

Chapter 4.21

Supporting and Facilitating Academic Integrity in Distance Education Through Student Services:

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ABSTRACT

This chapter briefly describes the growing concern over a lack of academic integrity in higher education and the traditional methods employed to detect and prevent it. Arguing that these possess inherent shortcomings, the author describes a systems approach that incorporates all aspects of student services: admissions, marketing, and orientation; instructional support; instructional technology; library services; and counseling and advocacy. For academic integrity policies and programs to truly be effective, they must be universal and preventative in scope and include all segments of student services and the student body itself. Regular assessment must be conducted and the topic incorporated into professional development. The primary goal for educational institutions

should be to foster and support the development of academic integrity in their students.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

The concern over a lack of academic integrity in education is certainly on the rise in recent years, with an increasing number of articles, papers, and presentations describing the results of surveys on academic integrity or the actions of colleges and universities against suspected cheaters. With regard to distance education (DE), regional accreditation groups are clearly requiring that institutions take steps to ensure the integrity of student work and the credibility of degrees and credits awarded (Commission on Colleges and Schools, 2000). At the same time, a

growing number of organizations and institutions are actively pursuing violations of copyright and intellectual property laws.

Although it is certainly impossible to determine the true extent of academic dishonesty, some statistics and examples provide both illustrations and indications. For example, in 2002, 47 students at Simon Fraser University turned in nearly identical economics papers (Hamlin & Ryan, 2003). The Center for Academic Integrity (CAI) at Duke University conducted a 1999 survey of 2,100 students on 21 campuses across the country, with about one-third admitting to serious test cheating, and half admitting to one or more instances of serious cheating on written assignments (Hamlin & Ryan, 2003). In a survey of 4,500 students at 25 high schools, over half admitted to having engaged in some level of plagiarism on written assignments using the Internet (Mayfield, 2001). Research by CAI members and others concluded that “student cheating is on the rise and that pressures and opportunities for dishonest behavior are increasing in many academic and professional contexts” (CAI, 1999, p. 4).

With regard to student populations, Dr. Diane Waryold, executive director for the CAI, stated that certain trends may be found in academic dishonesty: top students competing for spots in grad school; students with lower GPAs (survival); students who value grades over learning and honesty; females and males, though males tend to self-report more cheating; members of Greek organizations; business and engineering majors; younger students; and all cultural backgrounds. Waryold offers the following rule of thumb: 20% will never cheat, 20% will cheat whenever possible, and 60% are open to influence (Waryold, 2002). Although further research is certainly needed in terms of understanding the demographics of cheaters, the question remains as to how this data might be used in constructive ways.

Though the rise and development of the World Wide Web clearly cannot be blamed for a lack of academic integrity on the part of some students,

it has certainly provided new opportunities for cheating, where the “age-old concerns about ethical practices in assessment ... take on new twists in the distance-learning environment” (Abbott, Siskivic, Nogues, & Williams, 2000). McMurry (2001) described several methods, including copying and pasting text directly from articles, sharing assignments through e-mail attachments, and simply purchasing and downloading papers through sites such as EssayWorld.com, Planet Papers, Evil House of Cheat, Other People’s Papers, and School Sucks, all of which offer thousands of papers on a wide diversity of topics.

Hinman (2000) states that there are three possible approaches to minimizing online cheating and plagiarism: virtue (developing students who do not want to cheat), prevention (eliminating or reducing opportunities and reducing the pressure to cheat), and policing (catching and punishing cheaters). While some educators advocate an aggressive program of detection and punishment as the most effective method to deal with academic dishonesty, it may be argued that a primarily “downstream” approach lacks learner-centeredness and institution-wide coordination and will inevitably fail as a result. Therefore, in order to more effectively address these issues, this paper will argue for a systems approach to student services in order to better support and facilitate academic integrity.

Academic Integrity, Student Services, and the Systems Approach

Rumble (2000) argued that distance educators have generally been better at articulating what they mean by student services than traditional educators, and he adds that a systems approach to DE is embedded in the literature and that it is part of the culture of DE that includes student support. Lyons (1990) reminded us that student services exist to serve the institution’s mission and objectives, and that this will determine to a large degree where resources are focused. As a result,

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