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## Academic integrity: Corruption and the demise of the educational system

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Academic Integrity: Corruption and the Demise of the Educational System

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### **Academic Integrity: Corruption and the Demise of the Educational System**

There is a chasm between policy and research, and there is a need to increase policy impact of educational research (Gillies, 2014). Gillies (2014) claimed knowledge activism is one method that research can influence policy making. Public policy should be grounded by research, especially research on the phenomenon of academic integrity in a technologically-driven society. Löfström, Trotman, Furnari, and Shephard (2015) likened academic integrity to a skill. Academic dishonesty is a phenomenon witnessed in higher education where the decision to cheat is a deliberate choice for students (Seals, Hammons, & Mamiseishvili, 2014). Although this is prevalent in higher education, it is also a disturbing phenomenon witnessed at all educational levels. Understanding the reasons, although not condonable, for cheating is an important component in policy decisions (Marsh, 2011). Preserving academic integrity is a topic for all stakeholders that has been challenged by the onset of new technology and changed viewpoints of the millennial generation (Dyer, 2010). The increase of technology usage has increased violations of academic integrity: an increased connectivity, collaboration, and social networking (Dyer, 2010; Jiang, Emmerton, & McKauge, 2013; Marsh, 2011). Online courses mean reduced supervision and greater availability for collaboration. Another challenge for educators includes teaching students correct ways to use and cite online sources. There is a digital divide that exists between instructors and students. *Millennials* are adept at using computers, smartphones, and new technologies to gain answers for assignments, exams, or papers (Dyer, 2010). Additionally, the construct of academic integrity and consequences of academic dishonesty is a challenge institutions face as the international population increases at American universities and colleges (Gillespie, 2012).

## **Cultural Perspective of Academic Integrity**

Altbach, Gumport, and Berdahl (2011) predicted that although national enrollment in higher education is one-third minority, by 2050, it is estimated to be a majority minority. There are individuals from a wide range of diverse backgrounds possessing their own barriers to learning (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). With the increase in globalization, international issues bring a diverse perspective to a formerly American centered perspective (Smith, 2011). As our global society becomes more interrelated, different world values and beliefs will be shared both within personal and professional settings. There is an increase in global student mobility, and international students contribute to the dynamics of the classroom.

From an educator's standpoint within a multicultural setting, different values influence students' self-perception, behavior, and relationship to peers and teachers. Ethical decision-making and the notion of academic integrity is culturally, religiously, politically, and socially derived. Furthermore, the concept of plagiarism may be unknown to international students and strategies must be utilized to help international students comply with the American perspective of academic integrity (Gillespie, 2012). Marsh (2011) claimed different motives may be more acceptable in different contexts. Western cultures independently reason and problem-solve, whereas Eastern cultures memorize and learn collectively (Zhou & Fischer, 2013). Jiang, Emmerton, and McKaige (2013) explored the effects of cultural background and separated students according to "domestic versus international, Western versus Oriental, and native English speakers versus non-English-speaking background" (p. 175), claiming students' English language proficiency correlates with the ability to correctly paraphrase work without plagiarizing. In order for educators to be more effective, they need to have a more thorough

understanding of their students and the cultural impacts on their learning styles (Spiro, 2011). In the prevalent globalized setting of academic institutions, faculty, staff, and students need to explore personal levels of intercultural competence in order to understand responses to cheating and plagiarism (Smithee, 2009).

Blum (2009) admonished there must be communication about plagiarism between students and faculty, and international students must be cognizant of institutional policy on academic integrity. Cultural differences can be misinterpreted with negative consequences for international students (Cohen, 2007). Cohen (2007) found the concepts of cheating and students' shared work acceptable in many cultures; in fact, this is considered honorable to helping others in this capacity. The sharing of information is not seen as an issue of honesty, character, and integrity. Students do not believe cheating to be unethical, and in some cultures, it is considered a game, a challenge and/or acceptable behavior if caught. In many cases, students felt insulted by accusations of wrongdoing, and students felt it would be considered a lack of character not to help classmates. Cohen described a situation involving a student from Asia who enjoyed the challenge of cheating but readily admitted to wrongdoing if caught. Another situation deemed acceptable is the forgery of documents to leave native countries. If for the greater good, it is not perceived to be an act of dishonesty. Integrity in higher education is a culturally derived term, and has different meanings to people from varied cultures. International students contribute to American institutions of higher education; consequently, institutions are responsible for minimizing academic integrity cultural barriers (Smithee, 2009).

### **Honor Codes**

In drafting a hypothetical model code for academic integrity, Pavela (2013) delineated four stages of institutional development that exist at different institutions of higher education.

The *primitive stage* is the first stage, which includes schools without policy or procedures and a lack of standard procedure for handling academic misconduct. The second stage is the *radar screen* characterized by initial policies set by administration due to fear of litigation. There is an inconsistent response to academic dishonesty. The third stage is the *mature stage* where policies are known but not completely followed; the policies are utilized more by faculty. The final stage is the *honor code* where students take a responsibility in implementing academic integrity.

Pavela disclosed while there are advantages of student engagement and empowerment characteristic of the *honor code*, most institutions achieve the *mature stage*. However, institutions should create a campus culture that sustains integrity.

Demographic, attitudinal, and contextual factors can predict cheating, but cheating is not as prevalent at institutions with an established student honor code (Dix, Emery, & Le, 2014). There is an increase in dishonest academic behavior (Biswas, 2013). Academic integrity poses serious challenges for educators. Biswas (2013) examined the role student development plays in students' perceptions of academic dishonesty and in their willingness to adhere to a code of conduct that may be in sharp contrast to traditional integrity policies.

Dix, Emery, and Le (2014) examined academic integrity and commitment to honor codes, and postulated a need for honor codes as American institutions of higher education establish a greater number of international branch campuses. In addition, they claimed the global concept of honor codes should be introduced at K-12 international schools. Biswas (2013) contended student development plays an integral role in adherence to a code of conduct. Institutions should not only develop policy to implement academic honor pledges, but there is a need in raising awareness and increased training of academic integrity (Gullifer & Tyson, 2014; Jiang et al., 2013). When a policy is in place, it protects the institution, the faculty, and students;

it is the responsibility of the faculty to set expectations, guidelines, and scoring rubrics for assignments and coursework. Cheating on multiple choice or true false assessments is different from an essay; faculty must detect various types of plagiarism.

A wide spectrum of secondary and postsecondary institutions were selected to represent the diversity of different institutions ranging in geographic location, population, student demographics, initiatives, mission statement, and vision. Institutional plagiarism policies, which were found on their websites, are illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

*Sample Institutions' Relevant Terms Involving Plagiarism Policy*

| Terminology              | BC | BCU | DC | FAU | FIU | HU | NIU | NSU | SC | SU | UoA | VCU |
|--------------------------|----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|-----|
| Academic Dishonesty      | X  |     | X  | X   |     | X  | X   | X   | X  | X  | X   | X   |
| Academic Integrity       |    | X   | X  | X   |     | X  |     | X   | X  | X  |     | X   |
| Academic Misconduct      |    | X   |    |     | X   | X  | X   | X   | X  | X  | X   |     |
| Accountability           |    |     |    |     |     | X  |     |     |    |    |     |     |
| Cheating-Fraud           | X  | X   |    | X   | X   | X  | X   |     | X  | X  | X   | X   |
| Deception-Fabrication    | X  |     |    |     |     |    |     |     |    |    | X   |     |
| Electronic Dishonesty    | X  |     |    |     | X   |    |     |     |    |    |     | X   |
| Plagiarism               | X  | X   | X  | X   | X   | X  | X   | X   | X  | X  | X   | X   |
| Unintentional Plagiarism |    |     |    |     |     |    |     |     | X  |    |     | X   |

Note: BC=Broward College, Bethune-Cookman Univ., DC=Dartmouth College, FAU=Florida Atlantic University; HU=Howard Univ.; NIU=Northern Illinois Univ.; NSU=Nova Southeastern Univ.; SC=Skidmore College; SU=Stanford Univ.; UoA=University of Alabama; VCU=Virginia Commonwealth Univ.



Table 2

*Sample High Schools That Share Established Honor Codes*

| High Schools            | Cheating | Dishonesty | Forgery | Fraud | Plagiarism Policy |
|-------------------------|----------|------------|---------|-------|-------------------|
| Broward Virtual School  | X        |            | X       |       | X                 |
| Eastview High School    | X        | X          |         |       | X                 |
| Episcopal High School   | X        |            |         | X     |                   |
| Kent School             | X        | X          | X       | X     | X                 |
| Princeton High School   | X        | X          |         |       | X                 |
| Tates Creek High School | X        |            | X       |       | X                 |
| West Lake High School   | X        |            |         |       | X                 |

**Institutional Academic Policy**

It is important for institutions to implement and maintain a policy on academic integrity. Equally important is a systematic approach to ensure faculty, domestic students, and international students understand the definition of plagiarism and the policy on academic integrity (Gillespie, 2012; Gullifer & Tyson, 2014). In fact, in a survey of 3,405 participants at Charles Stuart University, only 52% had read the Academic Misconduct Policy, although the policy is publicized, provided in syllabus outlines, and emailed to students at the start of each semester. Reading the Academic Misconduct Policy is a requirement under the student charter, but Gullifer and Tyson (2014) found male and distance education students were more likely to read the policy than female and local students. Additionally, using an Understanding Plagiarism Scale, it was found that both students and faculty have inconsistent notions about plagiarism,

which contributed to inconsistencies among students, faculty, and institutions. Gullifer and Tyson contended a standard definition of plagiarism does not exist, and there is no standard among staff in recognizing and managing plagiarism. Table 3 illustrates some definitions by other writing styles.

Table 3

*Academic Policies for Various Discipline Styles*

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APA Policy - Authors do not present the work of another as if it were their own work.

MLA Policy - Taking another person's language or thoughts and putting them in your own paper without acknowledging they came from another source.

The St. Martin's Guide - A writer may represent someone else's thought or idea as his own by including direct quotations without attribution, or, in some cases, a writer may obtain an entire paper from another source and turn it in as her own (St. Martin's Tutorial, n.d., para. 4).

Chicago Manual Policy - Whether permission is needed or not, researchers should develop good practices at all times to avoid any possible charge of plagiarism; credit any sources used.

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**Academic Misconduct**

Weber-Wulff (2014) identified various forms of academic misconduct: (a) contract cheating, (b) falsifying data, (c) ghostwriting, (d) honorary authorship, (e) paper mills, (f) plagiarism, and (g) unknown ghostwriters.

**Contract cheating.** Contract cheating is the process of bidding between independent contractors for assignments that have been uploaded to a website. The client selects an author based on the lowest bidding price, and services are paid through PayPal (Weber-Wulff, 2014). Walker and Townly (2012) found there is an increase in contract cheating, and Wallace and Newton (2014) investigated postings from the freelancer and TransTutors website to postulate whether a shorter time frame for the completion of assignments would decrease the incidences of

contract cheating. Contract cheating evades plagiarism detection software since the submitted work is original work.

**Falsifying data.** Falsifying data is the manipulation of data to meet personal agendas in biased research. In a qualitative study, researchers have to write sections on ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and potential research bias. The ethical considerations are based upon how the researcher maintains ethics of the study and preserves anonymity and confidentiality while keeping documents and digital recordings secure. Trustworthiness demonstrates that the study is valid and reliable. Inaccuracy and a lack of corroborating evidence affects research leading to misinterpretation of research and falsification of data. The researcher must account for potential bias and remain subjective and neutral to various viewpoints (Creswell, 2013).

**Ghostwriting.** Ghostwriting is the process where an author does not receive acknowledgment for writing assignments. Companies hire ghostwriters to write custom-written papers. Because the company acts as an intermediary, the ghostwriter remains anonymous. There is no contact between the client and the ghostwriter (Weber-Wulff, 2014).

**Paper mills.** A paper mill maintains papers collected with an author's permission in a large database. The customer purchases access to this database under the pretense of learning to structure the paper. The paper mill cautions the client to use the paper only as a resource. As cited in Wallace and Newton (2014), Turnitin found 7% of higher education students have reported purchasing a paper during their undergraduate studies.

**Plagiarism.** Weber-Wulff (2014) classified ten types of plagiarism: (a) copy and paste, (b) translations, (c) disguised plagiarism, (d) shake and paste collections, (e) clause quilts, (f) structural plagiarism, (g) pawn sacrifice, (h) cut and slide, (i) self-plagiarism, and (f) other

dimensions like collusion.

**Unknown ghostwriters.** Weber-Wulff (2014) described an “unwitting ghostwriter” to be a thesis writer with archived work on a compact disk with a digital version at the university library. Students access these digital versions to modify, use, and claim ownership to the thesis.

Technology has revolutionized higher education and has provided a vast amount of information accessible to students. The great number of companies advertising *editing* services indicate a widespread problem of academic misconduct (Weber-Wulff, 2014). However, are students seeking editors for format only, or rather editors to create and/or rewrite existing papers? Institutions use plagiarism detection software to compare essays against a database of work, but many paper mill companies guarantee original work by a ghostwriter and screen the work for plagiarism before distributing it to clients. The cost ranges from \$20.00 to \$40.00 depending on the subject and turnaround time needed. Software like Turnitin is used to find counterfeit papers, but does not intercept custom papers. Wallace and Newton (2014) believed contract cheating to be a problem; although this phenomenon is widespread, there are few studies and few approaches addressing it. Theoretically, contract cheating is original work that avoids detection from originality detection software. This makes it difficult to estimate the extent of contract cheating. Wallace and Newton suggested a reduction in turnaround time for due dates of assignments may give students less time to contract an independent contracted writer, but would not eliminate the occurrence of contract cheating. Most likely, the student will have a due date, but if a ghostwriter does not fulfill his or her obligation to the student, the ghostwriter is also committing fraud by receiving funds and not adhering to the contract for the student.

## **Fraud**

Academic dishonesty is a concern for institutions of higher education as the increase in

technology provides a path to new ways of committing academic fraud and electronic dishonesty (Wallace & Newton, 2014). Stanford University issued an alert of a high number of students suspected of cheating. Even though students accept the terms of the honor code, students are risking the consequences of cheating (e.g., failing grade, suspension, expulsion). In 2013, 83 students violated the honor code; a first violation results in a suspension of one term and 40 hours of community service (Mercury News, 2015).

There are few acts that seem to draw the attention of society over others when discussing ethics and integrity. Society has an expectation that colleges remain neutral and inspire critical thinking; furthermore, it is expected that institutions will raise the bar on ethics, excellence, and integrity through various standards. However, there are far too many examples of clever schemes to defraud and cheat various entities and stakeholders.

Today, there is a lost trust and lack of ethics within the public and private sector. Without systematic reforms, individuals and organizations will be tarnished in failed systems that derail and erode America's educational system. Without concrete change and accountability, institutions will fail to produce critical thinkers.

Cheating has plagued our educational system and permeated the workforce; in fact, a significant body of open source reporting suggested cheating an epidemic in America. Conversely, the reference to "a banana republic nation" implies a deterioration of moral values and traditional perspectives. There are serious flaws within our educational system, exemplified in the ease of committing academic fraud. This phenomenon has become an almost instinctive impulse to achieve goals with little consideration for ethics and integrity.

Today, gaming schemes and subversive conduct has become the new organizational culture. Unfortunately, policymakers have ignored and failed to take on the seriousness of

academic cheating; as a result the conduct has become incentivized and has exploded. It will become increasingly important to take on any schema that involves deception or cheating as applied to the law. Academic cheating in any form involves illegal criminal acts punishable by a wide spectrum of penalties and sanctions including fines and imprisonment.

The conduct of cheating violates both federal and state felony statutes-law(s) and a person(s) or institution can be criminally charged-convicted individually or in a conspiracy case. Double jeopardy does not imply if charged or convicted in both the federal and state courts based on the same conduct in the defense argument, but for the purpose of this paper, the focus will only be based upon the federal law (i.e., U.S. Criminal Code). Aside from the criminal liability outlined, there are real concerns for civil suits which can also be applied simultaneously for the same conduct as the criminal charges. The Federal False Claims Act is a tool that can reign in unethical conduct and encourages the reporting of unethical conduct and violations of federal law. Many states have adopted the provisions of the Federal False Claims Act; any person or institution can be dually charged with violations of federal-state False Claims Act offenses arising from the same conduct.

By applying the law to cheating scandals, it sends a clear message to stakeholders to discourage individuals from cheating. Trying to assert a defense of ignorance fails to provide legal protection if the person or institution knows or suspects fraud or organized schemes to cheat or defraud. For example, any person or institution having personal knowledge of any conduct that is outlined in this paper and other activities defined by statute as illegal conduct can lead to the felony prosecution of persons and or institutions that fail (Misprison of a felony) to report any conduct which is illegal (18 USC § 4).

Under the federal criminal code, it is important to underscore the law of conspiracy (18 USC § 371). In summary, this provision of the law includes any (overt acts) or attempt(s) to do an act in violation of a crime; the crime is punishable under the same provisions as if the act had been completed. Under the theory of a conspiracy, any person-business in the conspiracy is liable for the acts of others whether they know the others involved and the statements of others are attributable to others.

Any proceeds or property acquired by means of academic cheating are subject to either federal or state administrative-criminal asset forfeiture proceeding. Thus, there is an added disincentive for engaging in the conduct presented in this paper (18 USC § 1956). It is nearly impossible to effectively escape criminal-asset forfeiture liability in these examples. The suggestion is to remain proactive and develop affirmative programs and policies aimed at preventing and eradicating serious forms of educational cheating.

At the University of California, San Diego, 600 students cheated in 2014 by copying tests, using notes, helping others, or purchasing papers online. As a response, the university implemented an Academic Integrity Office to handle student cheaters (Regents of the University of California, 2015). Students who earn grades through academic dishonesty undermine values of the institution; serious consequences include destruction of academic records and reputation and an inability to matriculate (Dyer, 2010).

CNN reported cheating on papers is a “booming Web business” and reported 90% of the requests for online academic papers come from the United States. DomainTools purported essaywriters.net solicits writers to write these papers research papers, book reports, and coursework on syllabi. Various paper mill enterprises make claims they offer original writing services provided to customers as a reference only and are not to be used without proper

citations. This assertion is deceptive and does not offer any statement reporting the true identity of the ghostwriters who authored the work. Clearly, there are few real customers other than students who purchase academic papers to defraud professors, academic institutions, financial loan service providers, and administrative-regulatory oversight agencies. It is not possible to sell the volume (based upon customer testimonials who admit to using the paper mill services to order, purchase, and submit papers to schools and colleges to pass courses) of scholarly papers for non-academic use.

There are a myriad of clever schemes designed by paper mill enterprises that actively solicit customers and students. These digital masked bandits conspire and consequently defraud academic institutions/loan servicing providers, and federal-state administrative and regulatory oversight agencies by using these fraudulent schemes with the intent to misrepresent.

An example of a simple scheme includes federal felony crimes of mail or wire fraud communications technology and other means to communicate the scheme including regular or express mail services. In summary, paper mills must operate using means to communicate. Under the federal mail and wire act, any person-business or other entity involved in a scheme to defraud (attempts are included) using the mail or wire systems are crimes (18 USC § 1341 and 1343).

A federal fraud conviction is most likely to include mandatory prison time, fines, or probation. If sentenced to prison, the sentence could range from 6 months to 30 years for each act. Home confinement is an alternative sentence that is rarely applied. The offender is now labeled a convicted felon restricting the rest of his or her life. Fines are another punishment for a violation of fraud, and could be as much as a \$250,000 fine for each violation. Finally, restitution and probation are additional sentences imposed with a guilty conviction of fraud



(Theoharis, 2015).

The volume of activity and sales of papers is unquantified, but remains staggering if one were to believe the published testimonials on the websites of paper mills and YouTube posts endorsed by student customers. It is likely the paper mill services under report and or fail to report earnings to federal and state taxing authorities which also become crimes (26 USC § 7201).

A national investigative-enforcement strategy could prevent-control this problem. Adding enhanced crimes, such as false statements or causing/keeping false records: (a) student grades and educational reports (18 USC § 1001), (b) theft (18 USC § 666), (c) the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act (18 USC § 1961-1968) and (d) financial institution fraud crimes (18 USC § 1344) can be applied as countermeasures and investigative tools. Each carries additional criminal sentences and asset forfeiture penalties (18 USC § 1956).

### **Motives for Academic Dishonesty**

Brent and Atkisson (2011) cited several reasons why academic integrity should be a concern. Academic integrity threatens ethical leadership and citizenship and permeates all aspects of life (a) validity of assessments, (b) equity in grading, (c) diminishes reputation of institutions of higher education, (d) workplace behavior, and (e) societal context. Academic dishonesty has social consequences reaching far beyond the classroom (Dix, Emery, & Le, 2014). There is a relationship between human values and ethical leadership. Moral education is the center of virtue ethics (Marsh, 2011). Marsh (2011) conducted a mixed-mode analysis to

find circumstances to justify cheating. Marsh surveyed 401 undergraduate students at a Carnegie I research university, 66% were freshman (59% were female, 41% male), and 7% spoke English as a second language. One hundred and forty-four students claimed there are circumstances that justify cheating. There were six reasons that justified cheating: (a) denial of responsibility, (b) denial of injury, (c) condemning the condemners, (d) self-fulfillment, (e) appeal to higher loyalties, and (f) denial of the victim. There were subcategories (a) accidents, (b) crisis, (c) scapegoating, and (d) accidental plagiarism. Additional reasons included material or tests that were too difficult or lack of explanation of material. Students reported paraphrasing may be considered plagiarism.

Jiang, Emmerton, and McKaige (2013) explored factors like age, gender, and education associated with academic misconduct and reported older students were less likely to commit academic fraud than their younger counterparts; although older students were less likely to self-report academic violations. Additionally, students with advanced degrees had a more conservative perception of academic dishonesty than undergraduate students. There has been question over the role of gender in academic integrity; past research showed a greater percentage of males performing academic misconduct. However, recent trends suggest a relatively equal proportion of males and females committing academic fraud, particularly an increase of females in a male-dominated environment. Other driving forces for academic misconduct include individual pressures, time constraints, and availability on online sources (Jiang, Emmerton, & McKaige, 2013).

Based on archival data illustrated in Table 4, students have expressed the following reasons for academic misconduct.

Table 4

*Themes of Reasons-Excuses for Academic Misconduct*

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Technology makes it accessible

Online labs and/or online assessments

Procrastination

Unclear expectations

Assignments too difficult

Temptation of copying and pasting

Unaware of the policies

Too busy to work on assignments

Vacation and other personal commitments to overshadow due date

Belief if name of the author and year is included, it would not constitute plagiarism

Unaware that taking someone else's work and using it as their own is dishonest

Lack of time to commit to papers, so *borrowing* a few ideas and thoughts would be justified

Uncertainty of paraphrasing: belief that rearranging or substituting a few words would be sufficient

Saw resubmitting previous assignments as acceptable since they authored original assignment

Since papers are made available via paper mills, support websites, and other electronic sources, students felt a general acceptance in hiring someone to do class assignments

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Blum (2009) contended competency-based education, increased cost of college tuition, and the value of earning power contribute to the culture of academic dishonesty in higher education. Shifting generational attitudes and information technology are two factors that perpetuate the lack of academic integrity (Dyer, 2010; Manly, Leonard, & Riemenschneider, 2014). In fact, Manly, Leonard, and Riemenschneider (2014) claimed an instructor-student

disparity existed over the perception of cheating. Instructors held a different viewpoint of cheating behaviors than students. In most cases, students did not consider behaviors associated with information technology to be cheating, and the top three behaviors using information technology included (a) electronic devices during exams, (b) using ideas from an online purchased paper, and (c) cutting and pasting data from the Internet. Dyer (2010) maintained millennials have worked collaboratively using the Internet since elementary school, and students are not aware that copying and pasting from online resources is a violation of academic integrity. The concept of integrity has evolved and there is a marked difference in the perception of acceptable academic behavior.

### **Hypothetical Case Study**

A student has a limited time to complete a paper, and a quick online search of *paper mills*, *plagiarism mills* or *essay mills* produces several results. Although many of these companies claim to help the professional, the services are geared toward a specific client: the student. The websites offering academic papers boast an endless amount of testimonials; this information can be used against the company's own interest and can be used as evidence in fraud cases. There are YouTube tutorials students have explained how to use paper mills. To illustrate the popular stance on academic dishonesty, one student explained successful strategies for cheating on an exam, this post received 20,947 likes and 6,560 dislikes (Ferasweelz, 2012). This evidence can be used in both state and federal cases and could also establish a RICO investigation by the federal system; additionally, laws vary within each state (VOA Special English, 2014).

### **The Process**

According to admitted scholarship ghostwriter Tomar (2012), this problem is rampant. As an illustration, a student receives an assignment with the professor's criteria, expectations,

rubric, scoring guide, and format rules. The potential client searches for a paper mill company and selects one based on various factors. The paper mills have ghostwriters who could be scholars such as professors, graduate students, and/or freelance writers. Papers are written for all academic levels and disciplines and are not triggered by Turnitin or any other program that will detect plagiarism. The client includes payment information and then posts the topic on the paper mill board, which is comparable to a bulletin board format. A ghostwriter contacts the client directly to discuss the specifics of the paper based on the guidelines. The client's credit card is charged and then the contracted writer begins working on the paper. By entering into an agreement, both parties agree to accept the resulting obligations and consequences. The ghostwriter then sends a final copy via email. The client can review the document and discuss possible changes or edits. If there are changes that will be made, there will be further discussion about pricing. The student only has to write his or her name on the title page of the paper and submit it to the professor, usually by email. This paper will not trigger Turnitin as plagiarized work, so then the professor grades it. At this point, the student has now stolen a grade which is something of value.

Consider the hundreds of thousands of grades that are stolen and reported to various oversight agencies causing them to keep and transmit fraudulent data and to fund the student's education in this scheme to defraud. This conduct can be defined as theft and fraud because something of value (e.g., academic grade) was stolen. The testimonials posted on paper mill websites and on YouTube indicates that income could exceed hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue from these services. Tomar (2012) reported the conduct is unregulated and out of control. These examples underscore what is defined in the above sections as additional-potential crimes which include; (a) false statements, (b) wire fraud, (c) mail fraud, (d) conspiracy, (e)

RICO, (f) money laundering, and (g) financial institution fraud (e.g., banks, PELL, VA, financial aid), and (h) theft.

### **Consequences**

Now the student is involved in the overall scheme or a conspiracy; everyone involved in the paper mill companies, e.g. owners, ghostwriters, institutions, and students, committed numerous violations of law and may be involved in an ongoing conspiracy.

Phony grades from students using fraudulent scholarly work from paper mills are ultimately reported, maintained, and transmitted to federal and state departments of education (and related administrative and regulatory agencies). This represents false record-keeping, and there exists no accrediting agency that has the means to track this information (18 USC § 1001). As a result of this illegal conduct by paper mills, considerable amounts of revenue may be produced and laundered. The assets/monies are subject to asset seizure and forfeiture; this is an added incentive for law enforcement to initiate criminal investigation into these organized schemes to defraud (18 USC § 1001).

### **Investigation**

Academic fraud needs to be approached much like any other fraud case. In order to curtail academic dishonesty, proactive initiatives are generally productive options. Investigators should develop cooperating witnesses-sources, collect testimonials and other promotional evidence found on paper mill websites and YouTube. Investigators should follow the flow of money through electronic wire intercepts, tax returns, credit cards and bank accounts, as well as subpoena records and financial-records search warrants. In the investigation, the Internet service provider (ISP) will provide a narrative content with the final goal of tracking the crimes all

conspirators: students, witnesses, ghostwriters, and companies.

### **Additional Players**

If an institution or individual has knowledge of a crime (schemes to defraud) and fails to report it, it is a violation of the US Code 18 Section 4 (Misprison of a felony), which is a federal felony violation of a law. In the recent cases of systemic academic corruption, the Atlanta Public School administration and faculty engaged in an on ongoing scheme to defraud various organizations and its chieftains-participants landed lengthy prison sentences.

### **Recommendations**

Weber-Wulff (2014) admonished the question of intent: (a) unintentional, (b) honest mistake, (c) poor referencing, or (d) purposeful deception may be difficult to discern, but university and college policy makers need to address the problem of academic misconduct. Strategies to reduce plagiarism will affect learning, cheating, campus culture, and institutional image (Dix, Emery, & Le, 2014). Using online detection services, providing plagiarism workshops, and educating students and teachers of the consequences of academic dishonest may decrease the number of occurrences. Plagiarism policies need to be developed by training students and teachers, establishing a transparent policy, and testing random theses (Weber-Wulff, 2014). By turning in early versions of term papers, research papers, and essays, students will be encouraged to complete original work.

Professors, teachers, and other personnel who detect plagiarism-unintentional plagiarism while grading papers need to have teachable moments for students who may not be aware of this type of behavior. Policy makers in universities and colleges, including the K-12 system, should have a policy in place that not only detects possible plagiarism, but how to collect the documentation to support the detection. In addition, this policy should illustrate the process to

determine whether a student was in violation of the plagiarism-unintentional plagiarism directives, and if so create a paper trail and flowchart as described in Figure 1.

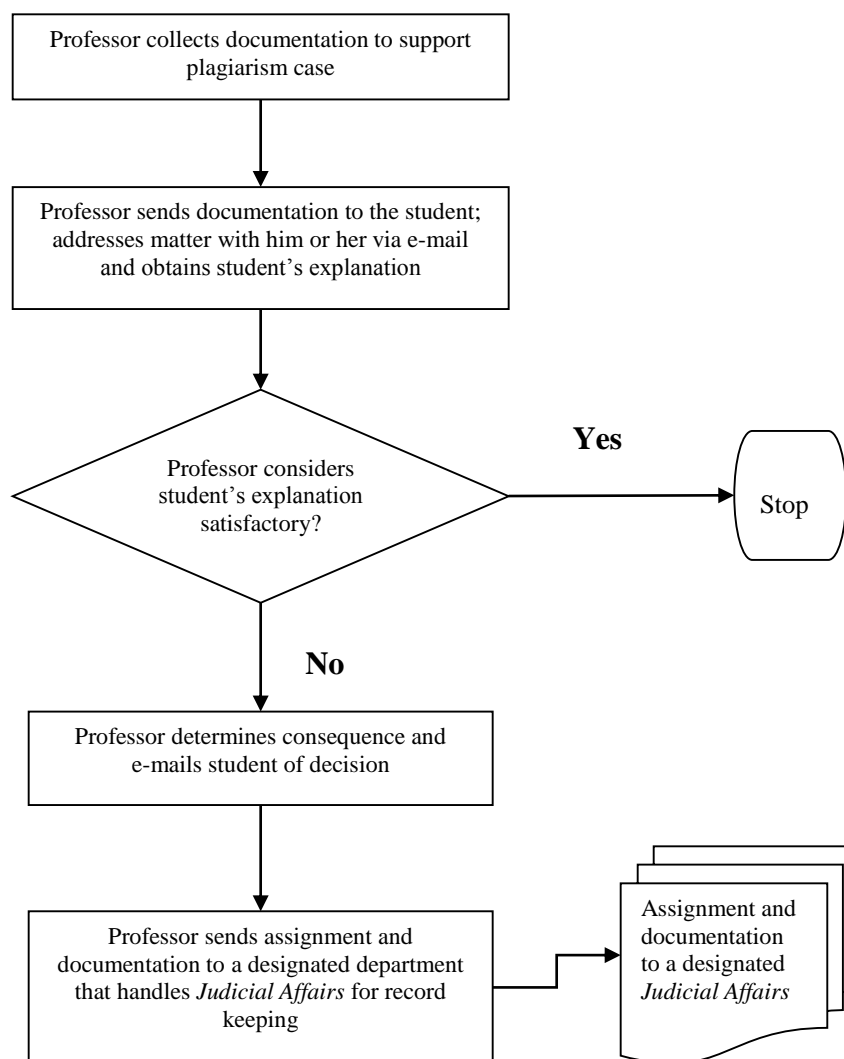


Figure 1. Protocol for Handling Plagiarism

Löfström et al. (2014) explored the definition of academic integrity, how it should be taught, and whose responsibility it is. All surveyed groups agreed on several components of academic integrity including but not limited to (a) the importance of the research process, (b) knowledge of faculty to teach academic integrity, (c) academic integrity is more than following rules, and (d) ignoring minor incidences will not protect the university's reputation. It is important to know the rules, teach the rules, and follow departmental and institutional processes.



The use of honor codes could also be part of the solution (Manly, Leonard, & Riemenschneider, 2014). Gillespie (2012) ascertained academic advisors play a role by informing new students about plagiarism, explaining its consequences, and referring new students to campus resources. These academic advisors and faculty should also inform students of *unintentional plagiarism*. Unintentional plagiarism is when students and researchers poorly paraphrase by changing minimal words, changing intended meaning, or using words not part of his or her vocabulary. Additionally, quoting or citing poorly also is considered unintentional plagiarism. Academic integrity can be maintained by (a) educating students, (b) incorporating new technologies and styles of teaching like smartphones and online authorized study groups, and (c) policing students and enforcing policies (Dyer, 2010). Since culture plays a role, the perceptions of academic integrity should be explored by advisors, faculty from other countries, and other international students (Smithee, 2009).

Public policy of plagiarism, editing services, contract cheating, and use of ghostwriting need to be implemented. These policies and issues apply to the university and its business principles. As noted in Table 1, not all universities/colleges have a policy on unintentional plagiarism, nor did they have policies on fraud. This is a phenomenon that must be addressed internally as well as with accrediting agencies. The Center for Academic Integrity (1999) developed seven recommendations for every institution of higher education:

1. Have clear statements, policies, and procedures that are implemented.
2. Inform and educate the community about academic integrity
3. Practice these procedures from top down. Follow and uphold them.
4. Have an equitable system to adjudicate violations.
5. Develop programs to promote integrity.

6. Watch trends in technology that affects campus integrity
7. Assess efficacy of policies and improve upon existing ones.

Policy needs to be formulated and followed by engagement and commitment. Such initiatives will reduce fraudulent acts.

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