Chapter XIII
An American Perspective of Ethical Misconduct in ODLS:
Who's to Blame?

Chi Lo Lim
Northwest Missouri State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Open and distance learning systems (ODLS) brought about immeasurable advancement in the delivery of education. Albeit all the benefits ODLS offers, there are some issues that need to be addressed. One of the most prevalent issues is the problem of persistent academic dishonesty. Much research effort has been devoted to explain why students commit acts of dishonesty, but there is limited research done on why faculty members do not take on a stronger position against it. This chapter offers cases of ODLS misconducts at an American University, the process that faculty members took to document academic dishonesty, the appeals process used by students, and the consequences of dishonesty. This chapter provides insights from faculty faced with dishonesty. It also addresses what administrators should do to support their faculty in curbing dishonesty in their institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is experiencing a new growth through technological advancements. In the 21st century workforce, a college degree has become a competitive advantage. Globalization demands an educated workforce. Many American employers today are requiring their employees to seek further education in the forms of certifications or college degrees. The majority of American employers are also offering some form of tuition reimbursement as an incentive to encourage more of their employees to return to schools. The constraints of limited time and family demands have made open and distance learning systems (ODLS) very popular and appealing to fulltime workers. The

growth of open and distance learning systems has created a new educational delivery mode that offers a formidable means to fulfil the needs of fulltime employees seeking further education. ODLS offers students the flexibility to further their education with less restriction to time and location. Although these benefits are indisputable, researchers have also found problems, including an increasing problem of dishonesty in academia, that can partially be due to the availability of electronic resources.

This chapter focuses on the growing problem of dishonesty in higher education in the United States. It provides an extensive literature review on factors that contribute to the epidemic of dishonesty. This chapter also sheds light from the perspective of faculty in regards to administrators' support or lack thereof. The objectives of this chapter are to present actual cases of ODLS dishonesty, and explore why students cheat, and what administrators and faculty should do to curtail the epidemic of dishonesty in higher education.

BACKGROUND

Cheating on campus is not a new phenomenon, nor is it limited to higher education. Evidence of cheating in U.S. schools was reported by the Centre for Academic Integrity at Duke University and the Rutgers' Management Education Centre to have increased in the last 10 years and 75% of all college students confessed to cheating at least once (Bushweller, 1999; Kleiner & Lord, 1999; Niels, 1997; Olt, 2002; Slobogin, 2002). McCabe indicated a 200% increase in cheating since the early 1960s (as cited in Carroll, 2002). Koch found that 20-30% of undergraduate students cheat regularly (Koch, 2002). According to McCabe, "... these results indicate that dishonesty appears to not carry the stigma that it used to" (as cited in Koch, 2002). Kleiner and Lord (1999) concur and found that 50% of those who had never been

caught cheating also believe that there is nothing wrong with cheating.

The advancement of technology created a new venue for educational institutions to offer new delivery formats to accommodate the needs of an increasing number of people returning to schools. Although there are many advantages of electronically delivered education, there are also the unfortunate and unforeseen problems of dishonesty due to availability, ease of obtaining material illegally, and companies aggressively enticing students to cut corners. Heberling (2002) documented the availability of papers and custom-tailored assignments available to students for purchase from digital paper mills such as Schoolsucks.com, PaperTopics.com, and Cheathouse.com. Academic dishonesty through technology was also reported in a survey conducted at Rutgers, which found that 50% of their students plagiarized Internet resources they used (Slobogin, 2002).

Kenkel (2004) found that students who took online classes are more likely to obtain unauthorized help than those who take classes in the classroom. Numerous studies reported the use of "ringers," or people who are paid to take classes for others (Maramark & Maline, 1993; Wein, 1994). Obviously, in an online environment, the use of "ringers" to complete courses for students becomes a very challenging problem, as technological advancement in identifying course-takers is not yet at the stage where we can monitor it consistently or systematically. Faculty members are concerned with this issue and many have reservations about online or distance education because they consider the use of "ringers" among the most serious forms of academic dishonesty (Nuss, 1984).

CASES OF ODLS MISCONDUCT

The cases of ODLS misconduct discussed in this chapter took place in a midsize public university in the United States. The grading system at the

university is as follows: "A" superior, "B" above average, "C" average, "D" below average, and "F" failure. The university has a clearly written academic honesty policy in place, which applies to all courses offered by the institution. Furthermore, faculty members are encouraged to copy the policy onto their individual course syllabi. The academic honesty policy requires that when misconduct is discovered, documented, and verified, the faculty member needs to notify the student and the administrators in writing and submit a grade of "F" for the course. In addition, the university also has a clear appeal process, which allows students to appeal a case if they feel that the charge was biased or unfair. The appeal process consists of two levels, one within the department that the student has declared a major in and a second level with the university-wide appeals committee. Any student charged with academic misconduct has 10 business days to file an appeal in writing.

ODLS Misconduct: Case 1

The first case of ODLS misconduct happened in a traditional class over a 4-month period, where the students have to read a book of their choice and critically analyze the book as part of the requirement to fulfil the course. The student (Dick) was not performing well in class and needed his book critique to be well written to achieve at least a "C" for the course. Dick met with the faculty and requested the faculty to grade his critique as early as possible so that if he needed to retake the course, he could do so before he left the country for Christmas break. The faculty agreed and, upon reading the first few paragraphs, was dumbstruck with conflicting statements in Dick's critique. There were obvious contradictions in Dick's paper on his perspectives about the book. The faculty did a preliminary search and phrases in Dick's paper immediately surfaced. She thoroughly searched the Internet for the rest of Dick's paper and found a total of 11 instances of plagiarism.

The telltale signs of ODLS misconduct were obvious because there was no logical flow between many of the statements in the critique. Dick did not even take the time to rephrase statements he lifted from Internet sources. Apparently, Dick was in too much of a hurry, and did not even bother to read what he was cutting and pasting to his paper. The faculty spent the next 3 days documenting the ODLS misconduct and requested the assistance of a librarian to independently verify the information. Once the librarian verified the misconduct, the faculty informed her superiors. Dick was immediately notified that he would be receiving an "F" for the course due to academic dishonesty. Dick did not appeal the case and retook the course.

ODLS Misconduct: Case 2

The second case involved a student (Rick) who was repeating a course to complete his graduate degree. This particular course was offered exclusively online during a summer session that lasted 8 weeks. Rick was doing acceptable work until the submission of the final term project, which was an in-depth analysis of an industry selected by the student. When the faculty started reading Rick's paper, there were numerous transition problems that made the reading extremely challenging. There were some specifically problematic sentences that neither seemed to flow properly nor did the sentences seem to correlate to each other. The faculty used a search engine and uncovered multiple incidents of plagiarism. A university librarian was requested to confirm the findings and she verified seven instances of plagiarism in the first four pages of the term project.

The faculty contacted her superiors about the ODLS misconduct and a formal written charge was filed. The faculty contacted Rick through electronic mail and informed him of the findings and that the consequence of his actions is an immediate "F" for the course and he need not take

the final exam. Rick immediately communicated with the faculty professing ignorance and pleaded for an opportunity to rectify the situation. Because the course was offered exclusively online, Rick was in another state and made arrangements to come back on campus to meet with the faculty. Rick was able to find the faculty's home address and called her home phone and requested to meet with the faculty in her home on a Saturday. Meeting with a concerned student at a critical time is definitely not protocol and potentially dangerous as the faculty was uncertain what state of mind the student was in. On the other hand, the faculty fully understood the importance of completing the course for Rick, as it was his last course and he had a position lined up that required the completion of the graduate degree. The faculty refused to meet with Rick in her home and arranged with him to meet in her office the following Monday.

The faculty received a phone call from her superior asking the details of the case and whether or not there was any possibility that it was a case of misunderstanding and miscommunication. Apparently, Rick informed the faculty's superiors that he had made a terrible mistake of submitting a draft instead of the final version of his term project. Rick was able to convince the faculty's superiors that he made a mistake and in turn the faculty's superior requested that the faculty afford Rick the benefit of the doubt. The faculty complied with the request and upon reading the first few pages of the "final" version, areas of concerns again became apparent. The faculty asked a librarian to assist in checking the problem areas and after 2 days of reading and extensive search on the Internet, the faculty and the librarian both found multiple areas of plagiarism.

The faculty contacted her superior and made arrangement to have a meeting with Rick in the superior's office. Rick was asked numerous questions about his explanation for the draft and the final version of his term project. There was time differential that Rick could not account for

between the "draft" and the final versions of his paper. He had made the mistake of trying to cover up his mistake by changing the clock on his computer to reflect that his "final" version was indeed the right version. However, in his haste he did not change the time on the computer and it showed that his "final" version was completed 2 days before his draft. The second term project that Rick submitted had 45 instances of plagiarism from multiple articles he copied off from the Internet in his 11-page paper. The librarian printed all the material and colour-coded all the areas of plagiarism.

In the last few minutes of the meeting, the faculty confronted Rick about the problem with the time differential of the papers; Rick was unable to provide any explanation and was completely dumbfounded. In addition, when the faculty asked Rick about the areas of plagiarism, his immediate response was that he had been doing research papers by cutting and pasting articles he found online and that no one had ever told him it was unacceptable. Rick further professes that online material is easily accessible, and he would change a word here and there to ensure that the sentences fit together. The final result of this case of academic misconduct was an "F" for the course after two levels of appeal. Rick retook the course a year later and completed his program.

ODLS Misconduct: Case 3

The third case of ODLS misconduct took place in a blended course that was offered in a summer session over a 4-week period. The class met online for the 1st, 3rd, and 4th weeks, but met on campus during the 2nd week for seminars and expert speakers. The student (Jane) was doing well in the class and was among the top 10% after all the required tests and other assignments. As part of the requirement for the course, Jane had to do an in-depth analysis on the evolution of quality in an industry of her choice. When the faculty

was reading the paper, she was surprised to read a familiar passage. The faculty felt strongly that she had read the passage previously and reviewed some of the material she had collected for class readings. After a brief search, she found the familiar passage from a document that she had shared with the class. Another area of concern was the use of British English in the paper; that prompted an uneasy feeling but knowing Jane's background, it was highly probable that she was accustomed to writing in British English. Further reading of the paper showed transition problems and lack of correlation between thoughts shared in the paper.

The faculty suspected that Jane had plagiarized but due to the lack of citations in the content of the paper, the faculty contacted Jane and afforded her an opportunity to complete the citations. Jane immediately offered to do another paper if the faculty was unhappy with the first paper she submitted. Furthermore, Jane asked the faculty for a delay of grade if she thought that she might receive a grade lower than a "B" in order to have more time to improve her performance in class. The faculty was surprised at the request and informed Jane that the only opportunity she had at that point in time was to submit the rest of the citations in the paper. Jane professed that all the sources she used were in the reference page she included at the end of the paper. After a number of e-mail exchanges and an ultimatum, Jane finally submitted a version of her paper with citations in the body of the paper.

The revised version of the paper was disappointing. Not only did Jane provide improper citations in the body of the paper; she also made changes to the reference page. After further analysis of the citations Jane provided, the faculty found that she placed superficial citations at inappropriate locations in the paper and also provided numerous incorrect and incomplete citations. The reference page was revised to include more citations than the original submission and some

had been deleted, which apparently were never used in the paper.

The faculty spent the next 10 days reading the paper and documenting areas of plagiarism. After the faculty completed the search, she asked a librarian to independently verify the areas of plagiarism and the result was 64 instances of ODLS misconduct in Jane's 30-page paper. The faculty followed the university's policy and filed a report to her superior as well as informing Jane of the finding. Jane never appealed the case and received an "F" for the course.

WHY DO STUDENTS CHEAT?

Academic dishonesty is not a new problem to education, but in recent years, it appears that this problem has continued to increase. Numerous researchers offer strategies to curtail academic dishonesty, but the fact of the matter is that unethical behaviours in academia seems to be increasing exponentially. Some rationalize that technology contributes to the ease for students to retrieve information without giving proper credit. Others indicate that students should not be faulted if they were not clearly taught what constitutes academic dishonesty.

Donald McCabe, Professor of Organization Management at Rutgers University and founding president of the Centre of Academic Integrity based at Duke University had done extensive research into cheating in higher education. In his 15 years of research in the area, McCabe found the two most common reasons why faculty members may choose to ignore academic dishonesty were sympathy for students and the tedious procedures required to document dishonesty incidents (McCabe, 2001). In an earlier study of 200 faculty members, McCabe and Trevino found that 40% of those surveyed had never enforced their institution's academic policy, while 54% seldom did and only 6% indicated that they did

enforce the policy (McCabe & Trevino, 1993). The trend of faculty not wanting to report academic misconduct is alarming. Numerous researchers concur, with their own studies finding that faculty members predominantly choose to confront student offenders themselves rather than subject these students to university authorities (Jendrek, 1989; McCabe, 1993; Nuss, 1984; Singhal, 1982; Wright & Kelly, 1974). Other researchers found that 79% of their faculty respondents reported that they had observed cheating, but only 9% of the same respondents actually took action against the student offenders (Graham, Monday, O'Brien, & Steffen, 1994).

USA Today reported that students and professors who suspected cheating would not likely take action if existing academic policy is seldom enforced ("Cheating thrives on campus as officials turn their heads", 2001). McCabe found a third of the 1,000 faculty members he interviewed from 21 campuses admitted that they observed cheating in their classes but chose not to take any action (as cited in Koch, 2002). It was also reported that students were discouraged with how some of their faculty members dismissed obvious cheating and with how others punished cheating without implementing their institutional policy (McCabe, 2005). Other factors that contributed to the lack of action from faculty members include fear of lawsuits, time, institutional policy, and so forth (Koch, 2002). Online cheating had been perceived as more rampant and easier than in the traditional classroom setting. Many believed that the distance and lack of face-to-face interaction between the students and the faculty made it less threatening for students to cheat (George & Carlson, 1999; James, 2002). Students admitted that they would be more likely to cheat in an online class than in traditional classrooms; however, when informed that surveillance would be used, the percentage dropped from 42% to 14% (Chapman, Davis, Toy, & Wright, 2004). Ironically, those who choose to teach their courses online tend to believe that cheating is not a major problem (Kaczmarczyk, 2001).

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Institutions of higher education are charged with the duty of educating and preparing youths for a better future. As they complete their academic training, they should be able to contribute positively to the society. Instilling integrity is vital to the stability in the new world under the leadership of future generations. The Centre for Academic Integrity defined academic integrity as "a commitment even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, respect, trust, fairness, and responsibility" (1999, p. 4). It requires all the constituents at educational institutions to actively work toward an honest environment where these five values can be introduced and instilled in our future leaders.

Most institutions of higher education have established some form of policy to discourage academic misconduct and to establish a level of academic integrity. Policies to deter dishonesty are written to provide guidance to all constituents, including faculty members and students. Research found that academic policies are written to guide members on how they are expected to behave within the institution (Kilbler, 1993; McCabe & Pavela, 2000; Olt, 2002; Taylor, 2001). Integrity guidelines are there to lay down the ground rules for a good working relationship for all concerned. Faculty members are held responsible for implementing their institutional policy when faced with an academic infraction. To successfully achieve the goal of any institution to uphold a high level of integrity, all members must abide by the set rules. However, the deterioration in academic integrity raises concerns about whether integrity

policies actually help prevent misconduct. It appears that policies that should uphold integrity are not functioning as they were meant to. In fact, the contrary can be said with the emergence of honour codes in many schools of higher education in the United States. There is evidence to show that schools with honour codes have less misconduct than those without (McCabe, 1993). The creation of honour codes does help deter dishonesty, but the continuous increase of incidents of dishonesty in higher education indicates that honour codes alone are insufficient.

Research found that faculty members are reluctant to implement institutional policy, because the process of documenting academic misconduct is time-consuming, tedious, and emotionally exhausting (McCabe, 1993). McCabe found that, more often than not, faculty members usually experience personal struggle because it appears that they are on trial instead of the student offenders and have to prove that they have done the right thing (1993). Furthermore, confirmation of faculty members' inaction was reported in a study of research universities where 57.2% of the faculty members professed concern about dishonesty, but only 53% of these faculty members will actually charge a student (Wajda-Johnston, Handal, Brawer, & Fabricatore, 2001). Faculty members showed strong reluctance to carry out institutional policies on academic dishonesty, partly because of a lack of trust, but also because of a felt need to assert their authority in their classrooms (Simon, Carr, McCullough, Morgan, Oleson, & Ressel, 2003). McCabe (1993) concurred with his findings that 25% of faculty members reported dissatisfaction with implementing institutional policies.

There appears to be a lack of communication between administrators and faculty members about how institutional policy would work when actually implemented. Institutional policies are established to help constituents focus on their institutional goals, but they require that all members of the institution understand and believe that they are fair and just for all concerned.

Academic Integrity: Faculty Responsibility

Faculty have a very important role in instilling academic integrity in their students. According to the American College Personnel Association, faculty members are responsible for making sure that their students understand the importance of ethical issues (ACPA, 2002, Section 2.9). Furthermore, the American Association of University Professors Statement of Ethics clearly indicated that faculty members must cultivate honest academic conduct (AAUP, 1987).

In an extensive study, McCabe (1995) found that students in general wanted their administrators and faculty members to take a strong stand against unethical behaviour. In fact, the same sentiment had been reported by another researcher, who found that students expect their faculty members to take the lead in nurturing and guiding them to become more responsible members of society (Boyer, 1987). Furthermore, Boyer posits that "If high standards of conduct are expected of students, colleges must have impeccable integrity themselves" (Boyer, 1987). McCabe states that student-offenders confessed that they dislike cheating and would prefer to be honest if they would not be in a position of disadvantage (McCabe, 2001). McCabe challenges the educational industry to deter academic misconduct by teaching students to take responsibility and be held accountable for their actions (McCabe, 2005).

Researchers found that students have a higher tendency to cheat if they believe that their peers are cheating (Chapman et al., 2004; McCabe & Trevino, 1993). It appears that faculty members' active involvement in deterring academic misconduct might help lessen dishonesty in academe. Numerous researchers indicated that students' inclination to behave inappropriately decreased when they perceived that their faculty members were serious about honesty and would enforce institutional policies on academic misconduct (Hall, 1996; Jendrek, 1989; Lim & Coalter, 2006;

Wajda-Johnston et al., 2001). Olt (2002) and Dirks (1998) found that online faculty members do not appear to be enthusiastic about actually discussing integrity with their students and that a majority of them do not even have an academic honesty policy in their syllabus. Communication and interaction between faculty members and students could build trust, which helps deter dishonesty (Chapman et al., 2004; George & Carlson, 1999; Graham, Cagiltay, Lim, Craner, & Duffy, 2001). Faculty should actively participate in discouraging dishonesty and instilling integrity in the classroom (McCabe & Pavela, 2000; McMurtry, 2001; Rowe, 2004; Sims, 1993).

CONCLUSION

The cases of ODLS misconduct discussed in this chapter show a problem area that needs the attention of all the constituents of higher education. From the cases, the actions of the students confirm the research that students believe their faculty would not take action against cases of ODLS misconduct. Furthermore, it showed that documenting suspected cases of ODLS misconduct can be a very tedious and emotionally exhausting endeavour for faculty members who choose to follow institutional protocol. Finally, the judicial procedure set by institutions can appear to be one-sided where faculty members have to prove their charge time and again.

In the technologically advanced world that we live in, the ease and accessibility of ODLS enable innovative ways of delivering education. This allows many learners the opportunity to fulfil their educational goals. Inadvertently, it also creates opportunities for unscrupulous paper-mill entrepreneurs who make ODLS misconduct available to those who are willing to pay and not learn. On the other hand, the availability of technology also provides educators a new tool to stop ODLS misconduct.

Who then should we blame for ODLS misconduct and academic dishonesty? In order to maintain an environment of true learning, all the constituents of ODLS need to take up the challenge. The temptation of cut-and-paste is too great and with increasing demands in the 21st century, it is not difficult to see why some might be tempted. Administrators must provide their students and faculty with a clear policy of institutional ethical expectations. In order for faculty members to nurture their students to become ethical and responsible citizens of society, they need to pursue all suspected cases of ODLS misconduct even in the face of possible hardships. As for students, they need to be aware that the 21st century society demands its members be socially responsible members where unethical behaviour is not tolerated. If all the constituents of higher education can come to the consensus that we all have a responsibility to create a better society for the future, we can certainly curtail any misconduct that is taking place in the open and distance learning systems.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Open and distance learning systems will continue to benefit from technological advancements. Unfortunately, misconduct and unethical behaviour will likewise be present. Based on the cases included in this chapter, it is imperative that all the constituents of higher education join forces to put a stop to any temptations and opportunities that would appeal to unscrupulous participants. Future research into ethics in open and distance learning systems should focus on an in-depth study of existing policies on integrity and their utilization in the new technology-based society. An in-depth analysis of existing policy can discover any possible oversight. Policies are established to set rules and guidelines but are only good if they appropriately reflect the needs of all the constituents.

A second area for future research is to identify the most prevalent acts of misconduct in open and distance learning systems and the factors that contribute to these actions. Obviously, the types of misconduct vary between the modes of delivery and in the open and distance learning system, the ease of "cut and paste" and an abundance of Internet sources make it all too appealing and tempting to cheat. A study that identifies the most prevalent acts of misconduct can provide researchers with a foundation to curtail specific actions.

A third area for future research is to identify factors that discourage faculty from pursuing unethical behaviour in open and distance learning systems. Technological advancement may present more opportunities for misconduct but by the same token, it also makes it easier to detect these acts of misconduct. It is interesting to see that previous research indicated a lack of interest from online faculty to actively explain or include integrity policies in their syllabi (Dirks, 1998; Olt, 2002). A study that identifies the factors can clarify what needs to be done for faculty to take on an active role in instilling ethical behaviour in their classrooms.

Finally, research should focus on the correlation between unethical conduct and its impact on society. The business world has a rude awakening in the aftermath of scandalous unethical cases such as Enron, Tyco, Anderson, and others. The 21st century business world demands ethical conduct and a study in this area could serve as a guide for would-be cheaters that unethical conduct will no longer be tolerated.

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