Honor Codes at Schools and Colleges of Pharmacy

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A survey was conducted in the Summer of 1995 regarding procedures for investigating potential cases of academic misconduct at schools and colleges of pharmacy in the United States. The questionnaire of 35 items, sent to deans of all schools and colleges of pharmacy, investigated what happens at a school when suspicion arises that a student has violated a rule of academic behavior: is the act one of academic misconduct, what steps are taken, and who is responsible for implementing them? The results of the survey show a wide range of options among the schools, with no clear consensus in defining academic misconduct and no single solution for the problem. Twenty-five of the reporting 57 schools (43 percent) report that they have an honor code, but these codes varied in their structure.

INTRODUCTION

Research has been documenting the prevalence and types of cheating at academic institutions in the United States in the past few years. Studies about cheating focus on various aspects: the differing definitions and types of cheating(1-6); the percentages of students who cheat(7-11); the characteristics and situational ethics of students who cheat(7,12-16); and reactions to and possible solutions for cheating(17-23). This article will provide background information about research on academic dishonesty and present results from a 1995 survey of schools and colleges of pharmacy in the United States about how they deal with cases of academic misconduct.1

Defining academic dishonesty is the first problem one encounters when evaluating the situation in the academic setting. Students and faculty do not always agree on what constitutes academic dishonesty, for faculty tend to be stricter than students when defining cheating(6). Whereas 99 percent of the faculty and students in a 1974 study by Wright and Kelly(1) believed that copying answers from another student’s exam was cheating, differences of opinion existed for other types of academic behavior. Failure to cite a source in a paper (i.e., plagiarism) was considered cheating by 81 percent of the faculty and by only 51 percent of the students in the study by Wright and Kelly(1). Similar results have been found by Stern and Havlicek in 1986(2) and by Livosky and Tauber in 1994(4). Once an act is defined as cheating, however, students were quicker to condemn their peers than the faculty was. For example, for in-class exams, students were harsher than the faculty in judging an act as one of cheating. Students evaluated an act as cheating when there was merely the intent of cheating—even if the act was not completed (4). Whereas the faculty could overlook the intent to behave dishonestly, the students were unable to do so. Even the thought of cheating constituted academic misconduct.

The percentages of students who admitted to cheating ranged from as low as 13 percent to as high as 95 percent(16,17). Varying definitions of cheating could account for this wide range. As indicated above, cheating incidences varied according to the assignment; according to Baird(7), 42.5 percent of students in a study cheated on daily quizzes, 58.5 percent on unit tests, 28.5 percent on midterms, and 27.5 percent on finals. Later studies support these figures; for example, Haines et al.(13) found 22.1 percent of students cheated on daily or weekly quizzes, 23.7 percent cheated on major exams, and 54.1 percent cheated overall; according to a study published in 1989 by Michaels and Miethe, 23 percent cheated on term papers, 78 percent on homework, and 42 percent on exams(14). A 1994 study by McCabe reported lower incidences of cheating, and claimed that the media had greatly exaggerated the amount of cheating that occurs at our schools. Nevertheless, McCabe did report cheating: at non-code schools, i.e., schools with no honor code, 41 percent of the students had plagiarized by copying a few sentences without footnoting, and 29.9 percent of the students had cheated on exams by copying from another(10). Schools with honor codes had lower percentages but still reported cheating: 22 percent of the students had plagiarized and 13 percent had cheated on exams by copying from another student. One clear concern emerges from these data: cheating is a problem at schools, colleges, and universities in the United States.

Some researchers feel that a possible explanation for cheating can be found in evaluating the motivations students have for academic dishonesty. Students cheat for a variety of reasons; Baird indicates that competition for grades played a role in 35 percent of the cases, insufficient study time in 33 percent, and too large a work load in 26 percent of the cases(7).

Unfortunately, none of these situations is apt to improve as academic pressures increase. More recent studies have focused on situational ethics and the role neutralization—a form of rationalizing unethical behavior—plays in cheating(3,15). College students justify cheating by denying responsibility (for example, a student might not consider his failure to study for an exam sufficient reason for him to receive a poor grade) and by condemning the condemners (a student might cheat in the belief that the professor—and all instructors—dislikes students and is merely trying to punish

1 A copy of the survey instrument may be obtained by writing the author.
all students as much as possible). By claiming loyalty to a
group other than the institution, such as a circle of friends or
fraternity, the student feels that cheating is not wrong be-
cause he is helping a friend (or is being helped by a friend) to
survive in a cruel, competitive world. Gardner et al. (8)
concluded their study with the pessimistic statement that
“(a)dmiration for academic honesty will always have narrow
limits in a success-oriented society which exalts individualism and dissent.” Some researchers feel that educa-
tors must instruct about academic dishonesty(6) and that
closer proctoring would lower the number of cheating
cases(1); both activities place the burden on the instructor,
which would do little to nurture a sense of ethical respon-
sibility in the students.

If the responsibility for apprehending and punishing
academic misconduct is left to the instructor, the sanction
for cheating varies—if imposed at all, despite strict guide-
lines for academic codes of behavior in place at most insti-
tutions. Faculty tend to give the student the “benefit of the
doubt” and are also reluctant to get involved in a messy,
tedious process(4). According to Jendrek, more than one-
third of the faculty who reported seeing someone cheat did
not penalize the cheater(20). Tenured faculty members
were more likely than were non-tenured faculty to punish
the student: 70 percent of the tenured faculty and only 50
percent of the nontenured imposed sanctions of some
kind(20). Those who did penalize the students did so in a
variety of ways. The most common sanction (57 percent)
was a zero grade for the assignment; 10 percent of the
penalizing instructors gave an “F” grade for the course.

Honor codes have been suggested as deterrents to
academic dishonesty, although some studies claim that honor
codes do not prevent cheating. In reviewing the studies, one
must realize that a common definition of honor code does
not exist, and the term is often applied loosely. Honor codes
vary from school to school, and the studies often ignore the
possible variations. Gardner et al. claimed that an honor
pledge had no effect on cheating; in their study, participants
were required to sign an honor pledge only when completing
the assignment that was part of the study(8). Tittle and
Rowe demonstrated that moral appeals did not lessen chea-
ting, but these appeals came from the instructor during the
semester in one course(17). Michaels and Miethe found that
42 percent of students cheated on exams, a rate that sur-
prised them—given that the school in question stressed
academic honesty(14). Although students in their study
signed an honor pledge upon entering the university,
Michaels and Miethe did not mention the students’ role in
preserving and maintaining the honor code.

McCabe indicated that in order to be effective, honor
codes must permeate the institution. Programs should edu-
cate the entire college community—students, faculty, and
administration—about the honor code; students should sign
an honor pledge with every assignment, course syllabi should
mention the honor code, and reminders about academic
honesty should be frequent and visible (16). Even more
important than the existence of a code is the students’
acceptance of it. Students will behave honestly when they
know dishonesty is not accepted by their peers(16). The
community as a whole needs to condemn dishonest behav-
ior and to encourage honest actions.

In a profession such as pharmacy, honesty and integrity
are crucial, and the public holds pharmacists to high stan-
dards. For the past seven consecutive years, Gallup Poll(24)
has found pharmacists to be the most highly trusted profes-
sion—most recently with 66 percent of those polled ranking
pharmacists as “very high” or “high.” How ethically are
American pharmacy students behaving when they are about to enter is so highly ranked? Studies indicate
that students in another health profession, medicine, failed
to exhibit exemplary behavior as students. Pellegrino be-
moaned the widespread tolerance of academic dishonesty in
medical schools(21), but little has been done to investigate
the attitude pharmacy students display toward cheating.
Sherrow and Becker’s poster from the 1995 American Asso-
ciation of Colleges of Pharmacy annual conference poster
session indicated that pharmacy students at the St. Louis
College of Pharmacy report dishonest behavior consistent
with the behavior at other schools(25).

If Sherrow and Becker’s data are indicative of the
pharmacy student population at large—i.e., that pharmacy
students across the nation are engaging in acts of academic
misbehavior—what are the schools and colleges of phar-

ACY in the United States doing to encourage ethical aca-
demic behavior? Are cases of academic misconduct handled
by the administration, the faculty, and/or the students? A
survey was created to determine how colleges and schools
of pharmacy in the United States deal with cheating and other
academic violations and to see how many and what types of
honor codes are in place across the country.

METHOD
In the Summer of 1995, a 35-item questionnaire on the
existence of honor codes was developed and sent to the
deans of all pharmacy schools and colleges in the United
States. Approved by Albany College of Pharmacy’s internal
review board, the survey was accompanied by a cover letter
explaining the purpose of the survey, and a postage-paid
return envelope was included with the mailing. The American
Association of Colleges of Pharmacy supplied the mail-
ing labels. The deans then forwarded the questionnaire to
the appropriate person to be answered. Schools were not
asked to identify themselves.

The survey posed multiple choice questions about the
size of the institution, types of cheating that had occurred (if
any), and whether the college had an honor code. If the
school had no honor code, four questions inquired how the
school dealt with cheating and about the level of satisfaction
with their disciplinary process. For those colleges that re-
ported having an honor code, twenty questions asked about
the details of the system. Many of the questions allowed
multiple responses. The questionnaire did not define the
term “honor code” but allowed each school to describe its
own procedure. The survey results thus give a picture of the
variety of honor codes in existence at schools and colleges of
pharmacy in the United States.

RESULTS
Three months after the surveys were mailed, 57 of 75 schools
had responded (77 percent). Although schools were not
asked to identify themselves, 11 included letters or cards
with their response.

Of the 57 schools responding, 25 had honor codes, 32 did
not, and three of these without a code were developing one.
At schools and colleges of pharmacy in the United States, the ratio of schools with an honor code to the schools without an honor code seemed to be roughly the same for both public and private institutions: 44 percent of public institutions (19 of 42) claimed to have a code, and 40 percent of private institutions (six of 15) reported that they had an honor code.

Forty-four institutions offered a course in ethics, and 25 required it for graduation. Ten of these that required a course in ethics for graduation also had an honor code.

Cheating was reported at schools with no honor code as well as at schools with honor codes, a finding that corresponds to current research(10,22). The types of cheating were related primarily to giving or receiving answers on a test or exam. Table I depicts the various forms of academic misbehavior reported.

Schools with no code cited lack of interest as the primary reason for not having an honor code: 10 mentioned lack of interest on the part of the faculty, six on the part of the students, and four on the part of the administration. Six considered it unnecessary (although each of these had at least one case of reported cheating), and one school dropped its code because it was ineffective.

Generally, individual cases of academic misbehavior at schools with no code were handled by the instructor (11 schools), the administration (three schools), or various individuals or groups according to the institution. These included a faculty committee on student discipline, a Dean of Students, and a jury of three students and three faculty members. Sanctions varied, depending on the offense (23 schools) and on the instructor (12 schools), but the most common sanctions were failure in the course (16 schools), expulsion from the college (15 schools), and failure of assignment (11 schools).

Most noncode schools reported satisfaction with their system; 21 were moderately satisfied, five were extremely satisfied, and four were not at all satisfied. Two did not respond.

Of the 25 schools that reported having honor codes, 15 codes were unique to the pharmacy college and seven were part of a university-wide code. Four of the 25 schools did not respond to this question. These codes were relatively young. Their ages are shown in Figure 1. The oldest were part of a university-wide code.

Cheating, lying, and stealing were covered by honor codes in varying degrees. Twenty-four of the codes covered cheating; 18 of these also covered lying and three of these in addition covered stealing. In other words, 15 of the 25 codes covered lying, cheating, and stealing. The different types of behavior covered under an honor code are summarized in Table II. One code school did not respond.

Administration of the honor codes at the 25 colleges claiming to have them, regardless of their scope, varied from school to school and was the responsibility of students, faculty, and/or administration. The honor code was administered exclusively by students at six schools, exclusively by faculty at one, and exclusively by administration at six. A combination of students and faculty administered the code at three schools, a combination of faculty and administration at three, and a combination of students, faculty, and administration at six.

The most popular means of informing the community about the honor code was the orientation (21 schools), with the student handbook a close second (19 schools). Only one school used all venues listed for disseminating information: orientation, student handbook, separate brochure, special meetings devoted to the topic, student representatives informing others, student publication such as the newspaper, and the recruiting packet. Nineteen schools used a combination of orientation plus publication also held meetings devoted to the topic, and seven had student representatives disseminating information. At five schools, special meetings, student representatives, orientation, and a publication helped spread word about the honor code.

At code schools, students are reminded of the honor code in a variety of ways. The student handbook is important, as it was cited by 15 of the 25 code schools. One school listed only the handbook as the means for reminding the students about the code. At seven schools, students signed an honor pledge whenever they took a test; three of these schools also required a pledge for paper and essay submissions.

When someone suspected a student of academic misbehavior, the procedure for initiating the process varied. At 13 code schools, the accuser's identity was known only to the investigating committee until it became necessary to reveal it. Nine schools called for an open accusation; seven kept the accuser's identity secret, known only to the investigating organization, and four schools allowed anonymous accusations. The accusation could be made by students and faculty at 16 colleges, by students, faculty, and administration at seven, and exclusively faculty at one college. One school did not respond.

Suspected cases of cheating were handled by a group of individuals responsible for investigating all cases of cheating at nine schools; another nine schools had an individual instead of a group responsible for investigating all cases of cheating. At most of these schools, the investigating individual was a member of the administration: three of them were assistant deans and three were associate deans. There was also a Vice Chair (status not specified) and an Attorney General, which was a student position. One college did not list the title of the individual.

Should there have been sufficient evidence for a case, guilt or innocence was determined in a variety of ways. At seven of the 25 schools, the individual or group who investigated the case also determined the verdict. One college

Table I. Reported cases of cheating at 57 U.S. schools and colleges of pharmacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of cheating</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving or receiving answers on a quiz</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving or receiving answers on a test</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving or receiving answers on a final exam</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving or receiving answers on a lab exercise</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving or receiving answers on homework</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing a grade</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherb</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Footnotes: aNo cases reported
bIncludes “altered examination,” “lying to avoid an examination,” “possession of unauthorized exam,” “submitted altered exam for regrading,” “use of crib notes during exam,” “suspected of stealing a copy of exam.”

Table II. One code school did not respond.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior covered by codes at the 25 schools</th>
<th>Number of schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheating</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating; lying; stealing</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating; lying</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating; stealing; lying</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating; stealing; lying</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanctions covered by codes at the 25 schools</th>
<th>Number of schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Failure in the course</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion from the college</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of assignment</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of assignment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion from college</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of assignment</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
indicated it had no investigating organization; the case was determined by an individual selected for the case from the administration. Randomly chosen juries, selected on a case-by-case basis, heard the case at seven schools. These juries consisted exclusively of students at three schools, of a combination of students and faculty at three schools, and of a combination of students, faculty, and administration at one school. Standing juries heard the cases at nine schools. These juries consisted exclusively of students at five schools (one of these also had a member of the administration), students and faculty at three, and students, faculty, and administration at one. One college did not respond. The decision regarding the outcome of the accusation was made solely by an individual at two institutions with honor codes, and this person was a member of the administration, either the Associate Dean or the Assistant Dean. In all other cases but one (i.e., in 22 cases) the decision was made by a majority vote; the one exception called for a unanimous vote. This unanimous vote was required of a standing jury from the student body.

Sanctions varied for a first offense. The most common sanction, mentioned by 13 colleges, was failure in the course. Five schools listed it as the only option. Most schools tended to impose a variety of sanctions, depending on the individual situation. Besides failure for the course, failure for the assignment (at seven schools) and repeating the course (at seven schools) were the most common forms of punishment.

All schools allowed an appeals process. At 16 colleges, the accused student could make an appeal to the administration, and at seven schools the accused could appeal to a second organization; at two schools, the appeals process involved both administration and a second organization.

Schools reported varying levels of satisfaction with their honor codes. Two schools were not at all satisfied with their honor code system, 15 were moderately satisfied, and seven were extremely satisfied. Two schools did not respond. The major shortcomings of the honor code, shown in Table III, involved the students. Table IV, on the other hand, depicts the advantages of the honor code. Two schools, obviously dissatisfied with their systems, wrote in “none” for advantages—although one of these had reported being “moderately satisfied” with the system.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the survey indicate a wide range of procedures for cases of academic misbehavior at pharmacy colleges with codes and without honor codes. Although investigating the occurrence of cheating at code versus noncode schools is beyond the scope of this study, one difference regarding the type of cheating did stand out. Of the reported cases of cheating handled at the various schools, the most marked difference was in the number of cases of plagiarism. A total of 14 schools reported plagiarism, but only three of these were at schools with honor codes. McCabe suggested that schools with honor codes had more students aware of campus policy on academic behavior, and therefore students were more careful when documenting their sources for papers (22). The existence of an honor code at these colleges may then increase student awareness of plagiarism; 22 honor codes covered plagiarism, and only three of these had a case...
involving this form of academic misconduct.

Honor codes were often young: Of the 25 honor code systems in place, 10 were younger than five years old. This renewed interest in honor codes reflects a nation-wide trend (19). One possible explanation for the recent attention paid to honor codes is that schools with them do tend to have fewer cases of academic misconduct (16), and the results of this survey indicate that code schools were slightly more satisfied with their method of dealing with cases of academic misconduct than noncode schools were with their system. (Care should be taken when evaluating these data, as the satisfaction level is the response of the individual completing the questionnaire.) Of the non-code schools reporting, 21 (66 percent) were moderately satisfied, five (16 percent) were extremely satisfied, and four (12 percent) were not at all satisfied, with two not responding. For colleges with honor codes, however, 15 (60 percent) were moderately satisfied, seven (28 percent) were extremely satisfied, and two (eight percent) were not at all satisfied. One did not respond.

The seven code colleges who reported being extremely satisfied shared very few characteristics except that four of the seven were exclusively student run. Two other “extremely satisfied” colleges had systems run solely by faculty or solely by the administration (in this case, the Assistant Dean). The seventh college’s system was administered by students and faculty. Research suggests that allowing and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own actions encourages more mature, ethical behavior (22). In addition to requiring courses in ethics, perhaps colleges of pharmacy should require the students to be responsible for their code to be successful (16). One college in this survey listed an active role in an honor code.

Frequent reminders of the code are recommended for a code to be successful (16). One college in this survey listed only the handbook as the means for reminding students of the honor code, which raises the question how often those students really were reminded of their code. How frequently do students refer to the student handbook? Another school never reminded students of the honor code. The failure to do students refer to the student handbook? Another school never reminded students of the honor code. The failure to keep the code visible may explain this particular school’s dissatisfaction with the code.

An honor code takes time to become part of the academic tradition at an institution. Ages of the honor codes at the “extremely satisfied” level ranged from one that was over fifty years old to two codes that were sixteen to thirty years old; there were also three colleges with codes that were six to fifteen years old.

CONCLUSION

The results of the survey indicate a wide range of procedures for cases of academic misbehavior at pharmacy colleges with codes and without codes. Schools without an honor code might pursue the possibility of beginning one. Colleges considering implementing an honor code are advised to give the system time—at least one generation of students—to become part of the academic tradition. Pharmacy colleges with honor systems in place who are only moderately pleased with their systems may want to increase the visibility of their honor code. No system is perfect. Cheating occurs with or without an honor code, but less often at schools with an honor system (22). While there is no clear definition of what an honor code is, it should be visible and actively involve the students—the people who are most directly affected by an honor code. The most trusted profession should also have the most trusted students.

References


