Chapter 9
Experimental Design to Examine the Effectiveness of Honor Codes

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ABSTRACT

Violations of academic integrity (e.g., cheating and other acts of academic dishonesty) are issues on every college campus (e.g., Turner & Beemsterboer, 2003; Arnold, Martin, Jinks, & Bigby, 2007). Many institutions have adopted honor codes as part of their unique culture in response to violations of academic integrity. While the number of honor codes at institutions has increased over the past few decades, research examining the effectiveness of honor codes has been limited by issues of research design. The case study presented here discusses honor codes, their presence on college campuses across the United States, and highlights one particular campus. In contrast to previous research, we suggest that future research should utilize experimental designs technique to determine the effectiveness of honor code reporting on reducing academic integrity violations. Thus, previous institutional research investigating violations of academic integrity has been retrospective and correlational in nature, which precludes an accurate examination of the effectiveness of honor code reporting as these research design characteristics do not permit the examination of cause-and-effect relationships. Only experimental designs permit the examination of causal or cause-and-effect relationships (Kirk, 1996). Thus, this case study describes the fundamental advantage of experimental design over previous research in its ability to conclude causal relationships between honor codes and violations of academic integrity.

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BACKGROUND

Established in the mid-1800s, Big Private University is a faith-based institution of higher education located in the southern United States. Big Private University is regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, and recognized by the Association of American Colleges, the American Council on Education, Southern Universities Conference, the Texas Council on Church Related Colleges, the Southern Association of Baptist Colleges and Schools, the American Association of University Women, and the American Society of Allied Health Professions, to name a few on an institutional level. Additionally, Big Private University is the oldest institution of higher education in the state of Big State. As articulated by its motto, Big Private University has a Christian focus and orientation with a uniquely Baptist identity as the largest university of its type in the world. Its enrollment was approximately 14,000 students during the 2009-2010 academic year, with students coming from all 50 states and almost 70 different countries. Big Private University offers bachelor, masters, and doctoral degree across a variety of disciplines. The institution's strategic plan, the "Big Private University 2012 Imperatives" includes ambitious goals to maintain and grow in its Christian and denominational identities while becoming a top-tier research university. In 2010, the *U.S. News and World Report's America's Best Colleges* ranked Big Private University in the top 100 among national research universities (America's Best Colleges, 2010).

SETTING THE STAGE

Since their inception, institutions of higher education have been confronted with acts of academic dishonesty, sought to understand students' motivation, and promoted strategies to increase academic integrity behaviors (e.g., Turner & Beemsterboer, 2003; Arnold, Martin, Jinks, & Bigby, 2007). Specifically, the reasons reported by students for cheating range from the desire for good grades, parental and peer pressures, to simply the desire to the do the least amount of work possible (Arnold et al., 2007). The exact prevalence rates of academic dishonesty among college students is unknown with self-reported estimates ranging anywhere from 4% to 100% of students (e.g., Baird 1980; McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Butterfield, & Treviño, 2006; Stearns, 2001; Vowell & Chen, 2004; Zastrow, 1970). However, academic dishonesty on college and university campuses has been termed as an epidemic (Arnold et al., 2007), requiring intervention on behalf of institutions of higher education.

Both anecdotal and scholarly research has attributed the introduction and implementation of honor codes with decreases in violations of academic integrity (e.g., McCabe & Treviño, 2002; McCabe & Pavela, 2000; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999). From this perspective, the implementation of honor codes has been considered a recommitment to the values of academic integrity by institutions of higher education (McCabe & Treviño, 2002). However, conclusions about the effectiveness of honor codes that can be drawn from existing scholarly research are limited due to the primarily retrospective and correlational nature of the research studies. Thus, a causal relationship between honor codes and reduction of academic dishonesty behaviors could not be established, rather only correlational relationships have been identified.

The case study presented in this chapter proposes the use of online experimental design techniques to examine the effectiveness of an honor code in reducing academic dishonesty behaviors. The online modality of these experimental design techniques provides greater flexibility to institutional researchers in recruiting and managing participant responses. Institutional researchers