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# A Comparison of Faculty Perceptions of Academic Integrity in Private and Public Universities

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## ABSTRACT

*Public and private institutions of higher education are challenged by academic integrity. In this study, faculty from over 100 U.S. private and public universities shared their perceptions of academic integrity issues such as academic dishonesty detection, awareness of punishments, the faculty as role models, personal values and the ethical image of administrative units. Results indicate perceptions differed by type of institution but not gender or teaching experience. Administrative units were influenced in public universities (but not private) by teaching experience. The results contribute to an understanding of the academic integrity environment underlying the performance of business education. Implications for research and practice are discussed.*

## INTRODUCTION

Academic integrity in higher education continues to be addressed by the Academy. Academic dishonesty is well documented to exist at very high levels on numerous campuses throughout the country (Iyer & Eastman, 2006; Brown & Choong, 2005). A national survey conducted by the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke University estimated that three fourths of college students admit to some form of academic dishonesty (Rawwas, Al-Khatib & Vitell, 2004). Kidwell, Wozniak, and Laurel (2003) reported a 75% academic dishonesty rate while McCabe and Trevino (1997) reported an academic dishonesty range from 13 to 95%. Academic dishonesty has become a norm of student behavior. The lack of academic integrity at the college level is of concern both for itself and for the potential carry over to the professional environment and the conduct of business in society (Batory & Batory, 2008; Chapman, Davis, Troy, & Wright, 2004; Lawson, 2004; Nonis & Swift, 2001; Sims, 1993; Smith, Davy, Rosenberg, & Haight, 2002). Academia, government and the public are concerned about social responsibilities and business integrity (Ahmed, Chung, & Eichenseher, 2003; Zhu, 2004). As business integrity becomes an important domestic and global issue, more attention is being directed toward the higher education experiences of future business practitioners (Ahmed et al., 2003; Chapman, Davis, & Wright, 2004; Peppas & Yu, 2009).

The focus of this study is to document the academic opinions and behavior of faculty at public and private universities to determine if faculties differ toward academic integrity. Studies indicate that in addition to peer influence faculty are a major influence on student behavior (Batory & Batory, 2005; Batory & Batory, 2008). If faculties are influenced by their respective public or private academic environments, management can better address the issues of academic integrity.

### **Academic Honesty: Public versus Private Institutions**

The literature on academic integrity among college students indicates that numerous student characteristics and their perceptions can influence their academic integrity behavior (Author, 2005; McCabe, D., Trevino, L., & Butterfield, K. 1999; Rawwas & Isakson, 2004). As a relevant contextual characteristic, studies have found that academic dishonesty is lower at institutions that have strong academic honor codes (McCabe, D., Trevino, L., & Butterfield, K. 1999).

There is limited research on the type of institution and academic integrity. However, three studies (Brown & Choong, 2005; Bruggeman & Hart, 1996; Graham, et al, 1994) were found that compared student participation in academic dishonesty behavior in public and private (religious) colleges. In each case, differences in behavior were reported but the differences were not statistically significant. Methodologies in each study indicated that a religious affiliation (a Catholic school) and a non religious affiliation (a public school) were the basis for type of school. The methodologies focused on academic dishonesty and did not contrast additional perceptions about their institutions to validate any perceived differences in institutional characteristics. Academic characteristics such as faculty, institutional ratings, and student body were not examined which may explain study results of no differences between private and public institutions. Research is needed to expand the understanding of academic integrity.

#### **Methodology**

The research was conducted among the target audience of business faculty through an online survey. A self-report survey is a well accepted method for measuring academic integrity. Numerous studies indicate that audiences are willing to self report their academic integrity behavior if asked under anonymous conditions (McCabe & Trevino, 1997; McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2002; Kidwell, Wozniak & Laurel, 2003). The sampling frame of faculty members was developed from active memberships at professional associations and from academic conference listings. Two thousand faculty members were contacted by email at their school addresses during March, 2009. The online survey consisted of forty three questions and assured confidentiality and anonymity. Approximately, 298 useable surveys were returned (a response rate of 14.5 percent). In addition to perceptions of academic integrity issues, faculty behaviors, ratings of ethical conduct institutional members and business behaviors were evaluated. The academic integrity statements were obtained from a literature review and evaluated on a five point Likert scale. Acts of academic dishonesty were assessed on a 7 point scale by estimating how frequently one witnessed acts of academic dishonesty such as cheating and plagiarism during the past year.

A demographic profile of the 298 faculty respondents is shown in Table 1. Faculty responses indicate private universities have noticeable demographic differences such as fewer master level degrees (10% vs. 15%), a higher percentage of female teachers (33% vs. 24%) and younger faculty (aged 36-45, 21% vs. 10%). Public universities were represented by a slightly older, male faculty member with more years of teaching experience compared to private universities.

**Table 1**

**Sample Profile**

		<b>Faculty</b>		
		Overall Sample	Public University	Private University
Gender	Male	73%	76%	67%
	Female	27%	24%	33%
Age	27-35	2.4	2.6	3.2
	36-45	14.1	10.3	21.2
	46-54	30.5	31.9	31.5
	55-65	46.7	50.0	37.9
	66+	6.2	5.2	6.3
Education Level	Masters	13.8	15%	10%
	Doctorate	86.2	85%	90%
Honor Code	Yes	46.5%	50%	40%
	Unsure	17%	24%	11%
Teaching Experience		21.1 years	21.5 years	20.0 years
		N=298	N=200	N=98

**RESULTS**

*Academic Integrity Situations:* Faculty evaluations of twelve academic integrity situations are shown in Table 2. For example, a deterrence theory measurement (punishment) is statement nine. Measurements of a false consensus effect (an acceptable peer norm) are statements ten and eleven. Based on their mean response scores, faculty at public and private universities are in general agreement. The only noted difference was the faculty perception that academic integrity policies are better known by their students in the private school setting. Similarly, there was one statistically significant difference in responses for gender and for teaching experience. At public universities, male faculty are more likely (mean=3.4) than females (mean 2.7) to perceive academic dishonesty being considered socially wrong by their students. At private universities, male faculty

(mean=2.6) are more likely than female faculty (mean=3.1) to perceive incidents of academic dishonesty receiving a low punishment. At private universities, an increase in teaching experience was associated ( $R=.30$ ) with an increase in perceiving that academic dishonesty does no real harm.

**Table 2**  
**Faculty Perceptions of Academic Integrity Issues**

Academic Integrity Issues Average response score is reported.	Public Avg.	Priv -ate	P Value	Gender		Experience	
				Pub - Prv	ns	Pub - Prv	ns
1. The school's academic integrity policies are well known by students.	3.3	3.7	.02	ns	ns	ns	ns
2. This school provides easily accessible channels for complaints about faculty.	3.9	4.0	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
3. This school's administration holds students strictly responsible for academic violations	3.3	3.4	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
4. Student evaluations of faculty have an important role in faculty evaluations.	4.1	4.2	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
5. Academic integrity policies are included in your course syllabi.	4.3	4.5	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
6. You consider yourself a positive role model for ethical academic behavior for your students.	4.5	4.5	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
7. In general, you do not report your students' academic dishonesty to school administrators.	2.5	2.5	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
8 Using a false excuse is common to gain access to closed courses or extra time for assignments.	3.7	3.6	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
9. Incidents of known academic dishonesty generally receive a low level of punishment.	2.6	2.7	ns	ns	.05	ns	ns
10. Academic dishonesty by students does not cause any "real" harm".	1.6	1.4	ns	ns	ns	ns	.00
11. Academic dishonesty is considered socially wrong by your students.	3.3	3.4	ns	.01	ns	ns	ns
12. Personal belief: Religious beliefs guide my academic behavior.	3.0	3.0	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns

Note 1: Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 3 = neutral; 5 = Strongly Agree and a no opinion response.

Note 2: The statistical test for gender was an Independent Samples T-Test. Teaching experience used the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) or lower...

*Academic Integrity:* Measurements of academic dishonesty behavior resulted in significant differences between the private and public universities for faculty as shown in Table 3. Seventy percent of the faculty at private schools witnessed on or more incidents of academic dishonesty and 73% were aware of disciplinary actions. This compares to 76% of faculty at public universities witnessing academic dishonesty and 67% of faculty being aware of disciplinary action. Faculty at private universities reported a lower number of incidents of student cheating and a higher awareness of students being punished for academic dishonesty compared to faculty in a public universities. Ethics as a core institutional value was rated higher by private university faculty. Gender and teaching experience had no significant differences on responses at either private or public universities.

**Table 3**

**Faculty Perceptions of Academic Dishonesty Behavior and Ethics**

In the past year,	Public	Private	P value (2)	Gender		Experience	
				Pub-	Prv	Pub-	Prv
...how many times did you witness academic dishonesty/ cheat on an exam, plagiarize, etc.? (1)	2.1	1.5	0.01	ns	ns	ns	ns
Faculty witnessing 1 or more incidents	76%	70%		7 6	6 9	7 0	7 1
...estimate your awareness of the number of instances when students were punished for academic dishonesty.(1)	1.6	2.1	0.04	ns	ns	ns	ns
Percent of faculty awareness of	67%	73%					
Ethics is a core institutional value at your school.(3)	3.5	4.0	.01	ns	ns	ns	ns

Note 1: Numerical scale: 0 to 7

Note 2: Statistical test: Independent Samples T-Test for public versus private and gender; Pearson product moment correlation for teaching experience. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note 3: Numerical scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) and no opinion.

*Institutional Ratings:* Perceptions of overall ethical conduct in public and private universities produced significant differences for academic institution, business faculty, general education faculty and university administration as shown in Table 4. Business faculty were rated the highest on the ethical behavior scale at 82% (private) and 76% (public). In contrast, the student body was rated the least ethical in both public (61%) and private (66%) universities. Gender did not have a significant influence on responses. However, as the level of teaching experience at public institutions increased ethical ratings decreased for business faculty, general education faculty, university and departmental administrators. This finding did not hold true for faculty at private universities.

**Table 4**

**Faculty Perceptions of Overall Ethical Conduct**

Institutional Ratings	Public	Private	P value	Gender		Experience	
				Pub-	Prv	Pub-	Prv
Academic Institution	71	78	0.05	ns	ns	ns	ns
Business Faculty	76	82	0.06	ns	ns	.01	ns
General Education Faculty	73	81.4	0.02	ns	ns	.04	ns
Student Body	61	66	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
University Administration	66	74	.04	ns	ns	.03	ns
Department Administration	74	79	ns	ns	ns	.06	ns

Note 1: Statistical test: Independent Samples T-Test for public versus private and gender; Pearson product moment correlation for teaching experience. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note 2: Scale of 10 (not ethical) to 100 (very ethical).

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The study demonstrates that type of educational institution has an influence on faculty perceptions of academic integrity. Faculties at the sampled public universities are considered significantly different than their counterparts at private universities based on their response patterns about their environment. Type of institution, as part of a holistic environment, is a partial explanation of attitudes and behavioral differences in academic integrity behavior.

An academic integrity problem continues to exist within higher education institutions as 76% of faculty witnessed academic dishonesty within the last year. A review of academic integrity situations indicate faculty are somewhat lukewarm on many issues as supported by neutral scores. However, faculty consider themselves good role models (mean=4.5), but they may not report student dishonesty to administrators (mean=2.5). Not reporting academic dishonesty is controversial. If the perception exists that rules are not enforced there may be an increase in the negative behavior.

Faculty perceptions of the overall ethical conduct of institutional areas reveals a major area of concern. Ethical ratings in the sixty and seventy percentiles should not be considered acceptable at academic institutions of higher learning. In addition, teaching experience at public universities supports a negative evaluation of ethical behavior. More senior and mature faculty may be more critical as they expect more but it can also be an awareness based on experience. This is an area to be researched.

*Implications for future research*

One popular remedy for unethical academic behavior is to call for increased ethics courses and moral education. Faculty members are encouraged to make clear that the decision-making process needs to include the ethical implications and consequences for

the company as well as its customers, stakeholders and society. However, Lawson (2004) reports that 97% of students agree that good ethics is good business but 71% also agree that being ethical may hurt their career. Students seem to know what to do but mediators develop to justify unethical behavior. Classroom exposure to ethical training may have limited value.

Research is needed on academic integrity that goes beyond student and faculty perceptions and behavior. Administrator behavior and family influences are important areas to be investigated as they relate to academic integrity. All stakeholders must fulfill their responsibility to monitor and comply with proclaimed high standards of academic integrity unlike the recent scandals at Penn State University. Implementation efforts by the quiet majority are seldom noted. Addressing the holistic nature of academic behavior will be necessary to understand the complex equation of academic integrity within academic institutions.

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