

Concept and Practice of Academic Integrity in Institutions of Higher Learning in Mysore, India

Anu Bhawana¹
Dr.Nanjunda²

Abstract

Academic integrity refers to a professional code of conduct in academia which specifically means practising principles and values of academic honesty. Teachers, research scholars and students have a joint responsibility to uphold and practice academic honesty and integrity. In an institution of higher learning, teachers as the mentors and guides of students have a greater responsibility than others to promote academic integrity. An enquiry about the understanding and practice of academic integrity in selected institutions of higher learning in Mysore, in the Indian State of Karnataka, shows that there is a lack of understanding among a substantial number of faculty, research scholars and students about the concept of academic integrity and what constitutes various forms of academic dishonesty. The study, based on a sampling of 100 selected students, teachers and research scholars, also shows that there is a great deal of tolerance and acceptance of academic dishonesty, in part because the problem is not given serious attention in the institutions and established procedures and rules of conduct to deal with the incidences are lacking. Suggestions for tackling the problem favour enforcing measures to detect offences and imposing punishment, combining these with establishing an academic code of conduct and inculcating professional values.

Key words: Academic integrity, Academic dishonesty, Institutions of higher learning in Mysore, Promoting academic integrity

1. Background

Academic dishonesty and cheating is a familiar problem in higher education, but it is often not very well reported or publicly discussed. University authorities may be concerned that such cases, if they come to light, will tarnish the reputation of the institution. Keith-Spiegel (1996) reported that among a sample of almost 500 university professors, 20 percent reported they had ignored to take further measures in evident cases of cheating. Many university teachers hesitate to take action against cheating behaviour because of the stress

^{1.} Dept. of Anthropology, University of Delhi -India

^{2.} UGC-CSSEIP centre, Mysore University -India,
E-mail; anthroedit@ymail.com Ph :09880964840

and discomfort that follows. Maramark and Maline (1993) suggested that faculties often choose not to involve departmental or university authorities, but handle the observed cheating on an individual level, making it invisible in university documents and, thus, unknown to the university authorities.

Jendreck (1992) concludes that students prefer to handle the problem informally rather than by using formal university code of conduct as they fear of this being placed in their academic records. Students' belief that "everyone cheats" or that cheating is a normal part of life (Baird, 1980) encourages cheating. The adage "cheaters never win" may not apply in the case of academic dishonesty. With cheating rates as high as 75% to 87% (Baird 1980; Jendreck 1989) among students and detection rates as low as 1.30% (Haines et al., 1986), academic dishonesty is reinforced, not punished, by the way it is generally handled. (Davis, Grover, Becker & McGregor, 1992, p. 17).

Drake over seventy years ago reported that students in general have no strong sentiments against academic dishonesty and they don't cooperate to control it (1941). The research conducted by Parr (1936) and Drake (1941), separately which involved extensive analyses of academic integrity issues, resulted in numerous interesting findings. It was found that students who graduated in the upper one-third of their class were far more honest than those who ranked in the middle and lower thirds (Parr 1936). He reported that students became less dishonest as they progressed in their education (*ibid.*). Bowers (1964) examined student dishonesty and reported underclassmen had an increased incidence of cheating as compared to upperclassmen. According to him, cheating in respect of term papers and assignments was considered to be a deviance where deviance is conceptualized as something which was not going according to the prescribed rules, but cannot be called illegitimate. Both students and faculty members considered copying related to term paper or assignments as a form of cheating that was not a moral issue (*ibid.*).

Miller and Parlett (1973) tried to investigate the frequency, methods and causes of academic dis-integrity. According to them, the definitions of cheating also varied as a result of change in ideas about moral development with time and influence of others including peer groups. Pressure to perform well, lack of studying strategy, poor understanding of the subject and other factors related to experience as a student are also responsible for creating temptation for academic misconduct.

2. Academic integrity: the nature of the challenge

The research conducted on academic integrity in institutions of higher learning is generally based on two premises: first, the students understand the nature of academic dishonesty and recognize that violating academic integrity norms in educational institutions is unacceptable student behaviour; second, there is a relationship between student's attitudes on cheating and the student's belief that specific practices are either not termed as cheating or cheating of a

non-serious nature. The strong belief that cheating in an academic context is a non-punishable offence in itself is a big influence in fostering a mindset to engage in academic dishonesty.

Students' attitude, belief and understanding about the issues of academic integrity have to be addressed in dealing with the problem. In George Washington University, for example, the question is looked upon as one of personal honesty and of violation of law in respect of intellectual property rights. In the mid-90s the 'Code of Academic Integrity' was designed and written with the help of students, faculties and other educationists along with the University administrators. An Academic Integrity Office was created and an Academic Integrity Council was formed to promote and manage all procedures associated with the code. This very step of the George Washington University led to many such structured steps taken up by other institutions worldwide and it has turned out to be a hot topic of debate in academia.

3. What is academic dishonesty: Definition of terms

In a narrow sense academic dishonesty can be defined as a deliberate attempt at misrepresentation of one's performance, and falsification, forgery or fabrication of any information and data, to gain academic reward or recognition.

Academic dishonesty includes:

Cheating: Deliberately using or attempting to use unauthorized materials or misrepresentation of such materials for individual gain.

Fabrication and forgery: Misrepresentation of data, information, or citations in any scholarly exercise.

Plagiarism: Using other people's work (words, ideas, data, theories, etc.) without giving proper credit and citation and claiming it as one's own original work.

Multiple submission: Submitting academic documents (viz., an article) to more than one journal or editor/publisher of a book at the same time with minor changes.

Professional misconduct: Deliberate and improper assessment of an academic work, negligence of professional duty, or breach of agreed or commonly understood professional code of conduct.

The present study has been done in selected higher learning institutions located in Mysore district of Karnataka. The purpose was to explore the challenges that higher educational institutions faced in respect of academic integrity. This is an area that has been ignored as a subject of research in our part of the world.

4. Aim of the study

This study is an attempt to increase the level of understanding about the academic code of conduct, principles and values to be followed at any higher educational institution. The study

explored practice and attitude about academic dishonesty among the teaching faculties and the research scholars in selected institutions of higher learning in and around Mysore city in India. Academic code of conduct and professional code of conduct in academia are regarded synonymous for this study.

The main questions posed in the study were:

- Are the participants aware about the term and the concept of ‘academic integrity’?
- How prevalent are activities which can be construed as academic dishonesty?
- What forms of academic dishonesty have participants indulged in?
- What reasons do scholars and faculties offer to explain or justify their involvement in academic dishonesty?
- What efforts are made to cope with the problems of academic dishonesty?

The study was conducted in University of Mysore and other institutions of higher education in and around Mysore. Data were collected from the respondents of various categories including university faculties and research scholars.

5. Research Methodology

The data for the study were collected through a one time cross sectional survey

Sampling:

A sample of 100 faculty members, advanced students and research scholars were selected using purposive sampling technique from two local universities, ten degree colleges and two research institutes in Mysore. Purposive sampling technique was used to ensure inclusion in the sample of people who have been actively involved in certain academic activities, especially academic writing, research and teaching. Fifty-four were from science disciplines and 46 were in arts and humanities. Sixty-seven were male and thirty- three female participants. They were in the age range of 22- 60 years; 70 percent of whom were below the age of forty.. The details of the sample are given below in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of the Study Sample

	Level	Number of Respondents	Science Discipline	Arts Discipline
1	Professors	30	17	13
2	Associate Professors	20	9	11
3	Assistant Professors	10	5	5
4	Research Scholars	20	11	9
5	PG Students	15	9	6
6	Others	5	3	2
	Total	100	54	46

Instruments and analysis of data:

The qualitative data generated from survey, interviews and focus groups have been thematically coded in the NUD*IST database software and indexed to identify dominant themes and to link those themes with specific research questions. The quantitative data have been analyzed using SPSS software. The thematically indexed discourse from various schedules has been converted into an extended set of dummy variables and entered into the SPSS database.

The following instruments of observations were developed and used for collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

1. Faculty Schedule
2. Research and Post-graduate Students Schedule

There were altogether 25 questions in each questionnaire, of both open and close ended types..

6. Main Findings

The findings are presented by organising the results under several headings reflecting the research questions posed for the study.

a. What forms of academic dishonesty are most prevalent?

In responding to question about types of academic dishonesty the respondents encountered frequently, it was reported that plagiarism was most common, followed by academic misconduct (breach of accepted standard in professional interaction, negligence of duty, improper assessment of academic work), multiple submission for publication of the same or similar professional work, falsification and fabrication, claiming student's work as one's own, and using crib notes by students during examination. (Table 2).

Table 2: Prevalence of Forms of Academic Dishonesty as Indicated by Participants' Response

Types of academic dishonesty identified by respondents (N=100)	Yes, it's a serious problem	No, it is not a major problem	Total
Plagiarism	70	30	100
Professional misconduct	64	36	100
Multiple submissions for publication of same work	59	41	100
Falsification and fabrication	52	48	100
Claiming students work as own by the faculty	48	52	100
Using crib notes	36	64	100

b. Understanding of forms of academic dishonesty

Questions were posed to determine how the respondents defined and understood different forms of academic cheating. Plagiarism, the most common academic dishonesty, also appears to be defined correctly by the highest proportion of respondents. Two thirds (65%) understood plagiarism to be “cut-and-paste” work, i.e., using the work of others without attributing the source and passing it as one’s own. A third (34%) defined fabrication correctly as making up data or factual information. Almost a third (31%) also understood the meaning of falsification and forgery as deliberate misrepresentation of data and information. These statistics suggest that while the large majority of the members of the academic community was knowledgeable about the concept and meaning of plagiarism, the most common academic misconduct, the large majority, on the other hand, did not have a clear understanding of the other forms of academic misconduct. Ignorance in this case, however, may not be innocence. Without clearly defining or understanding certain behaviour as misconduct, the students and faculty may be practitioners of the improper practices.

c. Reasons for academic dishonesty

Why did faculties and students indulge in academic cheating? Forty-five percent of the teachers and 55% of the scholars and students were of the opinion that cheating was necessary in order to enhance their credibility in the eyes of their colleagues and seniors. Research scholars were concerned about proving their worth in the eyes of the supervisor and considered it necessary to cheat for that purpose. Twenty-one percent of the teachers and double the number of students (43%) indicated that no one ever gets punished for academic cheating. Research scholars were asked why they personally felt the need to resort to dishonesty. About half of them (48%) responded that they felt themselves to be under pressure to advance themselves and prove themselves professionally, which was an incentive to be dishonest in their academic endeavours. Students said that to avoid failing in the examination at any cost, to get good marks in assignments and to improve and maintain high academic credentials they adopted dishonest academic practices.

d. Academic dishonesty and moral failing

A distinction appears to be made between academic dishonesty or misconduct and moral dishonesty or failing. The former apparently was seen as less egregious than what may be described as a moral failing (which would be described from a religious point of view as a sinful act). However, more than half of the respondents (53%) thought cheating in the academic arena should be considered as a professional misconduct as well as a moral failing. A fifth would like to see this primarily as a moral misconduct, whereas a quarter (26%) saw this as just as professional misconduct.

e. Who is responsible for upholding academic integrity

When it came to taking responsibility for academic integrity, the opinion was predominantly in favour of assigning the responsibility to the teaching faculty. Sixty percent of the

respondents thought that teachers were responsible for the behaviours associated with academic dishonesty among students, whereas only fourteen percent said that students who indulged in such behaviour should bear the primary responsibility.. On the other hand, 26% of the responses indicated that both teachers and students were equally responsible for the prevailing situation. The dominant view appears to be that in educational institutions teachers have the responsibility and the obligation to help moral development of students as well as their intellectual skills.

f. Provision for maintaining academic integrity

The faculties and students were asked about their knowledge about the rules and regulations that the institution has regarding academic integrity. They were also asked how often university policies and regulations on academic dishonesty were discussed with them. To our surprise, no one was aware about such guidelines in the university dealing especially with academic cheating. Approximately one-third of the students responded that faculty never or rarely discussed these issues with them. Approximately 54% of the faculty members indicated that they never or rarely discussed university policies and guidelines on their own with the students. If someone enquired about that then only they explained such things.

We gave the faculty a list of three behaviours associated with academic integrity which were-honesty (not indulging in cheating in academic activities), responsibility (not neglecting academic duties) and trust (expectation that people in academia will not be dishonest), and asked the respondents to rank them in order of importance. The majority of the responses placed honesty at the top, followed by responsibility and trust respectively. We also enquired about their opinion on establishing an 'Assessment Committee' to scrutinize academic misconduct. Sixty percent supported such a move; 20% were not in favour of this, and the rest had no opinion on this question, .

g. What should be done if someone is found indulging in academic dishonesty?

Thirty percent of all respondents said that they would report an incidence of academic dishonesty to the authorities. Forty percent of the students said that they would ignore the incident and the rest were unsure, some saying that it depended on the seriousness of the offense. Twenty-eight percent of the faculties said that they would definitely report dishonest conduct to the authorities, 24% would express disapproval but would not report the incidence. The remaining faculties said that they would be lenient in the case of first offence and let it go with stern warning.

Forty percent of the students thought it was acceptable to cheat, if one was not at risk of being caught and if the teachers were not so concerned about it, Both students and teachers thought that the seriousness of the offence should be considered in reporting an incidence, but what was a serious offence remained a subjective judgment in the absence of clear criteria and code of conduct.

h. Action to be taken to enhance academic integrity

Asked to indicate one most important measure that could be taken to promote academic integrity, more than a third of respondents put their trust on a technological solution – use of software to track plagiarism. This response also indicated that plagiarism was considered the most serious academic offence at least by these respondents. The next most frequent response by 28% of respondents regarding action to prevent dishonesty was imposing severe punishment. Raising awareness of students about the concept and practice of academic honesty was closely behind with 23% respondents favouring this solution as the priority measure. Moral persuasion through establishing an academic code on honesty and inculcating the values of honesty were the measures favoured by only 10 and 5% of the respondents respectively (Table 3).

Table 3: How Academic Integrity can be Promoted (Single Most Preferred Measure)

	Response	Frequency	%Count
1	Using advanced software to detect academic dishonesty	34	34.0
2	Imposing severe punishment for academic dishonesty	28	28.0
3	Promoting awareness about academic honesty among students	23	23.0
4	Establishing university code on academic honesty	10	10.0
5	Inculcating moral values among the scholars	5	5.0
	Total	100	100.0

7. Comments on findings

A review of relevant literature and the exploratory study based on a sample of the academic community in selected institutions of higher learning in Mysore show that the question of academic integrity is a serious and live issue that can jeopardise and undermine the basic academic mission of higher education. Different facets of the problem include understanding and perception of it, in what various forms it is manifested, its prevalence, and what is done or can be done to overcome the problem.

The exploratory exercise with a relatively small sample of faculty and research scholars and post-graduate students indicate that there is general awareness of the problem and its prevalence. Certain forms of academic dishonesty can be clearly identified to be more widespread than others. There are, however, differing views and perceptions about the seriousness of the problem, the danger it may pose to the academic endeavor, how it is handled and how it should be handled in the institutions of higher learning.

Plagiarism is recognized as the most common form of academic dishonesty which is indulged in by faculty and students. Academic or professional misconduct, a rather broad category, which involves subjective judgment, also comes out towards the top of the list of problems. This indicates a general sense of dissatisfaction about the behaviour and conduct of members of the academic community, even if specific offence cannot be clearly pointed out and quantified.

Interestingly, students copying from crib sheets during examinations, popularly regarded as a common problem, appears low on the list compared to other forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct.

The large majority of respondents agreed on plagiarism as a widely prevalent problem, but they were divided in their views about other forms of dishonesty – many of which may be related to plagiarism. These included falsification, forgery and different kinds of academic misconduct. This response may be a function of what is done about creating awareness of the problem, letting it be known clearly what acceptable norms of behavior are and how the norms are emphasized and enforced in academic life.

It is interesting that apparently a distinction is made between professional dishonesty and moral dishonesty – the former seen as less egregious than the latter, which is linked to the concept of sinful acts.

Teachers and faculty members are seen as the main actors in the academic community in creating awareness about academic norms of behavior and in preventing and taking action against offences. Students apparently take the cue from their teachers and make judgments about what they can get away with, what is acceptable and what the consequences are of offensive behaviour.

There is a general absence, or at least inadequate explanation and dissemination, and enforcement of rules, regulations, procedures and mechanisms for applying and implementing norms of academic behavior. Vagueness about perception of academic dishonesty and lack of clarity about what a serious misconduct is, as well as a separation of the moral (personal and religious) and academic spheres of life undermine action regarding academic integrity. These factors lead to a lack action or inconsistent action about acknowledging or reporting offences, requiring compliance, and imposing punishment.

What can be done? The recognition of plagiarism as the most serious problem has prompted the suggestion of reliance on technology to identify and prevent this form of offence. Establishment of rules and codes of conduct and rigorous punishment also have been seen as necessary steps. The preference seems to be for external imposition of preventive and punitive measures rather than creating internal incentive and motivation by creating awareness, making professional behavior a part of one's personal and moral code of conduct, and inculcating values and principles in the academic institution and in academic life.

8. Concluding Comments

Academic integrity is at the heart of the university's core mission of imparting and creating knowledge and upholding academic standards and expectations in both teaching and research. How the values and principles associated with academic integrity is communicated and applied in the academic community is critical to carrying on the academic endeavours.

A model code of academic integrity, containing definitions and examples of forms of

academic dishonesty and misconduct, the consequences of infractions and rewards and recognition for adherence to the norms have to be clearly framed, implemented and the means and mechanisms for implementation established in every institution of higher learning.

The obvious first step is to recognize the seriousness and prevalence of the problem. While there is a general acceptance of the existence of the problem, how the threats to academic integrity endangers the pursuit of basic academic missions and the many far-reaching implications of it needs to be discussed and debated in the academic community with leadership given by the policy makers and stakeholders in the academic endeavour.

External imposition of rules and application of preventive and punitive measures have to be part of the total effort to promote and uphold academic integrity. But these alone cannot be the wholly effective and long term approach. Creating awareness, inculcation of values, establishing collectively as the academic community the codes of conduct for faculty, researchers and students are necessary to support both the external measures and internal incentive and motivation to internalize and practise the norms of academic integrity.

References

- Baird, J.S. (1980). "Current Trends in College Teaching," *Psychology in the School*, 47:4, 515-522.
- Davis, S., Grover, C., Becker, A., and McGregor, I. (1992). "Academic Dishonesty: Prevalence, Determinants, Techniques, and Punishments". *Teaching of Psychology*, Vol. 19, p.16-20.
- Drake, C. (1941). "Why Students Cheat?". *Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. XII, No.8, p. 418-442.
- Haines, V. J., Diekhoff, G. M., LaBeff, E. E., & Clark, R. E. (1986). "College Cheating: Immaturity, lack of commitment, and the neutralizing attitude." *Research in Higher Education*, 25(4), 342-354.
- Jendreck, M.P. (1992). "Students' Reactions to Academic Dishonesty". *Journal of College Student Development*, Vol.33, No.3, p. 260-273.
- Keith-Spiegel, P. (1996). "Book Review" in *Ethics and Behavior*; 6:3, 255-258.
- Maramark, S. and Maline, M.B. (1993). *Issues in Education: Academic Dishonesty among College Students*, Washington D.C.: Us Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- 8. McCabe, D., and Bowers, W. (1994). "Academic Dishonesty among Males in College: A Thirty Year Perspective". *Journal of College Student Development*, Vol.35, No.1, p. 5-10.
- 9. Miller, C. and Parlett, M. (1974). *Up to the Mark - A study of Examinations*, Society for Research into Higher Education, Guildford, Surrey.
- 10. www.gwu.edu.in (website of George Washington university, accessed on 24th January, 2013 at 10 pm IST)