Chapter 15

Academic Integrity and International Students: Culture, Challenges, and Learning Habits

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ABSTRACT

The pressure to excel, peer perceptions, and the lack of faculty enforcement are among several factors that lead students to cheat in general. When circumstances of Academic Integrity (AI) among international students were examined, findings revealed prevalence of academic misconduct behaviors due to several factors. When admitting several academic dishonesty behaviors as accepted practices, a sweeping majority of international students denounced cheating as opposed to their own cultural, ethical, and religious beliefs. Several forms of academic misconduct behaviors are more frequent among international students than others. These included unauthorized help, cheating on online tests and utilizing Internet paper mills. Suggested strategies for minimizing misconduct practices of international students included: orientation training, a focus on learning outcomes, alleviating the social pressure, raising students’ awareness about academic expectations, and building on the students’ ethical backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION

Cultivating honesty lays the foundation for lifelong integrity, developing in each of us the courage and insight to make difficult choices and accept responsibility. (International Center for Academic Integrity, 1999)

Over the last two decades, academic dishonesty has become an alarming phenomenon on college campuses (Carter & Punyanunt-Carter, 2006; Fishbein, 1993). Davis, Grover, Becker, and McGregor’s (1992) study on 6000 college students showed that between 46-79% of students reported that they have cheated at least once. Several forms of academic dishonesty can take place in the college classroom with its larger meaning. These forms may vary in their degree of severity and seriousness from copying...
from a nearby student answer sheet during a quiz to plagiarizing a paper from an Internet website or collaborating on homework and inappropriate utilization of tutoring services (Levy & Rakovski, 2006). Faculty perceptions about cheating always varied from those of the students who usually denied the severity of the different forms of cheating (Graham, Monday, O’Brien, & Steffen, 1994). Moreover, students consider some forms of academic dishonesty more serious than others. Consequently, students are more frequently engaged in behaviors that they consider less serious than other forms of cheating (Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003).

Occurring for several reasons with varying rates, types of cheating within a college setting may have no limits (Hendricks, Young-Jones, & Foutch, 2011). An observed increase of incidents of academic dishonesty among international students warrants specific attention to the reasons of these practices, their varied levels, the different forms they take, and possible measures to eliminate these reasons for the sake of minimizing these practices for the ultimate goal of providing a rich learning experience for international students. The focus of this chapter, therefore, is to explore the motives and circumstances surrounding the increased reported academic dishonesty practices. These practices varied to include: unauthorized collaboration, copying a few sentences from an electronic source without referencing them, getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken the test, receiving substantial unpermitted help on an assignment, and fabricating or falsifying a bibliography. Among these practices, unauthorized help was the most frequently reported and falsification of bibliography was the least frequently reported. However, to delve into such topic, the prominent cultures of international students need to be discussed to highlight the common cultural norms among international students. Such norms combined with background learning habits play important roles in shaping the motivational drives of international students. The drives in turn influence international students’ efficacy beliefs.

BACKGROUND

Cultural Backgrounds of International Students

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2015), three main categories of international students represent almost 55% of the total number of international students studying in the United States (US). These groups, in the order of their rank are South-East Asian students, Indian students (132,888), and Saudi students (59,945) with the South-East Asian including Chinese (304,040), South Korean (63,710), and Japanese students (19,064). Each of these groups has its own dominant cultural norms. Discussing these cultures, one has to be warned that generalizations are only used to make it easier for the readers to understand the origins of the common academic practices among each group. However, a plethora of subcultural varieties exist among each of the aforementioned groups.

The discussion about these dominant cultures will focus upon a few factors that were deemed influential on the academic practices of international students when they are in the US. These will include:

1. Family roles in individual lives of the youth;
2. Schooling systems in the countries of origin;
3. Respect and hierarchical structures; and
4. Pressures and negotiations for success.
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