Chapter 13
International Students and Academic Misconduct: Personal, Cultural, and Situational Variables

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ABSTRACT

The incidence of academic misconduct among students at institutions of Higher Education (HEIs) is rising to epidemic proportions. Technological advancement makes it easier for students to engage in acts that violate Academic Integrity (AI), yet the same technology does not necessarily make it easier for instructors to detect misconduct. Compounding the problem is the apparent difficulty in establishing a general description for acts that constitute academic misconduct. Creating a consistent definition has been fraught with issues, although cheating and plagiarism are seen as common behaviors that violate AI. The literature indicates that international students are particularly prone to acts of academic misconduct such as plagiarism. Theories have been espoused to gain further understanding and clarity on why misconduct may be prevalent among international student populations. This chapter explores literature on the personal, cultural, and situational variables that are often implicated in international student’s academic misconduct and reviews initiatives used to curtail such behavior.

INTRODUCTION

In today’s technological age, students have access to a myriad of educational resources and innovations, which are a challenge for educators to keep-up with. Although quite beneficial in education, technological advancements have also given students more opportunities to cheat, plagiarize, copy, or use dishonest means of getting ahead in class. Academic misconduct may occur for several reasons: to fulfill course
requirements, because students lack motivation to complete assignments on time (Zimerman, 2012), they are not aware that they are plagiarizing, or they may be new to the English language (Erkaya, 2009), and may have trouble understanding what their assignment entails.

International students have been described as ‘persistent plagiarizers’ by Western HEIs (Park, 2003). This trend to engage in academic misconduct is primarily seen as having a connection with these students’ cultural background. Different educational systems, teaching and learning styles, and educational values for instance, are often cited as the main reasons behind international students’ unintentional acts of plagiarism. Bista (2011) studied academic dishonesty among international students and discovered that previous learning styles, poor proficiency in English, cultural differences, and access to technological and educational resources were implicated in the motivation to be dishonest in the academic sense.

Most often, international students’ cultural and educational backgrounds do not prepare them for the legal and academic implications of plagiarism and academic misconduct (Sarkodie-Mensah, 2007) in the West. Interestingly, in reviewing the intersection between culture and plagiarism, Zimerman (2012) concluded that if a student’s educational and cultural background espouses academic misconduct, then from his/her frame of reference academic misconduct is not wrong. Hence, institutions of higher education (HEIs) experience difficulties in explaining academic misconduct to international students. In addition, language barriers as well as internal and external pressures on the student to succeed can lead them to plagiarize.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the personal, cultural, and situational variables that recur in issues of academic misconduct among international students. Subsequently, the chapter discusses a few measures HEIs are employing to reduce the prevalence of these acts. These include practical suggestions on how to orient students to the culture of learning in the US and the long-term consequences of academic misconduct.

**BACKGROUND**

To fully conceptualize the importance of academic dishonesty or academic misconduct, the term must first be understood completely. Bertram Gallant (2008) defined academic misconduct as including the following:

- **Fabrication:** Making up data, results, information, or numbers, and recording and reporting them;
- **Falsification:** Manipulating research, data, or results to inaccurately portray information in reports (research, financial, or other) or academic assignments;
- **Misbehavior:** Acting in ways that are not overtly misconduct but are counter to prevailing behavioral expectations.
- **Misrepresentation:** Falsely representing oneself, efforts, or abilities; and
- **Plagiarism:** Using another’s words or ideas without appropriate attribution or without following citation conventions.

This definition identifies a list of behaviors that are seen as characteristic of academic misconduct or dishonesty. Of these, cheating and plagiarism are often seen as the most common examples of academic dishonesty. Cheating is not a new problem; even as far back as 1952, a study by Harp and Taietz (1966) revealed that ‘students at eleven colleges found that nearly two-thirds of students admitted to cheating’
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