Academic Integrity Survey: Summary of Results
University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus
Office of the Provost
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Overview

In October 2004 an online survey was conducted of student and faculty perceptions of academic misconduct. Participation was sufficient to give some indication of where the Norman Campus stands with respect to national norms. The bad news is that cheating is widely prevalent in college classes nationwide. The good news is that, on many measures, OU is somewhat better off than national averages would predict.

Background

OU's standards of academic integrity and our ability to address cheating are matters of importance to every member of the university community. However, until now the only source of empirical information on the issue has been the number of cases filed in the academic misconduct system. Those numbers, which rose steadily through the late 1990's before beginning to level off in the 2003-2004 academic year, suggest that OU faces the same growing problem with cheating that has been noted across the United States. In order to get a more comprehensive look at campus perceptions of the issue, in October 2004 the Office of the Provost invited an off-campus researcher to conduct an online survey of students and faculty.

Survey

The survey was conducted by Donald L. McCabe, a Rutgers University management professor. Dr. McCabe is one of the few researchers in the area of academic misconduct. Since the early 1990s he has conducted surveys at over 100 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, and has done research on cheating in secondary schools as well.

For the OU survey, Dr. McCabe created four websites: one for Norman Campus faculty and three for Norman Campus graduate students, undergraduates, and first-year students. All four sites contained a series of yes/no and Likert-scale questions regarding respondents' perceptions of the incidence and severity of cheating on campus, the degree of student and faculty understanding of OU's integrity policies, and the degree to which respondents were willing to report cheating. Open-ended responses were also solicited. All responses were anonymous. The survey websites remained open from October 1 to approximately October 20, 2004.

Similar projects at other institutions have encouraged survey participation by making it mandatory or by offering incentives such as prizes. In this survey, participation was simply invited by one email to students and another to faculty, plus a followup/remind e-mail to each group approximately one week later. Dr. McCabe reported that resulting participation levels were low but adequate for meaningful results: 130 faculty, 165 first-year students, 792 other undergraduates, and 76 graduate students participated. Because of a confusion in the emailed instructions, some first-year and graduate students participated in the undergraduate survey, but efforts were made to remove those data from the results where possible, e.g. through self-identifying comments in the open-ended response portion.
Dr. McCabe transmitted the results of the surveys on October 23, 2004. He also provided the results of nearly-identical surveys conducted at other U.S. institutions for faculty, undergraduates, and graduate students, plus the results of first-year student surveys in Canada. Because of the low numbers of graduate student responses and the absence of comparative data for first-year students, the discussion below will concentrate on faculty and undergraduate student responses. (Comparisons are currently being developed between the U.S. averages, which include all undergraduates, and the OU first-year and undergraduate surveys combined.)

Discussion

The results of these surveys suggest that on the whole OU-Norman Campus is strikingly similar to most other U.S. colleges and universities with respect to most measures of cheating, attitudes toward cheating, and faculty and student perceptions of campus culture and policy. These national averages are of considerable concern. Nationally, for example, only 80% of students nationwide reported they had "never" used a false excuse to obtain an extension of a due date; 70% reported they had never received unpermitted help on an assignment; 61% said they had never copied sentences in a paper from the Internet without proper attribution; and only 55% said they had never collaborated on an assignment that was supposed to be completed individually. U.S. students reporting that they had engaged in those behaviors three times or more in the past year were, respectively, 5%, 11%, 15%, and 21% of the totals.

There are a few notable differences between OU students and faculty vis a vis their national peers.

- Students report slightly less cheating than the national average, and a somewhat greater tendency to view particular forms of cheating as serious rather than trivial.

- More OU students report getting their information about cheating and the misconduct system from faculty or TA's rather than printed or online sources.

- Even though self-reported cheating was slightly lower than national means and reports of witnessing almost identical to those means, OU students exceeded national averages in believing that cheating occurs here "often" or "very often." Faculty reports of witnessing various forms of cheating were more mixed, but in many cases were somewhat higher than national averages.

- OU students were more likely to say they would report a fellow student for cheating, and more likely to agree that faculty are "vigilant in discovering and reporting suspected cases" of misconduct.

- OU faculty appeared to be somewhat more concerned about student cheating than their national counterparts. Faculty were more likely to report that students "often" engaged in certain forms of cheating and that student understanding of misconduct policies was low. Faculty were more likely to perceive faculty support for those policies as high, and less likely to report that they personally had ever ignored a cheating incident in their classes.