, junior, senior—gender, etc.) significantly affected the likelihood of self-reporting of academic misconduct. No significant demographic differences were uncovered and as such demographic variables are not included in this paper.

Table 1 Means of students who admitted to engaging in specific types of academic misconduct within the past year

	US students mean/SD	UAE students mean/SD	Difference in mean
1. Turning in work done by someone else.	1.10/0.37	1.29/0.61	0.19 ^c
2. Working on an individual assignment with others.	1.74/0.86	1.58/0.80	-0.17 ^b
3. Receiving unpermitted help on an assignment.	1.31/0.65	1.32/0.63	0.01
4. Writing or providing a paper for another student.	1.08/0.32	1.33/0.65	0.25 ^c
5. Providing a graded assignment to another student to submit.	1.07/0.30	1.34/0.67	0.28 ^c
6. Sharing an assignment with others to use as an example.	1.64/0.81	1.67/0.82	0.03
7. Getting questions/answers from someone who has taken test.	1.28/0.60	1.52/0.79	0.25 ^c
8. Copying a friend's computer program.	1.09/0.38	1.20/0.53	0.11 ^a
9. Helping someone else cheat on a test.	1.09/0.37	1.21/0.56	0.13 ^b
10. Fabricating/falsifying a bibliography.	1.08/0.35	1.20/0.53	0.12 ^b
11. Falsifying/fabricating research data.	1.08/0.34	1.23/0.57	0.15 ^b
12. Copying on test from another without their knowledge.	1.07/0.31	1.22/0.58	0.15 ^b
13. Copying on test from another with their knowledge.	1.06/0.31	1.23/0.59	0.16 ^c
14. Copying few sentences from written source w/o citing.	1.32/0.64	1.31/0.61	-0.01
15. Turning in a paper obtained in large part from a term paper "mill" or website that did not charge for this information.	1.03/0.23	1.26/0.60	0.23 ^c
16. Copying a few sentences of material from an Internet source without footnoting them in a paper.	1.35/0.66	1.29/0.60	-0.05
17. Using unpermitted crib notes (cheat notes) during a test.	1.08/0.32	1.22/0.57	0.14 ^b
18. Copying material word for word from a written source.	1.11/0.38	1.24/0.56	0.13 ^b
19. Altering a graded test and submitting it for additional credit.	1.03/0.21	1.18/0.51	0.16 ^c
20. Turning in a paper copied from another student.	1.04/0.27	1.20/0.55	0.16 ^c
21. Using a false excuse to obtain an extension on a due date.	1.23/0.53	1.31/0.62	0.08
22. Hiding library or course materials.	1.02/0.18	1.14/0.42	0.12 ^c
23. Damaging library or course materials.	1.01/0.13	1.11/0.40	0.10 ^b
24. Cheating on a test in another way.	1.06/0.29	1.20/0.50	0.14 ^c
25. Cheating on a written assignment in another way.	1.07/0.32	1.24/0.57	0.17 ^c
26. Plagiarizing myself by turning in a paper completed for another course.	1.12/0.40	1.16/0.48	0.04

^a Significant at the 0.1 level^b Significant at the 0.05 level^c Significant at the 0.01 level

more likely to report that they had engaged in academic misconduct than business students from an individualist society in America. McCabe et al. (2008) reported similar findings in their study where 80 % of the Lebanese (i.e., collectivist) students admitted to academically dishonest behavior in the past year compared to 54 % of U.S (i.e., individualist) students. McCabe et al. also found that 66 % of Lebanese students versus 21 % of American students admitted to cheating on tests and exams at least once in the past year.

Blachnio and Weremko (2011: 15) argue that "the individualism or collectivism of a society considerably affects its attitude towards academic cheating. In collectivistic societies, collaborative cheating such as copying from others with mutual agreement occurs more frequently than in individualistic societies." Chapman and Lupton (2004) agree that collectivist cultures are expected to tolerate more cheating as helping other students during exams is accepted and

Table 2 Means of student perceptions of seriousness of cheating behaviors

	US students mean/SD	UAE students mean/SD	Difference in mean
1. Turning in work done by someone else.	4.06/1.1	2.98/1.4	-1.09 ^c
2. Working on an individual assignment with others.	2.61/1.1	2.32/1.2	-0.29 ^a
3. Receiving unpermitted help on an assignment.	2.99/1.2	2.58/1.2	-0.40 ^c
4. Writing or providing a paper for another student.	4.27/1.1	3.02/1.4	-1.25 ^c
5. Providing a graded assignment to another student to submit.	4.25/1.1	3.13/1.4	-1.13 ^c
6. Sharing an assignment with others to use as an example.	2.82/1.3	2.41/1.3	-0.41 ^c
7. Getting questions/answers from someone who has taken test.	3.77/1.2	2.70/1.4	-1.07 ^c
8. Copying a friend's computer program.	3.72/1.3	3.03/1.5	-0.69 ^c
9. Helping someone else cheat on a test.	4.39/1.0	3.44/1.5	-0.94 ^c
10. Fabricating/falsifying a bibliography.	4.09/1.1	3.24/1.5	-0.85 ^c
11. Falsifying/fabricating research data.	4.13/1.1	3.28/1.5	-0.85 ^c
12. Copying on test from another without their knowledge.	4.45/1.0	3.46/1.5	-0.99 ^c
13. Copying on test from another with their knowledge.	4.47/1.0	3.40/1.5	-1.07 ^c
14. Copying few sentences from written source w/o citing.	3.74/1.2	3.00/1.4	-0.74 ^c
15. Turning in a paper obtained in large part from a term paper "mill" or website that did not charge for this information.	4.39/1.0	3.13/1.4	-1.27 ^c
16. Copying a few sentences of material from an Internet source without footnoting them in a paper.	3.63/1.2	2.96/1.4	-0.67 ^c
17. Using unpermitted crib notes (cheat notes) during a test.	4.37/1.0	3.47/1.5	-0.90 ^c
18. Copying material word for word from a written source.	4.25/1.0	3.26/1.4	-0.99 ^c
19. Altering a graded test and submitting it for additional credit.	4.46/1.0	3.33/1.4	-1.14 ^c
20. Turning in a paper copied from another student.	4.48/1.0	3.33/1.5	-1.14 ^c
21. Using a false excuse to obtain an extension on a due date.	3.61/1.2	2.85/1.4	-0.76 ^c
22. Hiding library or course materials.	3.76/1.3	3.13/1.4	-0.63 ^c
23. Damaging library or course materials.	3.65/1.4	3.16/1.5	-0.49 ^c
24. Cheating on a test in another way.	4.29/1.0	3.38/1.5	-0.91 ^c
25. Cheating on a written assignment in another way.	4.20/1.1	3.34/1.5	-0.86 ^c
26. Plagiarizing myself by turning in a paper completed for another course.	3.41/1.5	3.08/1.6	-0.33 ^b

^a Significant at the 0.1 level^b Significant at the 0.05 level^c Significant at the 0.01 level

may even be encouraged. McLeod (1992: 12) suggests that concepts of academic misconduct like plagiarism are culturally difficult for foreign students to understand since "students from certain Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures are baffled by the notion that one can 'own' ideas, since their cultures regard words and ideas as the property of all rather than as individual property." Similarly, Swaidan and Hayes (2005) reported that individualists are more likely to question the ethical standards established in their societies, whereas collectivists accept these standards without question. Payan et al. (2010) found that collectivist business students were a) more tolerant than individualist business students concerning questionable academic behaviors that tend to be more unilateral like copying material from the internet or looking at another student's exam without the knowledge of the other student, b) collectivist students tend to be more collaborative in their dishonest actions such as getting exam material

from others or “free-riding” in a group, and c) collectivist students tend to use more delaying tactics such as requesting due date or assignment extensions with false information.

One possible explanation of the results reported here is Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior, which asserts that intention to engage in a specific behavior precedes actual engagement in the behavior. The theory of planned behavior holds that while attitudes can be key initiators of people’s actions, other important predictors of behavior are their perceptions of the social norms governing the behavior, their perceived degree of control over the behavior, and their perceived moral obligation to perform positive behaviors and avoid negative behaviors. According to Ajzen’s theory, academic misconduct by students would be examples of actions with perceived behavioral control, since students not only violate academic integrity policies but also are usually constrained by other factors, such as the extent to which cheating is monitored and whether other students are willing to assist in their cheating efforts.

Stone et al. (2007) tested the theory of planned behavior in their study of academic misconduct using a sample of 217 business students and found the model provided significant prediction of intention to cheat. Similarly, Beck and Ajzen (1991) reported the theory of planned behavior predicted students’ intentions of dishonest actions with a high degree of accuracy and that it was moderately successful in the prediction of actual behavior with respect to cheating on a test, shoplifting, and lying to get out of assignments. Stone et al. (2010) also reported that the theory of planned behavior model explained 21 % of the variance in cheating intentions and 36 % of cheating behavior in a sample of 241 business undergraduates.

Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior hypothesizes that an individual’s intention to perform a behavior is a primary determinant of whether that behavior will occur. Intentions are “indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior” (Ajzen 1991: 181). Thus, an individual’s attitude toward a given behavior and related subjective norms determine the individual’s intention to perform the behavior. The likelihood students will perform specific behaviors such as cheating or other forms of academic misconduct are determined by the degree to which they hold favorable or unfavorable evaluations of the behavior, the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior, and the amount of perceived behavioral control they believe they have over the behavior in question. Beliefs arising from social pressure are termed normative beliefs (Ajzen 1991), and the social norms of individuals in different cultures will likely influence their intentions to perform particular actions like academic misconduct to the extent their subjective norm results in the perception that important others think the behavior is acceptable, encouraged, and/or promoted within their circle of influence. According to Hofstede (2001), members of collectivistic cultures recognize their interdependent natures and obligations to the group, and they focus on maintaining harmony by going along with the group’s wishes and promoting long-term relationships. Because the United Arab Emirates is a collectivist society, the theory of planned behavior would predict that subjective norms emphasizing the co-dependency among individuals and social referent groups would likely influence students when making the decision whether to engage in academic misconduct behaviors. In other words, students in collectivist cultures may believe their family, friends, and peers would support academic behaviors believed to be unacceptable in more individualistic societies, and these beliefs would influence their intentions to perform such acts which would then influence their likelihood to engage in specific behaviors.

While international academic integrity research applying social psychological theories like the theory of planned behavior is scant, preliminary studies support the impact of culture on college student behavioral intentions and subsequent behavior. For example, McCabe et al. (2008) found that students from Lebanon reported significantly higher levels of academic dishonesty than US students. McCabe et al. (2008: 464) conclude that “viewed through a collectivistic lens one could argue that the Lebanese students are behaving exactly the way

they were raised to behave—working together to navigate a difficult task.” This study agrees that culture, as determined by Hofstede’s individualism/collectivism ranking, does influence business student perceptions of the severity of academic misconduct and the likelihood of engaging in cheating behaviors.

Several limitations of this study should be mentioned which indicate the need for future research. First, this paper deals with self-reported behavior rather than actual observed behavior. Survey respondents may misunderstand, misremember, or misreport their real behaviors, although we believe the actual amount of academic misconduct is likely to be higher than indicated since authentic academic “cheating” is likely to be under-reported. Additionally, as indicated in Table 1 above, our study reveals an anomaly which brings into question the continuing categorization of purely “individualistic” or “collectivistic” cultures of origin when trying to establish a basis for understanding academic misconduct behavior by undergraduate students. Examining the data we collected regarding the mean scores of students who admitted to engaging in specific types of academic misconduct, the only category in which US students reported a significantly higher level of incidents is “working on an assignment with others.” Table 2 illustrates, moreover, the smallest reported differential between US undergraduates and UAE students in terms of seriousness of the offense. Given Hofstede’s cultural classification of the US as individualistic and UAE as collectivistic, one would not expect working with others to be a category—much less the only category of academic dishonesty—in which individualists would exceed collectivists. Recent psychographic research of the US Millennial generation may provide a perspective to help explain the anomaly.

Strauss and Howe (2000) identified seven core personality traits of Americans born since 1982, the time period when computerization, networking, and the internet created a prevailing and unprecedented environment of “connectedness” during childhood and adolescent years. Williams et al. (2011) research into best practices for designing curricular and co-curricular adjustments to this generation focuses on the “collaborative” Millennial core trait: Williams et al. (2011) argue that as the most interconnected generation ever, Millennials use email, texting, and social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to stay in touch with their peers and family. Millennial team-orientation manifests itself in growing expectations that business schools will engage in activities like team teaching, team assignments, and team grading. Referring to Ajzen’s criteria for planned behavior, then, highly networked Millennials may perceive a cultural norm of academic integrity prismatically through their generational norm of collaboration, expecting greater appreciation of, and focus on, teamwork in higher education.

Future research should focus on replicating and verifying the predictive power of the proposed model using larger, randomly selected samples of students from universities from additional cultures. Additional study might also explore the extent to which the Millennial interpretation offered above provides an accurate explanation of the observed phenomenon. Further efforts are also needed to develop additional methods of measuring student academic misconduct behavior using measures found to have strong reliability and validity. Within the constraints outlined above, we believe our study provides valuable insights into some of the causal factors underlying academic dishonesty on college campuses.

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