

Faculty and Student Perceptions of Unauthorized Collaborations: Student or System Failure?

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BACKGROUND:

- Unauthorized collaboration amongst medical students is a reported problem¹
 - Many faculty view it as academic dishonesty¹⁻³
 - Previous work suggests that students do not perceive it as problematic¹⁻³
- With the trend towards small-group, team-based learning, and online resources, collaboration and sharing may have become a student norm.³

OBJECTIVE:

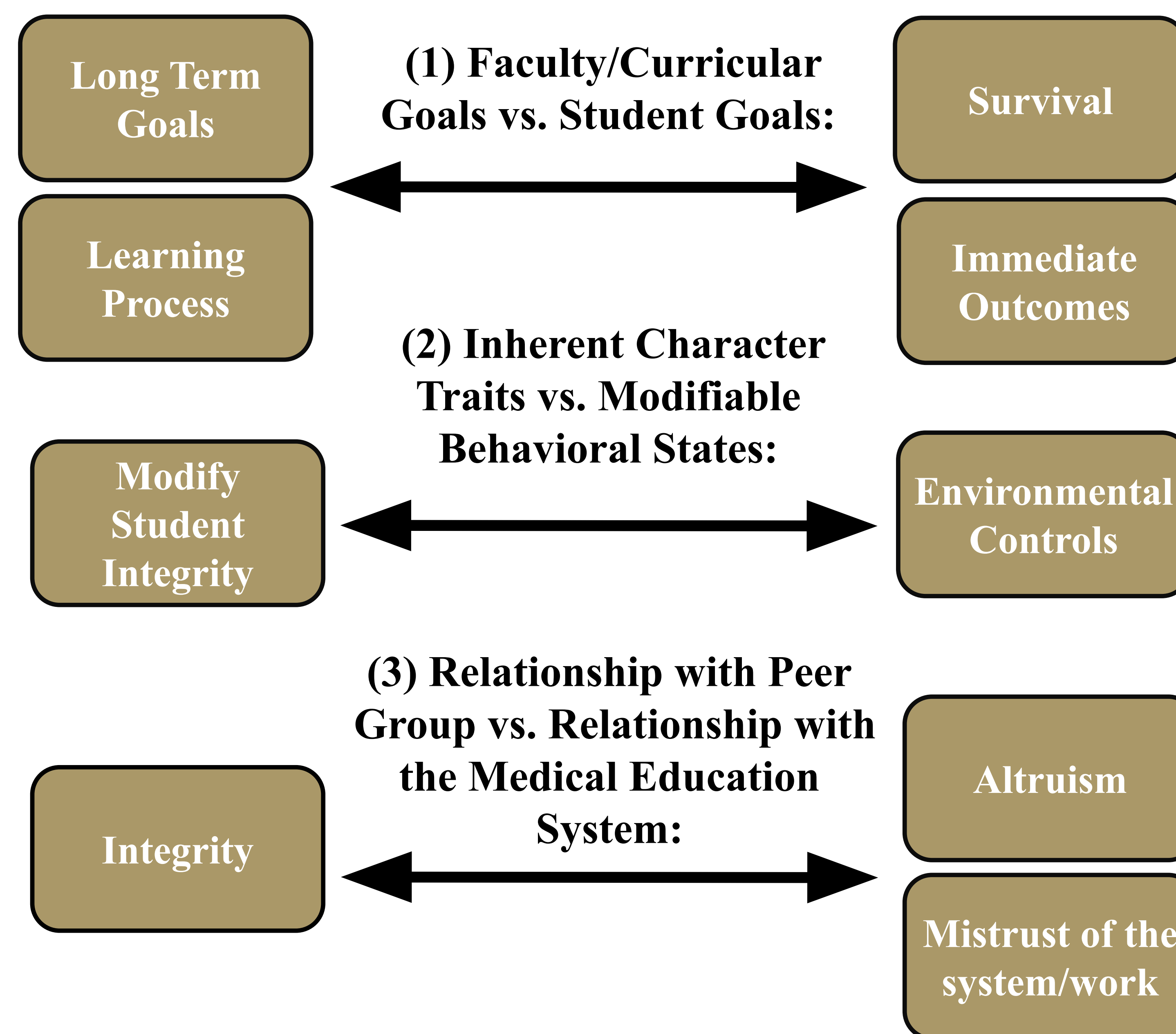
To examine faculty and student perceptions of and student motivations for unauthorized collaboration

METHODS:

- Multi-institutional, qualitative study
- IRB approval obtained from all 3 schools
- Authors conducted scenario-prompted, semi-structured interviews with faculty and students in preclinical curriculum
- Participants asked to reflect on three scenarios and discuss
 - Their perceptions of student motivation
 - The influence of personal and environmental factors
- Interview transcripts were analyzed with inductive thematic analysis using open and axial coding followed by abstraction and synthesis of themes

RESULTS:

- 21 faculty and 16 students interviewed in 2021
- Results suggest wide variation in perceptions among faculty and among students but little variation between faculty and students
- Students and faculty identified same three areas of tension/themes: (1) faculty/curriculum goals vs. student goals, (2) inherent character traits vs. modifiable behavioral states, and (3) student relationships with their peer group vs. their relationships with the medical education system



“They’re not getting a group MD...so everyone should be able to show mastery individually” (F14).

“The kind of student who would engage in this kind of minor activity is probably the kind of student who would make a good physician right?...This is how we help people.” (F14)

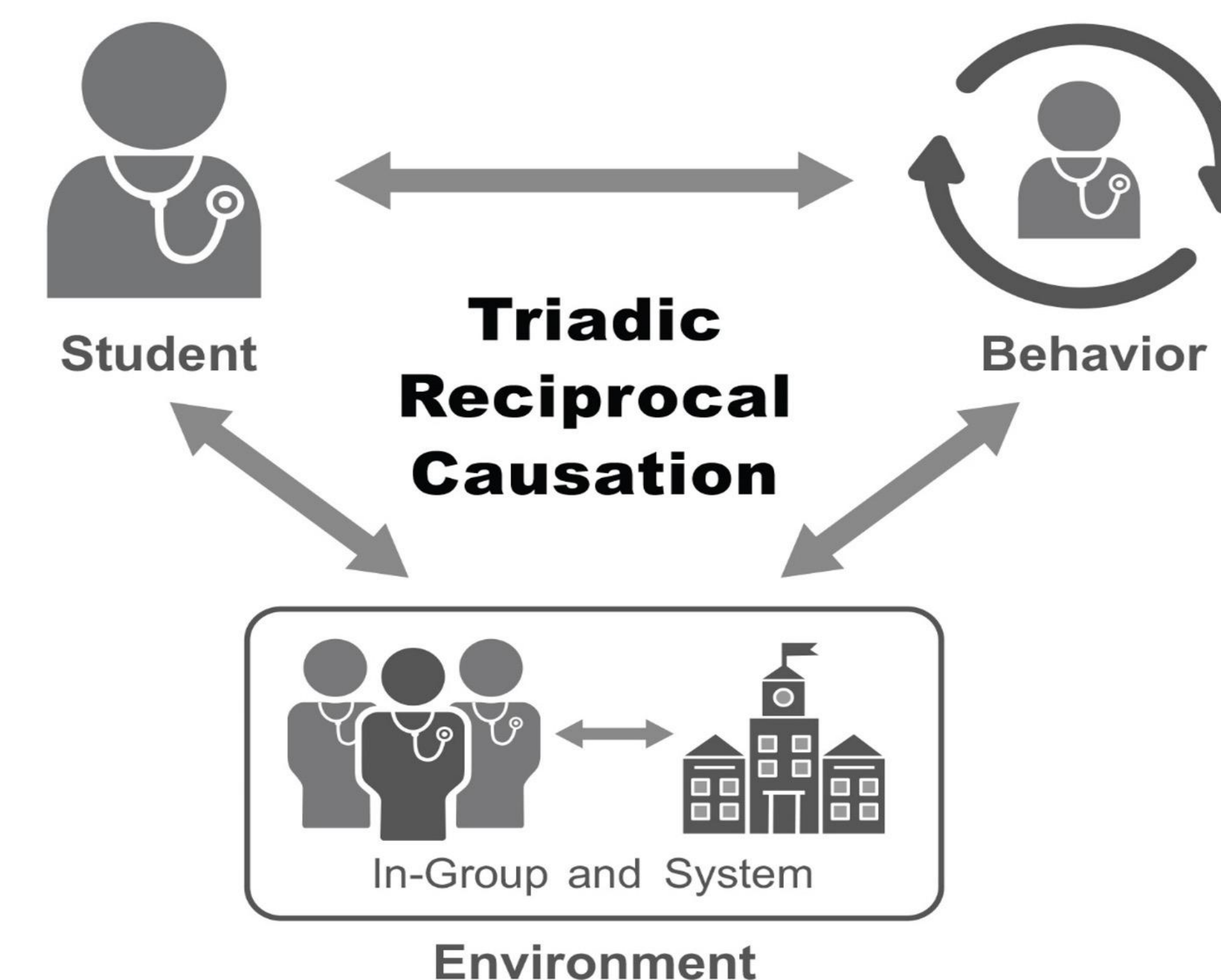


“I think that if a system is not designed to limit that collaborative sharing, then it’s the fault of the system and not of the student.” (S2)

“Man, I’m not gonna leave [a group member] to get an F. We’re evaluated on this, and we’re gonna help her out. We’re gonna make sure that she doesn’t [get] shot down the ladder.” (S3)

DISCUSSION:

- Student behaviors perceived to be influenced by their environment and motivated by desire to help peers
- Findings reflect Bandura’s model of triadic reciprocal causation, which describes the reciprocal relationships between a person, their environment, and their behavior⁴
- Environment includes both peer groups and the medical education system, which interact within themselves
- Supports needed for student and system-level interventions



CONCLUSIONS:

- Various tensions and positive motivation exist behind unauthorized collaboration
- Institutions should develop environmental mitigation strategies in addition to preparing students to make thoughtful decisions about competing priorities

LIMITATIONS:

- All institutions based in the Northeast United States
- Study limited to preclinical context

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