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Managing Academic Dishonesty in Australian Universities: Implications for Teaching, Learning and Scholarship

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Abstract

For institutions of higher education, academic dishonesty is an ever-present problem that many would suggest is exacerbated by: technological advancements that make it increasingly easier for students to access and misuse resources; relatively scarce funds to counter the problem; and a culture of acceptance within the student population. This paper examines the reporting and management of academic misconduct via an analysis of data obtained from surveys of 1206 students and 190 academic staff at four major Queensland universities. Both students and staff are found to be unlikely, for various reasons, to report suspicions of academic misconduct to their institutions. Staff seem to recognise the importance of the problem, however, with many indicating they have altered the delivery of their courses in an attempt to address the situation, although individual efforts are often hampered by a lack of resources as well as by a lack of coordinated institutional support. Given that a majority of surveyed staff believe that the incidence of academic misconduct has increased over the past five years, we suggest that a more concentrated and coordinated effort is required to support both the current efforts of academics and the development of further strategies to manage the problem.

Acknowledgement: This study forms part of a larger, multinational study being conducted across tertiary institutions in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom. The survey instrument used for this study was developed and piloted by our New Zealand colleagues (de Lambert, Ellen and Taylor, 2003).

Introduction

Academic dishonesty is an ever-present problem for institutions of higher education and has been the subject of much research in recent years, particularly in the United States. Concern over academic misconduct is highlighted by the growing pool of research evidence suggesting that not only is academic dishonesty prevalent in universities around the globe, but institutions tend to underestimate the level of such behaviour (Bowers, 1963; McCabe and Trevino, 1996; Crown and Spiller, 1998; Dick, Sheard and Markham, 2001; de Lambert, Ellen and Taylor, 2003; Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke, 2005). It is further postulated by this research that factors such as technological advancement and a tendency toward increasingly large, impersonal and bureaucratic universities with relatively scarce resources to counter the problem have contributed to an increasing prevalence of academic dishonesty (Bowers, 1964; McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield, 1999).

Further concern arises from evidence suggesting a divergence between the opinions of academics and students in relation to both the seriousness of various types of academic misconduct and the severity of penalties that should be attached to them, with students presenting a more tolerant view than academics in both respects (Roberts and Toombs, 1993; Roig and Ballew, 1994; Bailey, 2001; de Lambert, Ellen and Taylor, 2003; Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke, 2005). Such a culture of acceptance of academic misconduct within the student population serves only to weaken the academic integrity of our tertiary institutions.

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In addition, academic dishonesty undermines the purpose of higher education. The Australian Federal Government, in the Nelson Report (2002), argues that higher education is "... much greater than preparing students for jobs", regarding higher education as "... contributing to the fulfilment of human and societal potential, the advancement of knowledge and social and economic progress". Indeed, the report states the main purposes of Australian higher education are to:

- Inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential;
- Enable individuals to learn throughout their lives;
- Advance knowledge and understanding;
- Aid the application of knowledge and understanding to the benefit of the economy and understanding;
- Enable individuals to adapt and learn; and
- Contribute to a democratic, civilised society and promote the tolerance and debate that underpins it (Nelson, 2002:1).

Academic misconduct within tertiary education directly undermines these goals, presenting a serious ethical and moral dilemma for universities. While students choose to engage in dishonest behaviour, any perceived unwillingness by academics or institutions to openly deal with student academic dishonesty may be regarded as tantamount to condoning it (Woessner, 2004; Larkham and Manns, 2002).

In addition to opening public debate about the role of higher education, the Australian Government has been steadily developing national measures of teaching and learning performance. The publication of course experience questionnaires (CEQ), graduate destinations data, and public investigations of complaints over 'soft marking' and corruption in relation to teaching issues in universities has put pressure on the teaching and learning policies and performance of universities. Furthermore, the Government has raised the possibility of performance based funding of universities (Nelson, 2002) and has stated that "Quality [in learning, teaching and scholarship] needs to be identified, recognised

and rewarded. It should be at the centre of policy formation ...” (Commonwealth Government, 2002). This suggests that universities may be held more accountable for their teaching and learning performance in the future. The management of academic misconduct, we suggest, is central to this performance and hence warrants investigation.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how academics are managing academic dishonesty in their classrooms. In addition to this, we examine the propensity of both students and academics to report academic dishonesty. These two points are critical to the process of effectively responding to incidences of academic dishonesty: firstly, because teaching staff directly influence students’ opportunities/willingness to behave dishonestly through assessment design, supervision of examinations, diligence in marking and through their relationships and communication with students; and, secondly, because the willingness of both students and staff to report dishonest behaviour determines an institution’s ability to recognise the scale of the problem and to take appropriate action. Hence, we postulate that the reporting and management of academic dishonesty directly influence the performance of universities in terms of teaching and learning. To investigate these issues we examine data obtained from surveys of 1206 students and 190 academic staff across four Queensland universities.

This study contributes to the limited research literature on academic misconduct in Australia by: (1) providing an understanding of the strategies being used by academics to manage student academic misconduct; (2) determining the propensity of both academics and students to report incidences of student academic misconduct; and (3) determining the perceptions of academics with respect to the ability of universities to effectively deal with student academic misconduct. By establishing a deeper understanding of current attitudes toward academic misconduct within Australian universities, our ability to develop strategies to more effectively manage this issue should be enhanced.

Briefly, the study’s findings indicate that both staff and students are unlikely to report students engaging in academic misconduct. While students are unwilling to report their peers due to a general belief that they should ‘mind their own business’, academic staff are principally concerned about an inability to substantiate claims (and/or a lack of resources to do so), as well as the time consuming nature of the process

and a perception that management would be unwilling to support them in such claims. Nevertheless, many academics appear to be actively implementing strategies within their own courses to reduce academic misconduct, but with little coordination or support from management. While their efforts tend to focus on assessment issues, other approaches such as fostering a culture of academic integrity are receiving less consideration. We suggest that an integrated institutional approach, incorporating such strategies as improved education of both staff and students in relation to academic misconduct, development of clear policy that is consistently and rigorously applied, and processes to change student attitudes towards the acceptability of such behaviour, are required to address the issue of academic misconduct and reduce its impact on higher learning outcomes.

The remainder of this paper is set out as follows. A review of relevant literature is presented next, followed by a discussion of the study's data and survey instruments. Findings are presented in section four, with a summary and recommended actions for addressing the issue of academic misconduct provided in the concluding section of the paper.

Literature Review

Background

In recent decades academic dishonesty has received much attention in the academic literature. Much of this research has investigated the prevalence of dishonesty and the factors influencing such behaviour in the US context. In an early study, Bowers (1963, cited in McCabe and Trevino, 1996) surveyed five thousand students across ninety-nine university campuses and found that three out of four students admitted to having engaged in at least one of thirteen 'questionable' activities, such as copying from another student during an examination, using unauthorised materials during an examination, padding out a bibliography or collaborating on assignments requiring individual work. In a follow-up study conducted across the same campuses thirty years later, it was found that while the overall proportion of students admitting to having engaged in such activities had increased only modestly, the incidence of certain activities (including cheating in examinations, helping others to cheat and collaborating on individual work) had risen

dramatically (McCabe and Bowers, 1994, cited in McCabe and Trevino, 1996).

McCabe and Trevino (1996) suggested that these trends might be associated with a changing environment for tertiary education, where universities have become larger, less personal and more competitive, leading to increasing student cynicism toward academic dishonesty. They proposed an approach toward reducing academic dishonesty that revolves around increasing social pressure to behave honestly, and cite the reduced incidence of (self-reported) academic dishonesty among students at universities with honour codes in support of their arguments. Others who have associated increasing levels of student dishonesty with changing attitudes toward education include Nonis and Swift (2001) who argue that universities are now regarded by students more as credentialing institutions than as educational institutions, allowing students to more easily rationalise cheating.

In addition to changing attitudes toward education, changing attitudes toward what constitutes acceptable behaviour in the business world have also been suggested as contributing toward a decline in student honesty, particularly with respect to business students. Amid a public perception of declining ethics in the business community – Cole and Smith (1995) went so far as to suggest that the term ‘business ethics’ has become an oxymoron to some – a number of recent studies have sought to investigate the relationship between academic dishonesty and unethical behaviour in the ‘real world’. Lawson (2004) found a very strong relationship between students’ propensity to engage in unethical behaviour in an academic setting and their attitude toward such behaviour in the business world. Students who cheated in examinations or plagiarised assignments were found to be less likely to believe that people in the business world act ethically, and more accepting of the need for unethical behaviour in business, than those who did not engage in academic dishonesty.

Meanwhile, in a comparative study of business students in the US and in a number of Eastern European and Asian transitional economies, Grimes (2004) found that both groups of students generally viewed dishonesty in a business context more severely than dishonesty in an academic context, suggesting that students hold a lower standard of accountability for personal action within the university environment relative to the ‘real world’ of work and business. In fact, Grimes reported

that while more than 85 per cent of the US students (40 per cent of the transitional economies students) believed that cheating in college/university was ethically wrong, 49 per cent (57 per cent) felt it was nevertheless acceptable.

Findings such as those of Lawson (2004) and Grimes (2004) suggest that increasing levels of student dishonesty may be reflective of the value systems being internalised by today's young people exposed to an almost daily media litany of fraud, bribery, insider trading and other forms of unethical behaviour in the 'real world'. The fear, then, is that cheating will become (has already become?) normative behaviour for today's students who are arguably under more pressure than ever before to achieve high grades in order to secure scholarships or well-paid employment. Thus, it becomes increasingly important that university administrators understand the factors that cause and maintain cheating behaviour, in order to be in a better position to promote and engender ethical attitudes and behaviours among students. Given the foreshadowed changes to the Australian government's funding of universities and the likelihood that institutions will be held more accountable for their teaching and learning performance, responding to academic misconduct is likely to become a crucial issue for Australian universities. The literature proposes a variety of strategies that may help reduce the incidence of academic dishonesty.

Penalties and Minimising Opportunity

One of the more traditional approaches toward managing academic misconduct is deterrence. This usually takes the form of a misconduct policy that sets out the consequences of being caught engaging in such behaviour. Prevention strategies have wide support in the literature (for example, Zobel and Hamilton, 2002; Joyce, 2003; Woessner, 2004), with the argument being that rigorously imposing and publicising potential penalties will assist in reducing the incidence of academic misconduct. Evidence of the efficacy of such an approach was provided by McCabe and Trevino (1993) who found that academic dishonesty is influenced by the likelihood of being reported and the severity of penalties. Haswell, Jubb and Wearing (1999), in one of the few empirical studies in this area to be conducted outside the US, found that for a pooled sample of UK, South African and Australian students, the willingness of students to engage in a variety of forms of plagiarism in a risk-free environment fell dramatically when detection risk and significant

penalties were introduced, with size of penalty exerting a greater influence than risk of detection. Most recently, Woessner (2004) has argued that students are utility maximisers who use rational choice to weigh up the advantage of engaging in misconduct (that is, higher grades for less work) against the risk of being caught and the penalties imposed. He claims that failure to apply heavy penalties is tantamount to encouraging misconduct as it presents an excellent gamble to students.

Another approach toward reducing academic misconduct involves minimising opportunities for students to engage in such behaviour. Since most forms of student academic dishonesty relate to assessment practices (for example, exam cheating, assignment copying or plagiarism), it has been argued that careful assessment design can reduce dishonest behaviour (see, for example, Zobel and Hamilton, 2002; Joyce, 2003; Bolin, 2004). Joyce (2003) illustrated that the use of plagiarism detection software also minimises opportunity by providing an effective detection device - the incidence of misconduct was shown to decline as students became aware of the use of the software by academics. These authors also note the importance of devoting sufficient resources (in the form of staff time as well as financial resources for the purchase of specialised software) to combat this problem (see Zobel and Hamilton, 2002; Joyce, 2003; Larkham and Manns, 2002).

Fostering an Environment of Academic Integrity

Alternative approaches toward reducing the incidence of student academic dishonesty revolve around developing a shared (between faculty and students) understanding of academic integrity – what it means and how it can be achieved. For example, McCabe and Trevino (1993) observed a strong association between academic dishonesty and “perceptions of peers’ behaviour”, a variable that encompassed students’ estimated frequency of cheating by peers as well as the actual frequency with which they had observed peers cheating. This variable, in turn, was found to be significantly influenced by an institution’s ability to develop a shared understanding and acceptance of its academic integrity policies, leading the authors to suggest (pp. 533-534) that “... programs aimed at distributing, explaining, and gaining student and faculty acceptance of academic integrity policies may be particularly useful (in reducing academic dishonesty)”.

Roberts and Toombs (1993) also reasoned that the development of prevention strategies would be easier where faculty and students perceive cheating with similar degrees of seriousness, arguing for “a comprehensive effort to implement strategies of what both faculty and students view as appropriate to deal with cheating”. Roig and Ballew (1994) further supported this stance, calling for faculty to take a more active role in establishing an atmosphere of academic integrity in the classroom by communicating to students their strong position on academic dishonesty and the negative consequences of such behaviour. These authors also called for increased vigilance during examinations and professional and timely retribution for cheating, since inaction would likely result in the reinforcement of misconduct.

More recently, Zobel and Hamilton (2002) added a further dimension to this argument, contending that the willingness of staff to implement (and assist in the development of) university policy is critical to the management of student misconduct. They suggest that staff often see themselves as being ‘on the side of the student’ rather than as implementers of policy, an attitude that severely limits the ability of institutions to deal with student academic dishonesty. Larkham and Manns (2002) argue for cooperation not only between staff and institutions, but between institutions themselves. Accusing universities of hiding behind confidentiality to avoid revealing their policy towards, and treatment of, incidences of academic misconduct, these authors assert that such an attitude effectively condones dishonest behaviour. They call for a more open cooperation between institutions in both assessing and dealing with the problem of academic misconduct.

An Educational Approach

An educational approach, including the introduction of ethics courses into university curricula, would seem to provide a means of increasing students’ ethical sensitivity and, hence, behaviour. However, the effectiveness of such courses in curbing student dishonesty has not been demonstrated. While there is evidence that ethics education can lead to heightened moral development, the link between moral development and honesty is tenuous, with a number of studies (most recently, Bernardi et al., 2004; and West, Ravenscroft and Shrader, 2004) indicating that the relationship between moral development and student cheating is insignificant.

Nonis and Swift (2001) have argued for a more fundamental approach involving the teaching of integrity and discussion of ethical issues in every course, with particular emphasis in the capstone courses, rather than just in specialised ethics classes. Such an approach focuses not so much on teaching students the rules of ethical analysis, but on providing a strong ethical foundation that becomes ingrained in students over the duration of their studies so that they come to value integrity and honesty in their own (and others') behaviour. The authors call upon faculty to become role models for ethical conduct, citing in support of their argument a study by Sauser (1990) that found the behaviour of business professors taught students more about ethical behaviour than any other technique.

Similarly, a study by David, Anderson and Lawrimore (1990) found that 92 per cent of graduates who had been out of university for several years believed their professors' actions to be one of the most important factors in determining students' development of ethical standards and values. Thus it would appear that if universities are to establish a shared commitment to academic integrity and ethical behaviour, strategies should extend beyond the teaching of ethics in the classroom to include the enforcement of ethical standards and the modelling of appropriate behaviour by faculty members.

Honour Codes

Academic honour codes provide an alternative approach toward reducing the incidence of academic misconduct by shifting much of the onus for its detection and prevention from institutions and academics onto students themselves. Honour systems operate at many institutions of higher education in the United States and typically involve students pledging to abide by an honour code that clarifies expectations regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, and to take responsibility for detection and sanctioning of violations when they occur. McCabe and Pavela (2000) report that United States universities are increasingly implementing strategies, based on traditional or modified honour codes that emphasise student leadership and peer reporting, to reduce the incidence of academic misconduct. They argue that "the current generation of students faces the danger of being portrayed as moral slackers, habituated to cheating" and claim their research indicates that "a substantial majority of students will support stricter penalties for

academic dishonesty ... (and are) ready for such a change” (McCabe and Pavela, 2000, p. 35).

McCabe and Trevino (1993) found empirical support for honour codes. Employing survey data from more than 6,000 university students, they observed significant negative correlations between (self-reported) levels of academic dishonesty and the existence of an honour code, the perceived certainty of being reported and the perceived severity of penalties. Surprisingly, honour codes are all but unheard of in Australian universities – perhaps a reflection of different social and cultural norms?

Attitudes Toward Dishonesty

Potentially the most effective, but arguably the most difficult to implement, strategy to reduce the incidence of student academic misconduct involves altering student attitudes toward dishonesty. Bolin (2004, p. 110) argues:

“Because attitudes are less enduring than personality traits such as self-control (which is shaped in childhood), and require less frequent intervention than the eternal vigilance needed to reduce opportunity (to cheat), intervention aimed toward influencing student attitudes toward dishonesty (for example, education or honour codes) would seem to have a higher likelihood of success at a much lower cost”.

Examining academic dishonesty within the broader context of deviant behaviour and delinquency, Bolin (2004) found a strong relationship between cheating and students’ attitudes toward academic dishonesty. Using self-report data and path analysis techniques, Bolin observed that cheating behaviour is well explained by Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) general theory of crime (which posits that the major causes of all deviant behaviour are lack of self-control, perceived opportunity and the interaction between them), with the addition of the variable “attitude toward academic dishonesty”. This variable, which was constructed to measure students’ moral evaluations of cheating, explained nearly 40 per cent of the variation in academic dishonesty by US psychology students.

Bolin (2004) was not the first to observe an association between academic dishonesty and students' attitudes toward dishonesty. For example, Salter, Guffey and McMillan (2001) observed that the propensity for US and UK accounting students to cheat was positively correlated with a number of "attitude" variables, including tolerance for cheating, perceived acceptability of cheating in the students' university and student cynicism. Nevertheless, Bolin's (2004) study is noteworthy because it places academic dishonesty within the context of an empirically supported theory with the potential to explain and predict such behaviour, and ultimately permit the development of intervention strategies.

Peers and Whistle Blowing

As previously discussed, the development of a shared understanding and acceptance of academic integrity policies is seen by many as a crucial first step in fostering an environment of academic integrity. This shared understanding is also critical in the willingness of students and staff to report suspicions of academic dishonesty.

The reporting by academic staff and students of academic misconduct is not only important in terms of both determining the gravity of the problem and ensuring that perpetrators are brought to account for their behaviour, but is also a vital first step toward eroding the culture of acceptance. The literature, however, suggests that academics are unlikely to report incidences of student academic misconduct due to the laboriousness of the process and a perception that penalties often don't fit the crimes (Schneider, 1999; Rennie and Crosby, 2002). This gives rise to a situation where academics either ignore the problem or choose to deal with it themselves, rather than follow due process, with both approaches hampering the ability of institutions to formulate effective strategies for dealing with student dishonesty.

With respect to students reporting other students, Rennie and Crosby (2002) in an investigation of perceptions of whistle blowing amongst medical students, found that while 40% of students felt that they should blow the whistle on their fellow students, only 13% actually did so. Students cited a variety of reasons for not reporting academic misconduct, including camaraderie with their peers, fear of retaliation, self-preservation, a feeling that it was not their responsibility, acceptance

of the practice of misconduct, and a lack of guidance over what constituted academic misconduct. Thus it would appear that relying on students and/or staff to report misconduct is unlikely to be an effective strategy for dealing with the issue, particularly where a shared understanding and acceptance of academic integrity policies is lacking.

An integrated approach

In light of the above discussion, it might be that the most appropriate method for dealing with academic dishonesty would involve a holistic approach that focuses on reducing opportunities for students to engage in such behaviour (through carefully designed assessment items and close supervision of examinations), stricter enforcement of (appropriate) penalties for students who choose to engage in dishonest behaviour, strengthening student codes of conduct (including education of staff and students about these as well as greater student involvement in their establishment and implementation) and the modelling of ethical behaviour by faculty members. The success of such a strategy would depend on its being conducted in a coordinated and logical fashion at both the departmental and institutional levels, rather than being left up to individuals to apply at the course or subject level.

The present study seeks to examine the steps that academics are currently taking in the classroom to reduce the incidence of academic misconduct, in an attempt to gauge the methods being used relative to the literature summarised in the preceding paragraphs. We are not aware of any existing study that has sought to investigate what academics are actually doing to manage student dishonesty or, indeed, whether academics even believe it to be their responsibility to do so. By shedding some light on these issues, we hope to raise awareness of potential strategies available to academics and tertiary administrators in their efforts to combat this problem. This study also examines the reporting (by staff and students) of academic misconduct, particularly with respect to the reasons why parties choose not to report. Through enhanced understanding of these matters, tertiary administrators should be in a better position to develop policies that take into account any reluctance by staff or students to report incidences of suspected dishonesty, so as to be more effective in dealing with this pervasive problem.

Research Methods

Data

This study administered two interrelated surveys to academic staff and students from four major universities in Queensland.¹ Staff surveys were distributed by mail with a covering letter introducing the project and the research team. A total of 772 surveys were distributed to academic staff with 190 responses received, giving a response rate of 25%. Of those who responded, slightly more were male (57%) than female (43%), with age of respondents skewed toward the higher end (40% were aged over 50 years). There was a wide array of experience within the sample with 38% of respondents having taught for between 11 and 20 years and 18% for more than 20 years. Most academics had taught more than 2000 students (58%) and a majority (87%) were teaching predominately undergraduate students. Respondents were distributed across disciplines as follows: 24% from business, 41% from the arts, 29% from science and 6% from other areas. Full descriptive statistics for the staff sample are contained in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Academic Staff Respondents

Gender		Age				Discipline				Years of Tertiary Teaching Experience			
M %	F %	< 31 %	31-40 %	41-50 %	> 50 %	Business %	Science %	Art %	Other %	< 5 %	5-11 %	11-20 %	> 20 %
57	43	5	20	35	40	24	41	29	6	18	26	38	18

¹ This study is part of a broader international project involving participants from New Zealand, the United States and Europe in addition to this Australian sample. The surveys used have been extensively piloted by our New Zealand colleagues and revised following feedback from these tests.

Student surveys were administered in class across the four institutions. This enabled the person administering the survey to explain the importance of the project with a view to soliciting more accurate responses. The survey was administered to 1206 students, with 32 responses eliminated from the sample due to the survey being incomplete or incorrectly completed, giving a final sample of student responses of 1174. Of these, 59% were female and 41% male. In terms of age, respondents were generally representative of the student body with a large group (43%) aged 20 to 25 years and smaller groups over other age bands. Most respondents (55%) had between two and three years tertiary experience, with the majority (91%) being undergraduates. With respect to discipline, the sample is skewed toward business students (78%) with another 4% from the arts, 16% from the sciences and 2% responding 'other'. (These figures may be explained by generally larger class sizes found in business programs relative to other disciplines and a greater willingness of business academics to participate in this project.) Full descriptive statistics for the student sample are contained in Table 2 below.

**Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Student Respondents**

Gender		Age				Discipline				Years in Tertiary Education			
M%	F%	< 20%	20-25%	26-35%	36-45%	> 45 %	Business %	Science %	Arts %	Other %	< 2%	2-3 %	> 3%
41	59	28	43	19	8	2	78	16	4	2	22	55	23

Survey Instruments

As indicated above, two survey instruments were used in this study: one for students and one for academics. Both surveys contained three sections, with section A collecting demographic information as detailed above. Section B proposed twenty scenarios relating to academic dishonesty covering a range of issues from plagiarism through to

cheating on examinations (see Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke, 2005 for a full list of these). For each scenario, respondents were asked to complete questions relating to their perceptions of its seriousness, appropriate penalties and the prevalence of such behaviour in the student population. As well, student respondents were asked to indicate whether they had engaged in the various scenarios (and how often), while staff were requested to indicate how frequently they had detected students engaging in such scenarios. (This section of the survey formed the subject of a prior paper (Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke, 2005), the findings of which are referred to throughout this study.)

Section C of the surveys contained a series of questions relating to the reporting and management of academic misconduct within respondents' universities. With respect to the student survey, respondents were asked whether they had ever been caught engaging in academic misconduct and if they had, what penalty they had received. They were then asked how likely they would be to report fellow students' academic dishonesty, and whether they had ever actually done so. The final question in the student survey asked those who had failed to report fellow students whom they suspected of academic misconduct, why they had not reported them. A list of ten possible responses was provided, including an open ended 'other' option (see table 3 for a full list of these).

Section C of the academic staff survey contained four questions. The first of these asked those respondents who had suspected students of engaging in academic misconduct but took no action, to indicate why they had taken no action. A list of nineteen possible responses was provided, including an open-ended 'other' option (see table 4 for a full list of these). This was followed by a question regarding the steps taken by respondents to manage academic misconduct in their classes. Eighteen possible responses were provided,² again including an open-ended 'other' option (see table 5 for a full list of these). The third question asked academic respondents to indicate their perception of the ability of their institution to effectively deal with incidences of academic

2 It should be noted that these questions were structured as yes/no responses from participants as opposed to using a Likert scale. While this provides a clear indication as to the actions of participants, it does not allow for different degrees of agreement and disagreement with the options provided.

misconduct, with the final question seeking opinions on trends in the prevalence of academic misconduct over the past five years.

Results

To set the scene for the discussion of the survey results, we note that of our sample of 1174 students, 72% admitted engaging in some form of academic misconduct. By comparison, 987 students (92%) indicated they had never been caught engaging in such behaviour, with 74 students (7%) advising they had been caught once and 6 students (less than 1%) admitting to having been caught on more than one occasion. These statistics indicate an alarming disparity between the incidence of academic dishonesty and its detection, and highlight the ineffectiveness of systems currently in place to manage academic dishonesty. While institutions that fail to put in place adequate policy and procedure for the deterrence, detection and reporting of academic dishonesty run the risk of being seen to condone and promote such behaviour (Woessner, 2004), the situation raises concern over the ability of institutions to meet the quality goals specified by the Federal Government in terms of learning, teaching and scholarship (Commonwealth Government, 2002).

These concerns are further exacerbated when one considers the penalties that were imposed on those few students actually caught engaging in academic misconduct: 15% received no penalty, 42% received a warning, 26% received a reduction in marks for the assessment, 13% received a 'fail' for the course and 3% were expelled from the institution or refused reenrolment. Hence, only 16% of students caught engaging in academic misconduct received a punishment greater than a reduction in marks, and fewer than half of all detected incidences of academic misconduct incurred any penalty beyond a warning. As Woessner (2004) suggests, academic misconduct is a good bet for students due to the low risk of being caught and the even smaller chance of receiving any substantial penalty.

Reporting of Academic Misconduct

Given the above evidence, one would suspect that few students are 'blowing the whistle' on their fellow students whom they suspect of engaging in academic misconduct. This is evidenced by our survey

responses, where 66% of students indicated they would be unlikely to report fellow students, while only 14% (3%) said they would be likely (very likely) to do so, with 17% unsure. In response to the question on whether students had actually reported other students in the past, 95% of respondents indicated that they have never done so, while 4% had done so only once and 1% had done so on more than one occasion. These figures support the findings of Rennie and Crosby (2002) in relation to not relying on students to report other students.

Having established a lack of willingness to report, we now examine the reasons behind this choice. Interestingly, the most popular response (40% of respondents) was that it was none of their business what other students do (see table 3). This was followed by a perception that policing should be done by staff rather than by students (27%), concern about being responsible for another student being punished (20%) and a fear that the reported student might be innocent (19%). These responses suggest that students are not prepared to bear the responsibility for reporting suspected cases of academic misconduct. Some students appear to rationalise this via a belief that dishonest behaviour will “catch up” with the perpetrators once they enter the “real” world. When considered within the context of our prior findings of a perception among students that academic misconduct is rife among their peers (see Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke, 2005), it would appear that a culture of acceptance has developed in our universities, as per the warnings of McCabe and Pavela (2000). This is epitomised by comments made by participants in the open-ended questions:

“I do my part so what other people do is none of my business”

“I am not responsible for them or the loss they bring on themselves”

“They are only cheating themselves”

At the same time, many respondents did express concern over the prevalence of academic dishonesty, with a number of students voicing concern over what they see as inaction on the part of academics, examination invigilators and institutions generally, as per the response:

“A lot of cheating goes unnoticed, something needs to be done.”

It would appear, then, that students are not prepared to bear the responsibility for reporting cases of academic dishonesty, but are looking toward their lecturers and institutions to do more to deal with the issue:

“Staff are paid to do this, not me”

“Too busy to worry about others’ goings on!”

Table 3
Reasons for Not Reporting Fellow Students Suspected of Academic Misconduct

Reason	% Response
It is none of my business what other students do.	40%
Policing should be done by staff, not by students.	27%
I feared being responsible for having another student punished.	20%
I feared that the accused student might actually be innocent.	19%
Loyalty to my peers.	15%
I feared making an enemy or being ostracised by friends.	14%
I was concerned about reporting a friend.	13%
There is a code of silence that suggests that reporting on one’s peers is worse than cheating.	10%
I did not believe that any action would be taken by the staff or the institution.	8%

Surveyed academics, on the other hand, raised a number of issues concerning their reluctance to report incidences of suspected student academic misconduct (see Table 4). The most common response related to fear of not being able to substantiate misconduct allegations (53% of respondents), suggesting that academics prefer to 'err on the side of caution'. However, other frequently cited responses include the time consuming nature of following up on such allegations (36%) and the

fear that management would not support them if the allegation was denied (22%). These points are reinforced by the responses to a later question in the survey, which reveal that 53% of academics believe their institution to be at least somewhat ineffective in its ability to manage academic misconduct.

Table 4
Academics' Reasons For Not Reporting Academic Misconduct

Reason	% Response
I feared I would be unable to substantiate the allegations if required to.	53%
It is too time consuming, eg checking sources for plagiarism.	36%
I could see that the student did not realise they had been dishonest.	23%
I did not believe the management at my institution would support me if the allegation was denied.	22%
I did not believe the incident was serious enough.	22%
I thought the outcome would not be worth the trouble; penalties imposed are almost always inadequate.	21%
I did not see the point as the student involved was likely to fail anyway.	15%
I feared that I might accuse an innocent student.	11%
I did not believe that management would want to know about it as they are only interested in student numbers.	10%
I feared litigation or other reprisals which could include conflict.	10%
I prefer to devote my time to the majority of students who are honest, rather than waste time on a few.	9%
I was reluctant to harm a young person's opportunities for the future.	5%
I believe we never catch the worst offenders and the clever ones escape, so I did not bother.	5%
I do not see policing of this type to be an appropriate part of my role.	4%

I realised I was also at fault as I could have guarded against the action.	3%
I feared my colleagues would think I was a poor teacher if my students had to resort to cheating.	1%
I did not want to become unpopular with the students.	1%

Some respondents expressed a concern that the students in question did not realise they had been dishonest (23%) and a belief that the relevant incident was not sufficiently serious (22%). The latter response indicates that individual academics are exercising judgement in relation to the application of university policy, while the former indicates academics concede that students are not aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and hence should not be punished. Overall, these findings reveal that academics, like students, are reluctant to report incidences of academic misconduct to management – a situation that clearly undermines the ability of institutions to deal effectively with academic misconduct, since consistent reporting is a key first step in the process.

The concerns of both staff and students are even more clearly articulated in the responses to the ‘other’ option to this question. While a number of academics indicated that they always take action, or at least act upon situations where they believe they can substantiate a case, a greater number of respondents reiterated a lack of support by management and a lack of time to investigate properly. Some of these responses include:

“The process is so heavily weighted in students’ favour that the time required cannot be justifiably used considering the extent of current workload commitments and the perceived reluctance of my institution to apply severe penalties commensurate with the severity of the cheating.”

“The management have in the past failed to take appropriate action even when a charge is substantiated.”

“The approach to plagiarism, for example, varies enormously amongst staff, so with surrounding apathy there is a reluctance to pursue something at times when other staff just don’t care (eg ‘too busy with my research’).”

“I have been yelled at by my head of school for bringing repeat offenders to his notice – he said I was wasting his time!”

The concern that arises from this set of evidence is that such attitudes may promulgate a culture of acceptance of academic misconduct, as suggested by Woessner (2004). Clearly, if staff are disinclined to report suspected academic misconduct due to an onerous process, feared lack of support from management, a belief that the student will ultimately fail the course anyway, lack of interest or a belief that such behaviour will catch up with the perpetrators in the long run, then the probability that a student will be: (a) reported and (b) penalised for engaging in such activities is remote. This is also evidenced in our prior study where 33% of students stated that one of the reasons that prompted them to engage in academic misconduct was the belief that they were unlikely to be caught (Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke, 2005). Hence, our results suggest a self-perpetuating cycle where students engage in academic misconduct with a belief that there is a low risk of being caught, which is then reinforced by low detection rates and weak penalties being applied. This is evidenced by concerning comments made by student participants such as:

“As education is so expensive today, any help students can get to help or improve their marks seems to be fair enough. This basically means padding out a bibliography, paraphrasing information. I have read newspapers that academics have been caught doing this. It is not in my belief a hanging crime. Academics may need to get real with what happens in the real world”.

Overall, our findings suggest that the reporting mechanisms in place for academic misconduct are ineffective, with both academic staff and students generally unwilling to report students whom they suspect of such behaviour. This serves to foster dishonest practice, making it difficult for universities to effectively manage it.

Management of Academic Misconduct

While academics have reservations about reporting students, most are implementing strategies in their teaching in an attempt to minimise

dishonest behaviour (see Table 5 below). When asked what strategies they are using, most academics (78%) indicated they are taking an 'educational' approach by discussing academic dishonesty with students. While this may be seen as a positive development, it would appear that the main focus of such discussion relates to appropriate referencing techniques, rather than to discussion of moral and ethical values. Hence, we reiterate the views of Nonis and Swift (2001) in terms of the need to adopt a more fundamental approach that involves the teaching of integrity and ethics within every course, with a view to changing student attitudes and subsequent behaviours.

In addition to the above-described 'educational' approach, academic respondents also reported the adoption of various assessment related strategies for reducing academic misconduct. For example, 63% of academics reported changing assessment items each semester, while 45% required students to sign a statement of originality, 29% employed a portfolio of assessments rather than only one piece, and 25% reported closely monitoring group work to ensure marks were awarded according to individual merit. With respect to examinations, 43% of academics indicated they are supervising these more closely, with 24% requiring a minimum grade for the final exam (supervised assessment) in order to pass the course, and 19% indicating they are more closely managing the physical environment during exams (for example, using allocated seating). These strategies represent attempts to minimise opportunities for students to engage in dishonest behaviour, as advocated by Zobel and Hamilton (2002) and Bolin (2004). Once again these results are encouraging; however, it is doubtful that prevention strategies will result in long term changes in student behaviours, particularly when they are not employed consistently across courses and detection rates for misconduct are so low.

In terms of developing an environment of cooperation and academic integrity, a number of academic respondents (32%) indicated that they try to build relationships of trust with students. Once again, this is encouraging due to the importance of such an environment in facilitating the use of prevention strategies (Roberts and Toombs, 1993). However, we would suggest that the task of changing the culture of tertiary education with respect to academic dishonesty will be difficult if only one-third of teaching staff are using strategies such as these. Rather, a holistic approach where management and faculty take an active role in

establishing an environment of academic integrity is needed, as advocated by Roig and Ballew (1994).

Interestingly, academics seem to be paying little attention to penalty-based strategies such as increasing the severity of penalties or introducing a 'zero tolerance' policy, despite evidence in the literature of the efficacy of such an approach (see, for example, McCabe and Trevino, 1993; Haswell, Jubb and Wearing, 1999). Rather, there appears to be a preoccupation with changing assessment strategies so as to minimise opportunities for academic dishonesty. Furthermore, there is no mention or indication of an integrated approach being employed. We nevertheless believe that academics should be applauded for the efforts being made, given that many of the strategies they report adopting require additional investment by the academics in terms of both time and resources, often with little support from their institutions. The unfortunate result of this lack of support and lack of coordination at the institutional level is that academics dealing with academic dishonesty are forced into a somewhat haphazard approach that lacks any structured mechanism for measuring its success.

Summary of Open-Ended Question Responses

The final question in both the staff and student surveys was an open-ended question inviting further comment from the respondents. This question received a high degree of response, particularly from staff, which is seen as an indication of the level of concern about this issue. Many academic staff perceive their institutions as being either unwilling or unable (due to a lack of resources) to support efforts to combat academic dishonesty. Indeed, several respondents illustrated cases where students had been reported and management had failed to take the issue further. Staff also commented on the necessity to educate students as to what constitutes academic misconduct, particularly plagiarism. In terms of assessment items, academics raised concern about both examinations and assignments, suggesting that both are subject to dishonest behaviour by students. A further point raised by many respondents was the need for clear policy on academic misconduct that is rigorously promoted and applied.

Table 5
Steps Taken By Academics to Manage Academic Misconduct

Reason	% Response
I discuss cheating/academic dishonesty openly and strongly with the students, making my expectations extremely clear.	78%
I change the assessments used for each offering of the course.	63%
I require students to sign a declaration stating that the work they are handing is in their own.	45%
I teach appropriate paraphrasing and referencing skills.	44%
I now supervise text/exam situations more closely.	43%
I try to build a close relationship with the students.	32%
I now frame assessments in a different way, eg using more essay questions or requiring students to submit a portfolio of their work rather than a single piece of work.	29%
I closely monitor group assessment to ensure marks are allocated on the basis of individual merit.	25%
I require a minimum grade on a final exam (supervised assessment) in order to pass the course.	24%
I have organised the seating or otherwise changed the physical environment during tests.	19%
I have reduced or eliminated the number of take-home assessments, preferring to use supervised tests/exams instead.	17%
I have smaller classes, allowing better relationships to form with students and greater opportunities for observation.	16%
I use plagiarism-checking software on assignments.	13%
I have changed my grading/marking practices, eg collecting notes and rough drafts along with assignments.	11%
I retain all student assessment work – it is not returned to students.	7%
I negotiate a code of honour or similar with the students.	5%
I have taken no steps.	2%

In terms of the student responses, broad themes included reiterated concern about the prevalence of academic misconduct and the perceived lack of action by academic institutions in dealing with it. Particular comment was made about the inadequacy of penalties received by students who had been caught cheating, as well as the lack of information/training given to students in relation to what constitutes academic misconduct (particularly, plagiarism) and how to avoid it. Several students also raised the issue of lack of consistency between courses with respect to academics' expectations in regard to referencing, claiming that these were not made clear. Interestingly, respondents were silent in relation to their institutions' student charters, suggesting a possible lack of knowledge of these.

In general, the open-ended questions illustrated a high level of concern held by both staff and students with respect to academic misconduct. Both groups seem to agree that there is a need for students to be better educated with respect to academic misconduct and the positions adopted by their institutions on this issue. Additionally, staff and students agree upon the need for tertiary institutions to develop and consistently apply clear policy in this area, and to generally do more to combat the problem.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the results presented in this section provide further evidence that academic misconduct is a significant issue that the university sector needs to address. While it appears that both staff and students are generally concerned about the prevalence of academic misconduct, they are disinclined to report known or suspected incidences. A variety of strategies are presently being used by academic staff to combat dishonest student behaviour; however, the haphazard application of these strategies by the academic community makes it difficult to assess the impact they are having. Furthermore, there appears to be a focus on assessment items as a means of managing academic misconduct, with little attention given to other strategies developed in the literature (such as fostering an environment of academic integrity, educating students about ethical values and beliefs, introducing honour codes, or adopting a holistic approach that integrates all of these). Given that many of these strategies require institutional level action and resources to be effectively applied, it appears that academics are doing what they can within their own time and resource constraints.

These findings, when considered in conjunction with evidence that academic misconduct is highly prevalent in Australian universities (Sheard et al., 2002; Brimble and Stevenson-Clarke, 2005), present a worrying picture of student behaviour and, in turn, of the performance of our universities in terms of teaching, learning and scholarship.

Conclusions

Academic misconduct is a continuing problem for tertiary institutions and one that directly impacts on the performance attributes of universities. A growing pool of evidence from around the globe suggests that dishonest behaviour by students is highly prevalent, and that there is a divergence of opinion between academic staff and students in terms of the acceptability of such behaviour and the penalties it should attract. This poses both moral and financial concerns for Australian universities in relation to their performance in teaching, learning and scholarship. This study has examined actions being undertaken by academics across four Queensland universities in terms of managing academic misconduct, and has also examined the reporting by academic staff and students of suspected dishonest behaviour.

Evidence presented indicates that both students and staff are reluctant to report suspicions of academic misconduct to their institutions. While students commonly express a belief that other students' actions are not their business, academics cite the lengthy reporting processes and a perception that management would not support them as key factors in their unwillingness to report students. We suggest that this limits the ability of institutions to both determine the extent of academic misconduct and develop long-term strategies to deal with it.

Notwithstanding the above, academics appear to recognise the importance of this issue, with many indicating they have altered the delivery of their courses, particularly in relation to assessment items, in an attempt to reduce the opportunity for students to behave dishonestly. In addition, many academics indicated that they openly discuss academic dishonesty with students, educating them about expectations and requirements. While this evidence is generally seen as positive, we suggest that the present uncoordinated approach, focusing principally on assessment items, is indicative of a perceived lack of support from

management and a lack of resources. Accordingly, institutional level strategies including the imbedding of ethical and moral development across entire degree curricula, fostering an institutional environment of academic integrity, consistent and rigorous application of policy with heavy penalties for offenders, and the adoption of honour codes (which have provided some success in managing academic misconduct in the US) become difficult to implement.

What steps can or should be taken by universities to address the problem? Firstly, institutions must take the lead by conducting open discussions with staff and students for the purpose of determining new policy for the safeguarding of the academic integrity of our universities. We advocate an integrated approach, developed and implemented at the institutional level, that includes strategies such as: (1) increased resources devoted to managing academic misconduct; (2) improving the strength, awareness and application of student misconduct policies; (3) reinvigorating the teaching of ethics in program curricula; (4) increased cooperation between institutions, coordinated by a national body such as the AVCC or other educational association that is inclusive of all disciplines; (5) development of a national forum (that incorporates student participation) and research agenda on academic misconduct, led by the coordinating body referred to in the previous point; and (6) development of strategies that aim to change the attitudes of students in relation to academic misconduct (for example, the development of an honour code system and/or the inclusion of students on misconduct panels).

We believe that if the current situation continues to prevail, without a major change in policy direction, academic dishonesty will continue to have serious consequences for the quality of learning occurring in our universities with flow on effects for industry and society in general. We contend that the aforementioned strategies would provide a balanced and flexible approach to dealing with this issue.

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