

Analysis Of Academically

A line of business professionals in suits, all wearing black blindfolds. They are standing in a line, with their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. The man in the foreground is the largest and most prominent, wearing a grey pinstriped suit and a patterned tie. The others are smaller and recede into the background. The background is a plain, light color.

ABSTRACT

A questionnaire on academic dishonesty was completed by a sample of 62 MBAs enrolled at an institute of management in India. About 20 percent of the respondents reported that they had participated in 12 of the 16 academically dishonest practices listed on the survey instrument. Approximately 95 percent of the respondents reported having participated in at least one of the sixteen practices. The study also looked at the differences related to gender, age, and grade point average (GPA), and how the findings compared to the results that have been reported in the literature. Future directions for research are suggested.

Dishonest Practices:

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An Exploratory Study Of MBAs At An Institute Of Management In India

INTRODUCTION

While academic integrity is a virtue espoused by educational institutions, professors, administrators, and students universally, dishonest academic behavior is prevalent in many colleges and universities across the globe (Brown 2002; Burns 1998; Davis, Noble, Zak, & Dryer 1994; Diekhoff, LaBeff, Shinohara, & Clark, 1999; Lupton 2002; Magnus, Polterovich, Danilov, & Savvateev 2002; Mwamwenda & Monyooe, 2000; Vencat 2006). For example, Meade (1992) reported a dishonesty rate of 87 percent among undergraduates at 31 top universities in the United States. On the other hand, Diekhoff et al. (1999) found that Japanese students were involved in various acts of academic dishonesty at a rate of 55 percent. Similarly, Lupton and Chapman (2000, 2002) reported a dishonesty rate of 84 percent in Poland and 64 percent in Russia.

While the problem of academic dishonesty is not endemic to India, it is so prevalent on many of its colleges and universities that it has become, for many students, a "right" to cheat in examinations. To exacerbate the problem of academic dishonesty in India, the country has experienced a dramatic growth in higher education. According to Altabch (1993), India is the largest academic system in the Third World, with over 7,000 colleges and 150 universities, including over 2,000 institutes of management offering MBA degrees across the nation, often times collaborating with foreign universities from the United States, Europe, and Asian countries. To curb the academic dishonesty, the Indian government passed an act in 1992 providing for stiff punishments, including imprisonment, for cheating (The Economist 1994). However, the administration of higher education has not kept up with this exponential growth (Raza 1991). The educational reforms in India are slow to come by, and often times, are politically motivated. In addition, the antiquated educational system in India is wrought with chronic administrative and academic corruption.

Despite the severity of the problem, a comprehensive literature search produced no systematic studies of academic dishonesty in India. It is, therefore, imperative that a serious effort be made to study both psychological and demographic factors that underlie academic dishonesty among MBAs in India. Such an attempt will provide insights that can be used to develop a set of academic and administrative strategies to manage the problem of dishonesty both effectively and efficiently. The purpose of this exploratory study is twofold: (1) to understand the perceptions and attitudes toward academic dishonesty, and (2) to identify the reasons for student cheating.



METHODOLOGY

The Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire in the present study was adapted from one used in several published studies of student academic dishonesty (for example, see Brown, Chandra, & Tate 2004). Sixteen dishonest academic practices derived from an extensive review of the literature were included on the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to rate the ethical level of each of the sixteen practices on a scale ranging from 1, "very unethical," to 5, "not at all unethical." Respondents also rated how often they participated in each practice while an MBA student. Respondents used a 6-point rating scale, where 1 was "frequently participated" and 5 was "infrequently participated," with the sixth point being "never." Thus, the scale allowed the measurement of the proportion of respondents who had engaged in each practice as well as the frequency of participation of those who had engaged in the practice.

The questionnaire also included 11 reasons selected from the literature as to why students might engage in unethical academic behavior. Respondents were asked to think of the typical university student who engages in such behavior and rate the likelihood that each item would be a reason for the behavior. The scale ranged from 1, "very unlikely," to 5, "very likely." The respondents also provided information on their gender, area of interest, grade, age, and classification (1st year versus 2nd year MBA).



AMPLE

Questionnaires were administered during class time to MBA students at an accredited institute of management in Bangalore, India. Students were assured that their responses were anonymous. Sixty-two questionnaires were completed and returned.

The sample consisted of 53.2 percent male and 46.8 percent female students. Seventy percent of the students reported their GPA above 3.00; Accounting, Economics, and Finance as a group was selected by 32 percent of the students as their career interest, whereas the Management-Marketing-Healthcare Management choice had 58 percent of the students, and 10 percent was for the MIS-Operations management choice. With regard to age, there were 29 percent of the students at or below 22 years, 42 percent at 23 years, and 29 percent at or above 24 years.



RESULTS

The results are presented in five tables. The results were obtained using a series of frequencies and chi-squared tests where appropriate. Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that reported participation in each practice, the frequency of participation, and rankings of the practices according to their percentages, with the rank of 1 to the practice with the highest percentage of participation.



LEVELS AND FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION

Table 1 shows that the levels of participation ranged from a low of 6.5 percent for having unauthorized information programmed into a calculator during an exam to a high 80.6 percent for "working with others on an individual paper or project." Twelve of the sixteen practices had been participated in by more than 20 percent of the respondents. The overall level of academic dishonesty, as measured by the percentage of the respondents who had participated in at least one of the practices, was 95.2 percent.

Table 1

**Participation in and Ethical Ratings of Dishonest Academic Practices
By Indian MBA Students: Percentages and Ranks**

Practices	Participation ^a		Ethical Level ^b	
	%	Rank ^c	Mean	Rank ^d
Working with others on an individual paper or project	80.6	1	2.36	16
Allowed another student to see answers during an exam	67.7	2	1.31	7
Gave information about the content of an exam to someone who had not yet taken it	56.5	3	1.77	15
Asked about the content of an exam from someone who had taken it	48.4	4	1.73	14
Not cited sources used (plagiarism)	41.9	5(tie)	1.58	12
Cited sources in a bibliography that were not read or used	41.9	5(tie)	1.57	11
Had someone else check over a paper before turning it in	40.3	7	1.69	13
Passed answers during an exam	37.1	8	1.11	1(tie)
Used a false excuse to delay taking an exam or turning in a paper	33.9	9	1.24	6
Copied off another student's exam	22.6	10(tie)	1.11	1(tie)
Turned in work done by someone else as your own	22.6	10(tie)	1.18	4
Took credit for full participation in a group project when you did not do a fair share of the work	21.0	12	1.45	9
Before taking an exam, looked at a copy of it or a similar exam that was not supposed to be available to students	16.1	13	1.50	10(tie)
Visited a professor in his/her office to influence a grade	14.5	14	1.42	8
Used an unauthorized exam "crib" notes	8.1	15	1.16	3
Had unauthorized information programmed into a calculator when taking an exam	6.5	16	1.50	10(tie)
Overall	95.2			

Notes: a Frequency of participation in at least one practice
b Modified scale: 1 = unethical, 2 = somewhat unethical, 3 = least unethical
c Rank of 1 for most frequently practiced to 16 for least frequently practiced
d Rank of 1 for most unethical practice to 16 for least unethical practice

The ranking shows the highest level of participation involved "Working with other students on an individual paper or project," followed by "Allowing another student to see answers during an exam," "Giving information about the content of an exam to someone who had not yet taken it," and "Asking about the content of an exam from someone who had taken it." In other words, a majority of the dishonest behavior involved cheating on exams. The highest level of participation involved working with others on individual papers. On the other hand, the lowest levels of participation were related to using unauthorized exam "crib" notes and having unauthorized information programmed into a calculator when taking an exam. These findings are consistent with the study by Brown et al. (2004) in which forty-seven undergraduate commerce students from a public (state) university in India reported their participation in the same sixteen practices. As concluded

previously by Brown et al., a possible explanation for the high rates of cheating on exams might be that considerable pressure to cheat comes from social demands to excel on exams in India.



PERCEPTIONS OF ETHICAL LEVEL

Table 1 also highlights the ranking with respect to the perceived ethical level in each of the sixteen practices, with the rank of 1 being given to a practice that was perceived as the most unethical. As can be noted, the most unethical practices perceived were: "Copying another student's exam," and "Passing answers during an exam," followed by "Using unauthorized "crib" notes," and "Turning in work done by someone else as your own." Interestingly, the

act of working with other students on an individual paper or project was perceived as the least unethical. It seems that this perception might have led many respondents to participate in that practice (80.6 percent).



EVELS OF PARTICIPATION AND STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The results of a chi-square analysis between the level of participation in the sixteen practices and three student characteristics

(gender, GPA, and age) are shown in Table 2. The original scale for GPA was collapsed into two categories, namely, GPA below 3.0 and GPA equal to or above 3.0. As for age, the respondents were asked to specify the year of their birth. Based on that, three categories were developed, namely, below 23 years, 23 years, and above 23 years. The collapsing of categories for GPA and age were done so as to result in a comparable number of respondents in each category.

Table 2
Participation in Dishonest Academic Practices and Student Characteristics

Practice	Gender		Age in Years			GPA	
	Female	Male	<23	23	>23	<3.00	≥3.00
Used a false excuse to delay taking an exam or turning in a paper						58%	23% ^a
Used unauthorized exam "crib" notes						21%	2% ^a
Copied off another student's exam						42%	14% ^b
Had someone else check over a paper before turning it in	52%	30% ^c					
Cited sources in a bibliography that were not read or used						58%	35% ^c
Took credit for full participation in a group project when you did not do a fair share of the work			44%	15%	5% ^a	42%	12% ^a
Visited a professor in his/her office to influence a grade						26%	9% ^c
Had unauthorized information programmed into a calculator when taking an exam						21%	1% ^a
Asked about the content of an exam from someone who had taken it						68%	40% ^b
Gave information about the content of an exam to someone who had not yet taken it			72%	62%	33% ^c	79%	47% ^b

Note: ^aalpha-level < .01; ^balpha-level < .05; ^calpha-level < .10

There was a significant difference in the level of participation between male and female MBAs for only one of the sixteen practices. Fifty-two percent of female MBAs reported they had someone else check over a paper before turn it in," whereas only 30 percent of the male MBAs reported having participated in this practice. The student age was related to two practices, namely, "took credit for full participation in group project when you did not do a fair share of the work" and "gave information about the content of an exam to someone who had not yet taken it," with students below 23 years of age participating at 44 percent and 72 percent, respectively, compared to 15 percent and 62 percent for students 23 years old and 5 percent and 33 percent for students older than 23. Consistent with the findings of other studies, older students participated less than their younger counterparts in both practices.

Student's GPA was associated with the level of participation in nine of the sixteen practices. As noted in Table 2, in each of these nine practices, those students with GPA less than 3.0 reported higher levels of participation than those with GPAs equal to or greater than 3.0. It seems that students with lower grades are more willing to indulge in unethical practices in order to be competitive with those with higher GPA.



PARTICIPATION AND LEVEL OF PERCEIVED ETHICAL LEVEL

It might be expected that practices engaged in by larger percentages of students would be ranked as less unethical and vice versa, either because students did not feel guilty participating in an unethical practice or because they rated

practices they engaged in as less unethical to minimize guilt. To verify this relationship, the rankings reported in Table 1 were examined to see if there was any such relationship between the participation level and the perceived ethical level. As expected, in general, the rankings for participation were opposite of those for the perceived ethical level. For example, "working with others on an individual paper or project" received a rank 1 for being most frequently practiced, whereas it received a rank of 16 on ethical level (being the least unethical practice). The ranks for most of the practices follow the expected patterns. There were a couple of exceptions. One, the practice, "allowed other students to see answers during an exam," received a rank of 2 (second most frequently practiced) and yet it received a rank of 7 (being perceived as quite unethical). Two, the practice, "passed answers during an exam," received a rank of 1 for being perceived as most unethical practice and yet, its rank for participation was 8 (moderately practiced item). Perhaps the students participated in these practices because of peer pressure or a desire to help friends in the class.



LIKELY REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Table 3 highlights the mean scores for the likely reasons for participation in academically dishonest practices. The most likely reason for participation was: "the student wants or needs a high grade," followed by "the student feels there is a low risk of getting caught or punished," and "the student feels no one is hurt by the behavior." The respondents were less likely to use poor instructors, irrelevant material, and thrill or challenge as reasons for their unethical academic behavior.

Table 3
Reasons for Participation in Practices

Reason	Mean Rating
The student wants or needs a high grade ^a	3.53
The student feels there is a low risk of getting caught or punished	3.44
The student feels no one is hurt by the behavior	3.40
The student had time but did not prepare adequately	3.29
The student believes everyone does it, so he/she must do it to be competitive	3.11
Difficult material, course, exam	3.05
The student does not have adequate time to devote to his/her studies	3.02
Pressures from peers to engage in the behavior	2.65
The student feels the material, assignment, or task is irrelevant	2.65
Engaging in the behavior was a challenge or thrill for the student	2.52
The student feels the instructor is poor or indifferent	2.50
Note: ^a Scale: 1 = not at all likely, 5 = very likely	



DISCUSSION

A large portion of the published research on student academic dishonesty has involved students at colleges and universities in the United States. Given the great differences in the cultures of India and the United States, it seems reasonable to expect that substantial differences would exist in student behavior between the two countries, including academically dishonest behavior.

The most recent comprehensive review of student academic dishonesty in the United States that we found was by B. E. Whitley, published in 1998. Whitley reviewed 107 studies that used students in the United States and Canada as subjects. We will use Whitley's findings as the basis for comparison of academic dishonesty in India to that of North America, primarily the United States.

The proportion of students having participated in an academically dishonest practice in our sample, at 95.2%, was higher than the proportions Whitley found in his review. The mean level of participation reported by Whitley was 70.4%, while the range was 9% to 95%. This suggests an especially serious ethical problem among Indian MBA students. However, it should be recognized that the method of determining the overall level of participation in dishonest academic practices was not standardized across studies.

Whitley also reported rates of participation in cheating on exams, cheating on homework, and plagiarism. While our variables are not identical to those in the Whitley review, some meaningful comparisons can still be made. Whitley found a mean level of cheating on exams of 43.1%. Our data suggest a higher level of exam cheating among the Indian MBA students. Our questionnaire included eight different methods of cheating on exams. The proportion of students admitting participation in three of these exceeded the mean level of 43.1% found by Whitley. Once again, it appears that Indian MBA students are prone to involvement in this specific form of academic dishonesty.

Whitley found a mean level of cheating on homework of about 41%. The practice on our questionnaire that appears to be the closest to this one is "Working with other students on an individual paper or project," with a level of participation of

80.6%. The mean level of participation in plagiarism reported by Whitley was 47%, which is moderately higher than the 41.9% found in this study.

One of the most consistent findings of the research on student academic dishonesty in the United States has been that males participate at higher levels than females. This was not the case with the Indian MBA students. There was a significant difference by gender for only one practice, having someone else check over a paper before turning it in, and the level was 53% for females compared to 30% for males. The findings for the other two demographic variables included in this study were similar to those reported by Whitley. In both cases, younger students and those with lower GPAs were more likely to cheat.

The need for more information about student academic dishonesty in countries other than the United States has been noted by several researchers. Lupton, Chapman, and Weiss (2000) have offered two specific reasons why such information is needed. Colleges and universities in the United States are sending more faculty overseas to teach as the importance of international studies is increasing. In addition, more international students are attending U. S. colleges and universities. About one-third of non-U. S. college students studying overseas study in the United States. A better understanding of students' perceptions of the behavior that is expected of them in a given academic environment, as well as their behavioral tendencies, will better enable faculty to deal with the dishonesty issue. This paper makes a contribution that ends by presenting this type of information about MBA students in India.

Finally, avenues for future research are suggested. The sample in this study was a small group of Indian students in a program at one Indian university. The study should be replicated in other Indian universities to assess the extent to which the results presented here are representative of Indian MBA students in general. In addition, students from other programs in India should also be studied.

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