Ivanova V.A.
Academic fraud

_____

Ivanova, Vanya Angelova, Assistant Professor
University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski", Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Abstract. The article aims to define academic fraud in higher education, describe the most commonly used methods of committing it and search for the reasons causing this problem. This work presents a survey investigating the personal experience of tertiary education students in practicing academic fraud and includes an analysis of the results. The ultimate purpose of the author is to find ways to minimize academic fraud in order to enhance the efficiency and quality of higher education.

Keywords: academic fraud, cheating, plagiarism, efficiency, code of ethics

Introduction and background to the study. The rapid advancement of information technology together with its growing implementation in higher education offers new possibilities for cheating. In this respect, teachers need to raise our awareness to the problem of academic fraud and to search for ways of dealing with this issue.

The origin of the word fraud is Old French *fraude* from Latin *fraus* "deceit, injury". The dictionary definition of fraud is wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain [10]. Academic fraud (also called academic dishonesty or academic misconduct) can be defined as any type of cheating that occurs in relation to a formal academic exercise. Universities around the world publish detailed definitions of fraud in its various aspects so that students can recognize the problem and learn how to avoid it [3], [7], [8].

Some of the manifestations of academic dishonesty are the following: plagiarism, multiple submission (of assignment work), false citation, false data/fabrication, deception, cheating, bribery, sabotage, professorial misconduct, and impersonation. [2], [3], [7], [8].

Plagiarism is by far the most common instance of academic fraud. Its essence is in representing somebody else's work as your own such as copy-pasting text from websites or books without acknowledging the sources of information that have been used. Nowadays, in foreign language learning for example, paraphrasing without citing the original sources is becoming more and more widely used. This practice is also considered plagiarism although it is more difficult to detect. For instance, when students are assigned to write an essay on a given topic, they search the Internet for similar papers and make minor alterations to them, such as changing names and locations, and then pass the text as their own genuine work. In such cases it is often obvious to the teacher that the student is not the original author of the paper because of factors such as a much higher language level, use of specific grammar constructions, colloquial expressions, measure units, etc., or references to a different culture or age of the author. Evident as they may seem, however, such fraudulent cases are not easy to prove so teachers may wish to warn their students at the beginning of a course that plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form.

Similar to plagiarism, multiple submission is the use of work previously submitted at the same or another institution to fulfill academic requirements in another class, for example students "borrowing" somebody else's paper work or presentation which has already been graded and passing it as their own. Another frequent manifestation of academic fraud is impersonation – assuming another student's identity to provide benefit for them, for instance, when a person attempts to sit for an exam instead of somebody else or to submit a test under a false name. Bribery, on the other hand, is paying a person for a certain illegal service such as writing a thesis or supplying test answers for somebody else. Sabotage means acting to prevent others from completing their work. This includes from theft, mutilation, or tampering with library books in order to prevent access to information or willfully disrupting the experiments of others to sabotaging the administration of online tests by breaking into the teacher's computer or hacking websites. Deception is giving a teacher false information in relation to an academic assignment such as an excuse for missing a deadline or falsely claiming to have submitted the work. The most typical excuses are computer technical problems, site crashes, and health problems. Another type of academic fraud is false data or fabrication, which is the invention or forgery of data to deliberately mislead, for example to falsify data, information, or citations or to change data in order to get better experiment results.

Cheating is practiced both in the classroom during exams and at home when working on a project either individually or in a team. There are plenty of old-fashioned ways to cheat at an examination in class. The easiest one is for students to look at others' papers while concealing their eyes, for example by wearing a hat or massaging their foreheads as if stressed out. Another trick is for a student to go to the teacher's desk, pretending to ask a question while peeking in other students' papers on the way or even completed papers on the teacher's desk that have already been handed in. This trick can be used also to simply engage the teacher's attention in order to allow some time for peers to cheat undisturbed. Other well-known methods of cheating at exams are cheat sheets or crib notes of various forms and sizes which can be attached to the body, to clothes or objects such as pens, water/soft drink bottles, etc., or hidden among the examination papers. Students often write down notes prior to the exam, for example on their hands, rubbers and other objects allowed in the classroom, or they jot down formulae or other kind of information on the desk just before the exam starts while the use of books is still permitted for reference. [1] Different codes have been devised for signaling the answers of multiple-choice questions, such as tapping lightly on the desk or the floor once for answer A, three times for C, and so on. Dropping a paper on the floor is also practiced so that another student can cheat off it or even pick it up, copy from it and then re-drop it in order that the original owner can get the paper back.

New technologies offer a plethora of opportunities for cheating. Smart phones are used for checking information

online, taking pictures of test questions and sending them to a friend who returns the answers, or receiving instructions or a dictation of the test topic via an inconspicuous hands-free device in the ear hidden by the test taker's hair.

Melissa Olt points out several disadvantages to online assessment which need to be considered in order to prevent or minimize academic dishonesty. [6] The first and most serious disadvantage is the instructor's inability to ascertain who is actually taking an online assessment. A second disadvantage is the instructor's inability to control a student's unauthorized use of resources while completing an assessment. A third disadvantage is the possibility of students collaborating with each other in taking an assessment. A final disadvantage to online assessment is the technological difficulties that instructors and students will undoubtedly face. Sometimes a student may try to use such difficulties to his/her advantage, complaining that the computer "crashed" while taking an assessment which gives them extra time to consult collaborators or unauthorized reference materials.

Professor Rowe draws attention to the fact that with online assessments it is hard to ensure all students take the test simultaneously and earlier students can supply answers to later students if some of the same questions are used. The earlier students could memorize questions or take screen shots. He also dwells on a different danger that students may be able to log in as the instructor and read the answer key themselves. [9]

Purpose. The purpose of this article is to study the most common methods of committing academic fraud in higher education and to search for the reasons causing this problem. This work investigates the personal experience of current and former university students in practicing academic fraud by conducting a survey, and searches for ways of motivating students to work harder and develop their own original materials on tasks assigned by their teachers instead of cheating.

Methodology. The survey compiled to investigate students' involvement in academic fraud – either their personal commitment or that of other students that they have witnessed or heard of, was conducted online with Bachelor and Master Degree students at a number of universities in the town of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. To collect the data the survey made use of the Survey Monkey platform. The questionnaire comprised 17 queries about the university they study at, their age and gender as well as request for information about why, where and how academic fraud was committed and what could motivate students to reject academic dishonesty.

Data analysis and results. The online survey was conducted among 48 participants of whom 75% are female and 25% are male. Half of the respondents (exactly 50%) have already earned a Bachelor's degree, while 25% have graduated from a secondary school and the other 25% are in possession of a Master's degree. Nearly 23% of all of the participants in the survey have already finished their tertiary education while the other 77% are studying at present either for a Bachelor's or a Master's degree. The majority of the respondents in the survey (approximately 63%) fall in the age group of 23-29 years.

To the question "*Which types of academic dishonesty are practiced at your university?*" (students were allowed to select more than one answer), the majority of respondents chose cheating from textbooks, reference books, lecture notes, crib sheets, and other similar sources (85%), copying from another student (69%), cheating by leaving the examination hall (22%) and impersonation – sitting for an exam instead of another student or taking an exam by another student impersonating them (20%). (Fig. 1) With regard to the reasons for committing academic fraud, students ranked the possible answers in the following way: Students do not think that this knowledge will be of any use to them later in life (60%), they do not have time to study (50%), students are not interested in the study matter (42%), they do not understand the study material (35%), because it is easier to take an exam by cheating (35%), because students know they will not be sanctioned (21%), because teachers allow it (19%), and finally, because everybody does it (17%). (Fig. 2)
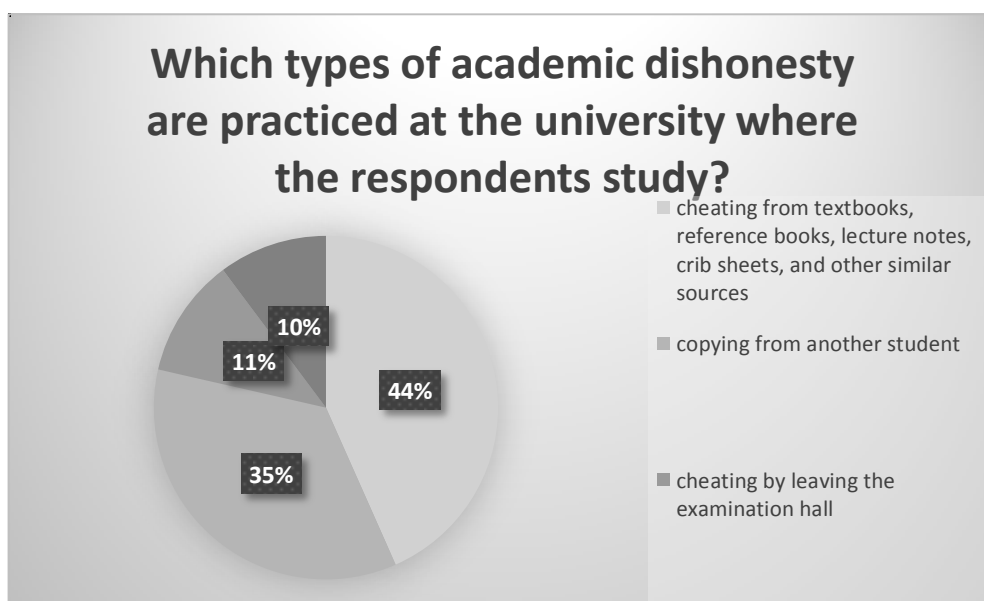

Fig. 1. Types of academic dishonesty

Some of the other survey questions included a ranking of the most commonly used methods of committing academic dishonesty and the frequency of practicing it, as well as some possible actions aimed at demotivating students to cheat. Unsurprisingly, plagiarism was the most often selected option – word for word use of online materials (55%), literal use of a number of jumbled sources without altering the text (49%), and slightly paraphrasing online materials (45%), followed by getting oral or written help from another student (34%). The positive side of the survey results is that 28% of the respondents claim they have never personally committed any type of academic fraud, while 21% state they cheat only once every semester, 19% – several times per semester, 15% each have selected once a year and once during the whole period of university studies, and only 2% say they practice it on a regular basis.
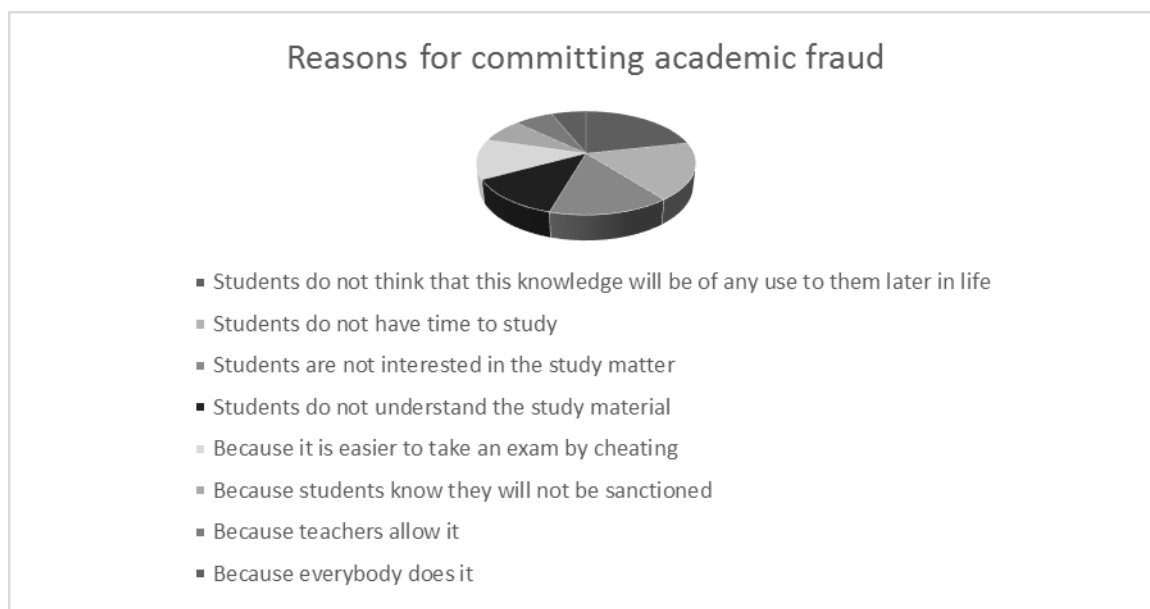

Fig. 2 Reasons for committing academic fraud

In reference to the students' motives to cheat, 52% considered that high grades lead to subsequent benefits such as a scholarship, an advantage when applying for student accommodation, defense of a graduate thesis instead of sitting for a state exam, etc., 43% selected desire to outwit the system, 22% preferred the ambition to come first at all costs, followed by 17% each for pressure from their parents to obtain a higher education and the inadequately over-loaded curriculum and examinations, and finally 2% chose the option of a close social relationship between a student and a teacher.

When asked if the numbers of cheaters will decrease in case the study material is explained well at lectures and exercises so all students understand it, half of the respondents answered positively (52%), 22% replied negatively, and 26% were not sure. With respect to what could motivate students to reject academic dishonesty, the majority were in favor of professional interest in the subject (61%), followed by bonuses for effort put forth (54%), positive attitude to the teacher (29%), threat of sanctions (20%), and only 4% stating that nothing could motivate them and they would always use unauthorized assistance.

Conclusions. The survey shows that students have their excuses for cheating. Informal talks with them reveal that some of them are forced to do a part-time job for financial reasons and they find it hard to attend lectures and exercises, do projects, prepare for exams and also go to work. If there is no threat of sanctions and there are no consequence for students even when they get caught, they are more likely to yield to the temptation of taking their exams by means of fraud. Students claim that they are willing to put forth more effort when they work in a competitive environment and have peer pressure to be creative and original.

Anita Kirilova proposes various steps that should be taken in order to minimize cheating during examinations. For example, teachers should introduce their university code of ethics and discuss it with students during the course of their studies. Students need to be aware what is considered cheating and be warned against committing any forms of academic fraud at any time. Also, teachers should work towards creating a friendly atmosphere which encourages honesty. When devising a test, teachers should take into consideration the number of students sitting for it simultaneously. Last but not least, during an exam teachers should take obvious actions to detect students trying to or committing any fraud so that the others know that such activities will not be tolerated. [5]

In our practice as a foreign language teacher, at the beginning of each course, we start with a brief introduction including a description and aims of the course as well as the rules for students' grading and the code of ethics. We communicate with students at university and via email and do our best to answer all their queries to ensure that they are acquainted with the regulations, their grading is fair and to provide help to students who lag behind the others in terms of knowledge and skills. We use questionnaires and informal talks with the students to make sure that the projects we assign are interesting and meaningful to them, and they have enough time to complete them.

Regarding assessment, we use online self-study tests in combination with exams conducted in class. Our students do self-study tests at home every week to prepare them for the examinations. These self-study tests are based on

the covered study material and are graded automatically except for an open essay-like question which is corrected by the teacher. Students are allowed to take the preparatory tests as many times within the week as needed until they have learned the material. Students seldom cheat on these tests because they give them an idea of the types of questions the exams will contain and students can retake the tests in case they aren't satisfied with the results they have obtained. [4] Besides, these self-study tests supply statistics on student performance and we can compare a student's exam results with the grades he/she usually gets at home for any discrepancies. Examinations are usually performed by computer-based tests which are password-protected and limited in time. The assessment is proctored and students are not allowed to use any handheld devices or reference materials. By means of specialized software teachers check that students have not opened any other webpages except for the one with the test. When constructing a test, teachers pay special attention to its length and level of difficulty so that it is not too easy or too difficult to discourage the test takers. Usually a combination of closed and open questions is used as the former is

graded automatically and the latter demands from test takers higher-level skills. Additionally, even if the test questions are the same for all students doing the test simultaneously, the questions and the answer options are jumbled which makes cheating more difficult. In case of any unforeseen technical problems, teachers are flexible and they are always ready to supply a paper version of the test. Last but not least, when two students submit word-for-word identical answers to essay-like questions, neither of them gets any points and these students should be tested additionally with a different test based on the same study material.

In conclusion, we believe that treating students honestly and fairly and taking into consideration their needs and interests to encourage them to put effort into their work will be more fruitful in the long-term struggle to minimize academic fraud than simply concentrating on sanctions and measures.

REFERENCES

1. Castro, D. Dean's List: How to Cheat during Exams. Filipino Book. (2012) / URL: http://filipinobook.com/deans-list-how-to-cheat-during-exams/. Date of access: 2015.03.26.
2. Dinev, D. Economic Fraud. (2006) / URL: http://www.potre bitel-vikbg.org/files/document_2.pdf. Date of access: 2015.03.26.
3. Honor Committee. University of Virginia. (2012) / URL: http://www.virginia.edu/honor/what-is-academic-fraud-2/ Date of access: 2015.03.26.
4. Ivanova, V. Use of Achievement Tests in the English Classes at the Distributed E-Learning Centre. // Proceedings of the International Conference FROM DELC TO VELSPACE, Plovdiv, 26–28 March 2014, Third Millennium Media Publications ISBN: 0-9545660-2-5, pp. 167 – 174.
5. Kirilova, A. Academic Fraud (2005) / URL: http://www.ace fraud.org/fileadmin/storage/documents/bg/AcademicFraudExce rpt-Anita_Kirilova.pdf. Date of access: 2015.03.26.
6. Olt, M.R., Ethics and Distance Education: Strategies for Minimizing Academic Dishonesty in Online Assessment. (2002) / URL: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall53/olt53.html. Date of access: 2015.03.26.
7. Principles and procedures concerning students who commit academic fraud in theses/thematic papers. B.E.2549 (2006) Mahidol University / URL: http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/download/pdf/thesis_cheat1_49_en.pdf. Date of access: 2015.03.26.
8. Statement on Plagiarism & Academic Fraud. Department of History. Florida State University / URL: http://history.fsu.edu/Undergraduate-Program/Statement-on-Plagiarism-Academic-Fraud. Date of access: 2015.03.26.
9. Rowe, N.C. Cheating in Online Student Assessment: Beyond Plagiarism (2004) / URL: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer72/rowe72.html. Date of access: 2015.03.26.
10. The Oxford Dictionary, Thesaurus, and Wordpower guide. (2001) // Oxford University Press.

Иванова, В. А. Академическое мошенничество
Аннотация: Эта статья является предметом описания сути проблемы академического мошенничества в высших школах, иллюстрируя чаще всего используемых способов его совершения и ищет причины, порождающие проблему. Включена анкета, которая исследует личный опыт студентов в совершении академического мошенничества, и сделан анализ результатов анкеты. Конечная цель автора найти способы предотвращения или ограничения академического мошенничества, которыми повышается эффективность и качество обучения в высших школах.
Ключевые слова: *академическое мошенничество, списывание, плагиатство, эффективность, этический кодекс*