

Cheating in College: Why Students Do It and What Educators Can Do About It

Reviewed by Will Barratt, Indiana State University¹

Donald L. McCabe, Kenneth D. Butterfield, and Linda K. Treviño. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2012. 225 pp.

Abstract

Integrity has been a topic of interest for thousands of years. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Code of Hammurabi, and many sacred writings cover ethics and promote honesty and integrity. In the modern world integrity, and specifically academic integrity, is a hot topic. With advances in students' ability to copy and paste from Internet resources to advances in plagiarism detection software, new areas of cheating in college are emerging. Academic integrity among U.S. students, according to McCabe, Butterfield, and Treviño, is part of the larger discussion about integrity because dishonesty in college is related to dishonesty in their lives after college. This book covers two decades of quantitative research on student cheating in college, analyzes the results from several perspectives, and includes an exploration of data from research studies in high schools. The chapters cover prevalence, types, and methods of cheating; individual student characteristics and cheating; institutional factors and cheating; honor codes and cheating; the role of faculty in cheating; and end with a look at cheating in business and professional schools. The final chapter explores practical advice for faculty and administrators.

Cheating is behaviorally defined by the authors based on the work of Bowers (1964), and the research studies included are critically and carefully examined. Traditional cheating behaviors such as giving answers to another student during an exam or taking an exam from another student are included with the modern versions of copying material from a source without proper citation. Student self-reported behaviors are the focus of the research and analysis. While the reader may wish that the authors explored the technological battle between cheaters and teachers, this battle was not a focus of the book. Emerging technologies both enable cheaters and enable those trying to catch them, and these technologies raise many new questions in

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the struggle to promote academic integrity. The focus of the book is student cheating and promoting a campus culture of academic integrity, not the ongoing struggle between teachers and students in the classroom.

Overall, the results of the studies are cause for concern; cheating in college is common. “More than two-thirds of college students report that they engaged in some form of academic dishonesty in the previous year” (p. 2). Based on the research presented, the most successful intervention to promote academic integrity is a campus culture that actively promotes honesty and discourages dishonesty. “A deeply embedded and well-run honor code can play a key role in creating a strong ethical environment. However, a strong ethical environment can also be created in the absence of an honor code” (p. 2). The authors stress the need for an active approach to cheating rather than just having an honor code or a student code of conduct.

Since college is a time of intellectual and ethical development, what happens on campus affects people throughout their lives. An awareness of the level of cheating in college is the first step toward creating a positive campus climate that promotes ethical behavior and development.

The book was written to bring together two decades of research by the authors as well as by others. In this goal the authors were successful. The volume is filled with data, tables, references to studies, analyses, recommendations, and everything a scholar and practitioner could want. There are few other books on the topic of cheating. Bertram Gallant’s 2008 ASHE reader *Academic Integrity in the 21st Century: A Teaching and Learning Imperative* brings together essential readings; Davis, Drinan, and Bertram Gallant’s 2009 book *Cheating in School: What We Know and What We Can Do* covers precollege cheating. Callahan’s 2004 *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead* focuses on the larger topic of honesty in the United States. There is no book covering this topic like *Cheating in College*. The author’s reliance on large-scale quantitative and generalizable studies sets this work apart as a classic.

This is an excellent book that should be required reading for academic affairs and student affairs leaders. The level of detail that adds strength to the author’s analysis occasionally makes for slow reading. The extra effort required to read slowly and carefully is rewarded by a deeper understanding of student cheating behaviors in the college context.

References

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