



## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY; FOSTERING A CLIMATE TO MINIMIZE ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS

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**ABSTRACT:** Academic misconduct is a serious and a common problem. The aim of this article is to review the literature for different methods used to counteract this problem. My synthesis is that the use of these mechanical methods of detecting and deterring dishonesty leads to a climate of us versus them between students and faculty and to an environment of polices rather than a culture of integrity. Moral development can be integrated into curriculum through professional ethics courses with the purpose to develop academic integrity.

**Key words:** Cheating, academic integrity, honor code,

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The terms academic misconduct and academic dishonesty are often used interchangeably in reference to a range of unethical behavior that students engage in at times during their academic career. Mullen's defines academic dishonesty in an article in university affairs as: "Anything that gives a student an unearned advantage over another. It includes any of the following: purchasing an essay; plagiarizing paragraphs or whole test; impersonating another to take the test; padding a bibliography; fudging laboratory results; collaborating for an assignment when the professor asks for an individual work; or asking for a dead line extension by citing a bogus excuse."<sup>1</sup>

At university of Guelph, academic misconduct is "broadly understood to mean offenses against academic integrity of the learning environment"<sup>2</sup>

### MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Looking at the prevalence in Pakistan, Kamran Hafeez in 2013 conducted a survey to determine the trends of academic misconduct in undergraduate students of different private and government section medical institutes. Results showed that 55.1% of the students accepted that they cheated at least once, 85.7% reported they marked proxy for their friends, 16.9% accepted

to forge teacher's signature, 10.2% copied assignments from seniors, 18.2% asked teachers for answers during OSPE, 44.02% admitted to writing fake histories and 5.1% paid someone to pass exam.<sup>3</sup>

Kalsoom Ghais published another research article in BMC Medical Ethics in 2014 on "Self reported attitudes and behaviors of medical students in Pakistan regarding academic misconduct". It was a cross sectional study, on a pre-coded questionnaire about attitudes and behaviors regarding plagiarism, lying, cheating and falsifying documents, conducted in one private and one public sector medical college. Study revealed that 26% of private medical college students and 42% of public medical college students self reported this behavior. However 53% of private medical students also found that copying an assignment is wrong as compared to 35% of public medical students. Study also highlighted that male students as compared to female students admittedly indulged more in cheating.<sup>4</sup>

This is in contrast to 2% of incidence reported at Dundee University and 27.4% in US fourth year medical students.

## RISK FACTORS

The literature provides many reasons for high prevalence of academic misconduct, focusing on student characteristics, faculty attitude and behaviors, and some on institutional culture and environment.

Students offer following reasons as an explanation of academic misconduct: Intense academic and family expectations and pressures, societal expectations, the pressure to get high grades, high levels of stress, the desire to excel, highly competitive environment, pressure of getting good job, laziness, apathy and lack of preparation. Dishonesty may stem in the clinical year rotation in the fear of bad evaluation or from a desire to be a team player (incompetence, feelings of fear, competition).

Burnout appears to be common among medical students and found to be independently associated with cheating and dishonest behavior. Prevalence of burn out in medical student is high, 90% of students felt stressed at one time or the other in a study carried out at Agha Khan, 73% and 61.4% among Spanish students in a survey.<sup>5,6</sup>

Faculty that is aware of cheating in their course and do nothing about exacerbates the problem further. Faculty perception of finding the complaint process to cumbersome, finding penalties inappropriate and fear of lack of institutional support for cases brought forward are also factors responsible for failure of faculty to deal with the situation.<sup>7</sup>

Institutional size influences the prevalence of misconduct, as students feel more anonymous.<sup>8</sup> Institutional features such as the values embedded in the hidden curriculum can promote cheating and dishonest behaviors.

Learning technologies also challenge boundaries of academic misconduct Like availability of online papers, options to copy- and paste, copying others work by sharing electronic papers, hacking exam or others assignments and using communication technologies (cell phones, pagers, email, internet,

programmable calculators) for help.

## REALISTIC PLAN TO AVOID CHEATING AND TO PROMOTE INTEGRITY: A LITERATURE SEARCH

Medical students and faculty both agree that cheating is unethical and has plagued medical schools since their inception. It has ramifications beyond graduation; producing incompetent doctors whom then treat patients.

Strategies to deter and detect academic dishonesty are not enough; promoting a culture of academic integrity is integral to being part of academic community.

## HONOR CODE

To diminish this growing problem many universities, colleges and professional schools have developed student honor codes along with policies and procedure for their implementation.

Through honor code, academic integrity is created and students' indulgence in cheating and plagiarism is reduced to 25- 50% in institutions that have developed honor code as compared to those not having such codes at all. The success of the honor code depends on defining the consequences of unethical behaviors, communicating expectations with students, and establishing a culture of integrity.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF HONOR COUNCIL

Honor council shall be a body, dealing with the duty of presenting the honor system to all new students and acting as a fact finding body for determination of honor code violation.<sup>9</sup>

The body investigates on receiving the report of violation, being impartial and fair, carries out hearings and decides penalties accordingly.

Further reduction is only possible through systemic changes. Colleges and universities must implement strategies to deter and detect academic misconduct and rigorous sanctions against these kinds of behaviors.

## STRATEGIES TO DETER ACCADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Strategies best used to deter academic misconduct include early integrity training complemented with course level reinforcement, faculty role modeling, application of testing strategies including honor pledges and declaration.

## REQUIRED INTEGRITY TRAINING FOR STUDENTS

Moral development can be integrated into curriculum through professional ethics courses with academic integrity as a key component.<sup>10</sup>

The program could be based on following learning outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define academic integrity and understand its fundamental values and principles.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of what specific actions and behaviors constitute academic honesty and academic dishonesty.
3. Recognize the standards, policies, and procedures in place to maintain academic integrity at the University.
4. Identify their roles and responsibilities in maintaining academic integrity at the University.
5. Access additional information and resources regarding academic integrity issues and information.
6. Apply their knowledge of academic integrity to real-life scenarios by evaluating examples of acceptable and unacceptable academic behaviors.

These integrity training programs can be free standing and web- based. Where appropriate, student training on ethical writing and proper sourcing should be included as a component of courses on information literacy.

## FACULTY AS A ROLE MODEL

Faculty as role models can help in promoting integrity. They should uphold and support the same honor code. McCabe and Pavela's "Ten principles of Academic Integrity" can be used as guidelines to help identify faculty behavior,

which are likely to promote academic honesty in students.<sup>11</sup>

## DECREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHEATING

In addition promote integrity and to create internal aversion to cheating, one should also adopt sensible procedures to make it very difficult to cheat. Strategies like announcing not to cheat, constantly watching students, walking up and down the rows, use of limited or focused topic of research, use of alternate tests, (computerized) random tests, exclusion of electronic devices and random seating can be used to deter cheating. According to students the less liked deterrents were announcing not to cheat, assigned seats, leaving their belongings outside the classroom.<sup>12</sup>

Strategies for effective written assignments:

While designing written assignments, following points should be taken into consideration:

- Focusing on written process and end product.
- Change nature and topic of assignments.
- Assignments should be relevant to outcomes.
- Adding specific elements to assignments like books, Internet source and primary sources.
- Submission of assignment in steps for grading.

These measures may help deter cheating but do not prevent students from considering cheating as an alternative prior to examination. Davis also did a survey on response of students to "instructor announced penalties" and found that 40% of men and 10% of women responded "NO", as it would not prevent from cheating.<sup>12</sup>

## STRATEGIES TO DETECT CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM

Recent research indicates that deterrence is not enough to prevent student cheating and plagiarism. One can make use of Cizek's observational and statistical approaches in detecting plagiarism by using the manual review and use of plagiarism detection software.<sup>13</sup>

## PLAGIARISM DETECTING SOFTWARE AND

## SERVICES

The faculty can employ comprehensive search and repository system, which not only searches the Internet but also compares the work with the provided reference material. Internet only plagiarism search engines can be used check student paper for unreferenced online source material.

File comparison/pattern matching software use pattern matching algorithms and linguistic pattern to access the uniqueness of individual's writing and to generate plagiarism probability score.

## MANAGING BURNOUT

Burnouts need to be addressed by student advisors, peer education and counseling. The coping strategies commonly used are positive reframing, planning, active coping, self-distraction and emotional support. The living conditions of the students and their recreational facilities should be improved.

## HIDDEN CURRICULUM

### Starting at the institutional level and filtering down to all the members

When the culture changes the Hidden curriculum also changes, though its slow and reiterative. The most commonly described model for establishing culture change in academic medical centers involves Kotter's eight steps: "establishing a sense of urgency, forming a powerful guiding coalition, creating a vision, communicating the vision, empowering others to act on the vision, planning for and creating short-term wins, consolidating improvements and producing still more change, institutionalizing new approaches."<sup>14</sup> This model promotes diversity, redefine scholarship, and encourage primary care.

## CONCLUSION

My synthesis is that the use of these mechanical methods of detecting and deterring dishonesty leads to a climate of us versus them between students and faculty and to an environment of polices rather than a culture of integrity. These mechanical methods will not prevent cheating

in long run. The problem can be solved by development of internalized code of ethics. Davis also talks about Ludvigson model on "theory of understanding" He highlighted six major components of understanding:

- Understanding is not rote memorization.
- Understanding is not learning isolated facts.
- Understanding involves the creation of personal theory about something.
- It permits generalization of inferences to new situations.
- It involves perspectives.
- Understanding involves in knowing what is important and what is not.

This highlights the fact that Understanding is required for competence. Competence is required for success. Success is required for self-reliance and self-reliance is required for happiness and cheating weakens the entire chain.<sup>12</sup>

## ANNEXURE 1

### Ten Principles of Academic Integrity for Faculty

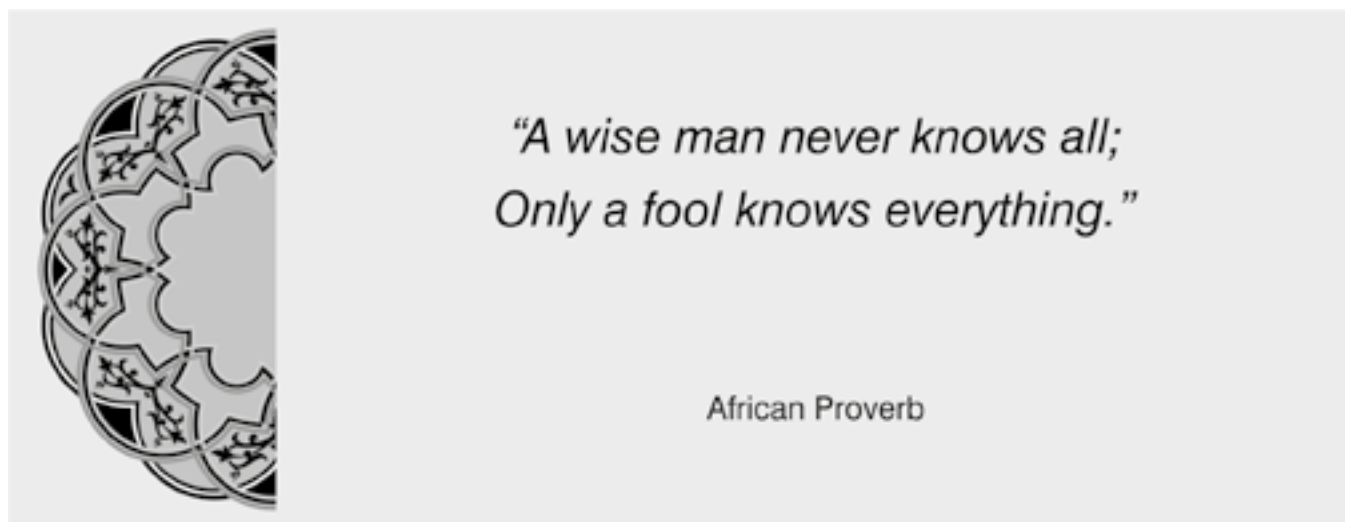
1. Affirm the importance of academic integrity
2. Foster a love of learning
3. Treat students as ends in themselves
4. Foster an environment of trust in the classroom
5. Encourage student responsibility for academic integrity
6. Clarify expectations for students
7. Develop fair and relevant forms of assessment
8. Reduce opportunities to engage in academic dishonesty
9. Challenge academic dishonesty when it occurs
10. Help define and support campus-wide academic integrity standards.

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### AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION DECLARATION

Sr. #	Author-s Full Name	Contribution to the paper	Author=s Signature
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2	Dr. Attia Sheikh	Literature search	