

Faculty commentary

Cheating: a victimless crime?

by Professor Denis Collins

A recent survey of college students found that a whopping seventy-five percent have cheated. Unlike the authors, who were shocked and disgusted by the findings, I found myself wondering about the twenty-five percent who never cheated. I wish I was one of them, but, alas, I am not.

You see, twenty-five years ago, while an undergraduate student, I didn't know the answer to a particular multiple-choice question on a marketing mid-term exam. The class was in a large lecture hall and the professor sat up front reading a newspaper. For the first time in my life I slyly looked at the answer chosen by the person on my immediate right and left, neither one of whom I knew, and copied the answer of the person who looked smarter. Why? For the obvious reason of getting a higher grade.

I have no recollection if the answer I copied was right or wrong. What I do recall is the anxiety I felt at the moment, the guilt I felt after submitting my exam, and the regret that I still have about the one and only time I ever cheated on an exam.

Have you ever cheated on an exam or class assignment? If not, keep up the honorable integrity. You are a gem in a corrupt world. Humbly offer your advice to those struggling with cheating.

If you've only cheated once, please don't do so again. It's not worth the anxiety and lack of integrity. As Aristotle noted more than two millennia ago, human beings are creatures of habit and habits are very difficult to break.

If you are in the habit of cheating,

tell a sympathetic person with high integrity about your desire to change. Then watch out for the infinite number of opportunities to backslide. You will gain remarkable strength each time you say "no" to the temptation. In the meantime, honestly share your struggles and successes with your trusted friend.

Some may argue that certain cultures are more tolerant of cheating than others, thus the views I've stated above are simply another arrogant attempt at western cultural imperialism. But cultural relativism, which suggests that "Is Implies Ought," commits the naturalistic fallacy. Should I beat my wife and participate in child labor because some cultures tolerate such practices? Of course not. World cultures should be competing with each other to live according to the highest, not lowest, standards of human behavior.

Let's not kid ourselves. Cheating is not a victimless crime. You damage your integrity, dull your conscience, present a false image of your ability to the professor, and unjustly benefit at the expense of students who aren't cheating.

For these reasons the Business School recently agreed to post the following honor code in every classroom in Mandeville Hall: As a UB student I take personal responsibility for emulating the highest values and ethical norms: my work is my own and reflective of my best efforts and abilities.

The University of Bridgeport has a unique potential to create an international, world class university based on ethical leadership. Care to join the cause and spread the message?

PS: Good luck on your finals!