

CAN A BUSINESS ETHICS COURSE AFFECT ACADEMIC DISHONESTY?

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ABSTRACT

Academic dishonesty is a concern of both instructors, who must deal with the unethical behavior, and business practitioners, who feel this unethical behavior leads to unethical professional behavior as these students graduate and enter the workforce. Many in both groups believe that student behavior can be modified, corrected, or shaped so that unethical behavior is reduced, both in the classroom and after graduation. The purpose of this study is to assess the effects of a business ethics course on students' level of academic dishonesty. The effects are assessed by a pretest and posttest of multiple sections of an environment of business course with an ethics component. Several hypotheses are proposed based on several types of academic dishonesty. New measurement scales were developed based on previous work in the area. The results revealed a decrease in academic dishonesty during the course in one of the five factors analyzed. Conclusions, limitations, and future research directions are discussed and interesting questions are raised regarding the business school curriculum and how it is addressing ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty is regarded as unfair and unethical by most academicians and those students who do not engage in it. In the short term, academicians can be frustrated and honest students can legitimately feel that they are at a disadvantage as a result of academic dishonesty.

Academicians are concerned with the problem of academic dishonesty and the rate at which it is increasing (Park, 2003; Pullin et al., 2000; Williams & Hosek, 2003). Brown and McInerney (2008) found that there were significant differences between 1999 and 2006 for seven of the 16 unethical behaviors examined in their study. All seven differences were increases, with a mean increase of 19.2%. Furthermore, business students are consistently ranked as students most likely to cheat, possibly due to the adoption of a "bottom line" mentality that the ends (better grades) justifies the means (cheating) (Riley, 2004). Choong and Brown (2007) state that this phenomenon is just one component of a broader, "culture of cheating," that includes not only students but also school administrators and teachers who have inflated students' test scores and have manipulated statistical data. Moreover, this culture extends from dishonest practices by businesspersons and politicians to inaccurate and misleading reporting by members of the media.

Academic dishonesty or cheating may be described as "a conscious effort to use proscribed data and/or resources on exams or written work submitted for academic credit"

(Sierra & Hyman, 2008, p. 51). Similarly, academic dishonesty or cheating has been defined as behavior that breaches, “the submission of work for assessment that has been produced legitimately by the student who will be awarded the grade, and which demonstrates the student’s knowledge and understanding of the context or processes being assessed” (Lambert et al., 2003, p. 98). Alternatively, it “refers to any instance in which a student claims credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation” (Becker et al., 2006, p. 37). Anitsal et al. (2009) identified two types of academic dishonesty, active and passive, and state that research has been largely focused on active academic dishonesty, which includes behaviors to raise one’s own grade. Passive academic dishonesty includes behaviors to assist another student (Finn & Frone, 2004). Anitsal et al. (2009) concluded that both constructs are of equal importance in the intention to cheat.

Academic dishonesty involves deceptively violating rules in order to gain something of value and personal advantage (Bloodgood et al., 2008). It has been characterized as a type of fraud (Becker et al., 2006). This issue is critical for universities as it seems to mirror the growing concerns of ethical problems in the business community (Chapman et al., 2004; Kidwell et al., 2003). If professors hope to improve the ethical behavior of students as future business people, they need to first address the ethical behavior that occurs in their classroom, i.e., academic dishonesty. “What kind of expectation for ethical behavior is communicated when professors ignore cheating?” (Copeland, 2005, p. 43).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Many colleges and universities have incorporated ethics courses and/or courses with an ethics component into the business school curriculum. The ethics material usually focuses on ethical issues in the marketplace, often in the form of case studies. The rationale of this effort is to improve the ethical behavior of business students before they graduate and enter the workforce.

Given that students’ ethics in the classroom impacts their ethics as business professionals (Brown & Choong, 2005; Klein et al., 2007), it is vital that business professors gain a clearer understanding of these issues so they can better address the problem. This study focuses on essentially two important questions that are targeted toward business schools that incorporate ethics in their programs: Can business ethics be taught (Sims, 2002)? If so, will students apply business ethics to their own ethical behavior? This paper attempts to address these questions by noting any changes in the level of academic dishonesty by students who have taken a business course with a prominent ethics component. If significant changes in students’ level of academic dishonesty can be noted at the end of this course, then there is support for the notion that not only can business ethics be taught, but also students can apply business ethics to their own ethical behavior.

The study begins with a brief discussion of some of the salient issues surrounding academic dishonesty. It continues by posing relevant hypotheses, developing scales to measure some of the various facets of academic dishonesty, and then testing these measures in a pretest-posttest study of students who have taken a required business core course with an ethics component.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reasons students engage in academic dishonesty

Williams and Hosek (2003) stress that students, even dishonest ones, are rational and that the decision to cheat is a conscious decision that the benefits of cheating outweigh the risks. “Causal factors run the gamut from large classes, impersonal relationships with professors, competition for jobs, gaining higher GPAs in order to enter graduate school, to a culture that appears to accept cheating readily as a normal part of life” (Pullin et al., 2000, p. 616). The literature offers the following additional reasons for why students cheat: a lack of understanding of what is plagiarism, efficiency gain, time management problems, a lack of personal values, defiance/lack of respect for authority, negative attitudes towards teacher/class, temptation/opportunity, a lack of deterrence (Park, 2003), and a personal crisis (Lambert et al., 2003). Students reported that they felt an increasing pressure to get good grades and that cheating was a legitimate strategy to meet this challenge (Klein et al., 2007). Bolin (2004) showed that students’ attitudes toward academic dishonesty had the biggest impact on it.

Finally, Chapman et al. (2004) state that there is a robust false consensus effect in that students significantly overestimate the degree to which others cheat so they perceive cheating as a normative behavior and believe their own behavior is more honest than their peers. Anitsal et al. (2009) conclude that, if academic dishonesty remains a gray area for students, then group dynamics will continue to support a norm of cheating, which encourages, and even pressures, students to cheat. Broeckelman-Post (2008) concurs that the most prominent factor for students in their decision to cheat is whether they believe their peers are engaging in cheating. Chiesl (2007) notes that cheating has become both more common and more socially acceptable.

The relationship between academic ethics and business ethics

There is concern that if students see academic dishonesty as a normative behavior, they will also view unethical business behavior as normative behavior (Mangan, 2006). That is, if they think everyone else is cheating, they will be more likely to cheat and when they get into the business world, if they feel cheating is commonplace and acceptable, they may also engage in unethical business practices (Mangan, 2006). Karassavidou & Glaveli (2006) found that academic dishonesty is positively related to students’ attitudes towards unethical managers’

business behavior. This suggests that the impact of academic dishonesty extends beyond the classroom.

Wimalasiri (2000) found that students and practitioners demonstrated similar levels of sensitivity to ethical issues. Singhapakdi and Marta (2005) found mixed results in comparing marketing students with practitioners. They found students to be more relativistic as well as more idealistic than practitioners (Singhapakdi & Marta, 2005). Additionally, students were less likely to perceive the moral intensity of issues (i.e., see a lower degree of harm from unethical behavior) and have less ethical intentions than practitioners; but there was no significant difference regarding the students' and practitioners' perceived importance of ethics (Singhapakdi & Marta, 2005).

The identification of academic dishonesty

These results suggest concern over the ethical levels of students. Based on the notion that cheating is academic fraud, Becker et al. (2006) developed a model similar to the fraud triangle model in business with three components, the incentive to cheat (e.g., to get better grades), the opportunity to cheat (e.g., faculty do not deter cheating), and the ability to rationalize cheating (e.g., penalties are not severe so faculty don't care about cheating). They found that each of the three elements is a predictive factor in academic dishonesty. Although it was concluded that reducing the incentive to cheat would be difficult since it often comes from external pressures, reducing the opportunities for cheating may be more easily addressed. Those in academia who do not attempt to deter academic dishonesty may be fostering an environment that invites dishonest behavior. Defining academic dishonesty in the course syllabus is a way to begin to address this.

Teaching ethics

Teaching ethics in the classroom has been discussed often in the literature (see Alsop, 2003; Copeland, 2005; Klein et al., 2007; Rawwas et al., 2004; Sims, 2002; Singhapakdi, 2004). The topic has more recently been in the forefront as a result of the highly publicized business ethics scandals: Enron, Arthur Andersen, and WorldCom (Alsop, 2003; Copeland, 2005; Singhapakdi, 2004; Smyth et al., 2009). Additionally, the major accreditation body of business schools, The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), requires that ethics be incorporated into business curricula (Bloodgood et al., 2008; Chapman et al., 2004; Singhapakdi, 2004). Yet, academic dishonesty persists, even at some of the best universities (Embleton & Helfer, 2007; Rawe, 2007). Central to this discussion is the debate whether business schools can or should influence the ethical behavior of their students. The argument ranges from the point that one's moral compass is already well-developed upon entering college and will change little, to the notion that people can change throughout their lives, perhaps even in

retirement (Copeland, 2005). A study by Brown and Choong (2005) found that even though there was greater emphasis on ethics and values at a Catholic university versus a public university, there were no significant differences in academic dishonesty between student groups. Moreover, corporate recruiters are cautious in stating that business schools can teach ethics, however, they believe schools can provide guidance in making ethical choices. In other words, the ability to teach ethics may be questionable, but, at the very least, schools can teach the ramifications that result from unethical business practices (Alsop, 2003).

Furthermore, Bloodgood et al. (2008) note that various types of training and interventions can increase moral reasoning for some individuals. Advanced moral reasoners are less likely to focus on their own self-interest and instead accentuate “fairness” and the “greater good.” More specifically, university courses in business ethics may improve ethical understanding and attitudes. However, there is no guarantee that learning about ethics will affect individual behavior, regardless of the approach.

There is no consensus on how to embed ethics into the business curriculum. Some academics feel it is best to sprinkle ethics throughout the disciplines, others support courses dedicated specifically to ethics (Alsop, 2003; Copeland, 2005; Singhapakdi, 2004). Adopting both options is probably the best approach. Likewise, there has been significant discussion over the use of codes of conduct, both on the professional level as well as honor codes (for example, see Alsop, 2003; Chapman et al., 2004; Park, 2003; Sirgy et al., 2006; Taylor, 2003; Williams & Hosek, 2003).

Components of academic dishonesty

Addressing academic dishonesty is especially challenging, since it is viewed as a multidimensional construct (Anitsal et al., 2009; Choong & Brown, 2007; Ferrari, 2005; Rawwas et al., 2004; Rawwas & Isakson, 2000; Sierra & Hyman, 2008) that takes into account a wide range of unethical behaviors including cheating, e.g. on exams (Ferrari, 2005), plagiarism, e.g. on papers (Ferrari, 2005), the misuse of technology (Scanlon, 2004), as well as additional practices to gain an unfair advantage (Rawwas et al., 2004; Rawwas & Isakson, 2000), such as the use of outside help. As a result of addressing the measurement of academic dishonesty and its multiple factors, business professors can gain a better understanding of the issue of academic dishonesty and what impacts it.

There is no consensus in the identification of factors for the academic dishonesty construct. Roig and DeTommaso’s (1995) Academic Practices Survey is a two-factor scale made up of “plagiarism” that deals with written assignments and “cheating” that deals with tests (Ferrari, 2005). Rawwas et al. (2004), in building on the work of Rawwas and Isakson (2000), devised four factors for academic dishonesty: “receiving and abetting academic dishonesty” (items universally perceived as unethical and initiated by the student), “obtaining an unfair advantage” (items in which students take advantage of a situation not of their creation),

“fabricating information” (items that may not be clearly perceived as unethical) and “ignoring prevalent practices” (items that students may view as permissible and ethical). Choong and Brown (2007) found four dimensions of cheating: Flagrant Cheating, Insidious Cheating, Collusion, and Illicit Collaboration. In their study of the joint effect of personal moral philosophy and perceived moral intensity components on students’ cheating intentions, Sierra and Hyman (2008) named four factors: Personal Moral Philosophy of Idealism, Personal Moral Philosophy of Relativism, Magnitude of Consequences, and Willingness to Cheat. Anitsal et al. (2009) conducted research to determine whether students perceive passive and active academic dishonesty as two separate constructs.

The most recent element associated with academic dishonesty is the role of technology. While the web is a resource for both students and faculty, some are concerned that this generation of students may have a different idea of what is considered ‘fair use’ (Scanlon, 2004). The web could be increasing the problem of plagiarism; a quarter of college students surveyed have plagiarized from the Internet, but students perceive that significantly more students than that are doing so (Scanlon, 2004). Additionally, while term paper mills have existed for years, the ease of getting papers has increased with various web sites (e.g., buypapers.com) (Born, 2003; Park, 2003). The concern is that if students perceive that Internet cheating is commonplace, they will be more likely to engage in it (Scanlon, 2004). Thus, consideration of academic dishonesty must include the technological elements that can impact it. Eastman et al. (2008) included a two-item scale, “Electronic Cheating,” in their four-factor study of the impact of unethical reasoning on different types of academic dishonesty.

HYPOTHESES

The literature review revealed several major issues involving academic dishonesty. First, “Research shows a correlation between academic dishonesty and moral development” (Rawwas et al., 2004, p. 89). Because of its ethical ramifications, which may later manifest themselves in business ethics, academic dishonesty is a concern in both academic and practitioner settings. Copeland (2005) emphasizes the urgency of the situation when stating that society, “is facing an ethical breakdown of crisis proportions” (p. 36). Second, business curricula should therefore address the ethical issue of academic dishonesty. Business school academicians have been challenged with molding their students into ethically responsible graduates. Third, academic dishonesty is a multi-dimensional construct. Due to its complexity, scale development is very important when attempting to measure this construct.

Several hypotheses were designed based on four major categories of academic dishonesty, i.e., exam cheating (Kidwell et al., 2003; Ferrari, 2005), illicit collaboration (Choong & Brown, 2007), slacker behavior (Rawwas et al., 2004; Rawwas & Isakson, 2000), and plagiarism (Ferrari, 2005). The last hypothesis focuses on the reasons for unethical behavior (Bolin, 2004; Klein et al., 2007; Lambert et al., 2003; Park, 2003; Pullin et al., 2000; Williams &

Hosek, 2003). Thus, it is hypothesized that, as students become more sensitive to ethical behavior, their reported levels of academic dishonesty will decrease:

- H₁: Students will report a lower level of exam cheating after completing a core business curriculum course with an ethics component.*
- H₂: Students will report a lower level of illicit collaboration after completing a core business curriculum course with an ethics component.*
- H₃: Students will report a lower level of slacker behavior after completing a core business curriculum course with an ethics component.*
- H₄: Students will report a lower level of plagiarism after completing a core business curriculum course with an ethics component.*
- H₅: Students will report a lower level of reasons for unethical behavior after completing a core business curriculum course with an ethics component.*

METHODOLOGY

Sample and procedure

A pretest-posttest study was designed to assess any change in students' perceived level of academic dishonesty as the result of a core course requirement for business administration majors at a medium-size southeastern university. The course catalog states that the course, entitled "The Environment of Business," includes topics that "focus on the conflicting rights and duties of individuals, organizations, and other factions in a domestic and global society that lead to the development of ethical awareness, social responsibility, and law." Furthermore, this course was designed to educate students in terms of business ethics issues, which intuitively may increase their sensitivity toward ethical business issues and in turn result in a lower level of their own unethical behavior, particularly, academic dishonesty.

The questionnaire was designed to allow students to assess their level of academic dishonesty. It consisted of several sections: academic dishonesty activities, demographics, and reasons to engage in unethical behavior. The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester to the same five sections of this course in order to observe any change during the semester in student perception of their levels of academic dishonesty.

There were 202 usable questionnaires in the pretest group and 148 usable questionnaires in the posttest group. Fewer questionnaires were completed in the posttest group due to attrition

during the semester. All students present for the days the questionnaire was administered for the pretest and posttest completed the instrument. It was not possible to remove respondents from the pretest who did not participate in the posttest in order to assure students anonymity of their responses and to minimize respondent bias that this was a pretest-posttest study. Approximately 51 percent of the pretest respondents were males (51 percent posttest) and 18 percent (20 percent posttest) belonged to a fraternity or sorority. Fifty-six percent of the pretest group (60 percent posttest) were upperclassmen (i.e., junior or senior status) and 42 percent of the pretest group (45 percent posttest) were not employed, whereas 25 percent pretest (23 percent posttest) respondents worked between 10 and 20 hours per week. Majors in the pretest group were dominated by marketing (19 percent), accounting (12 percent), and management (10 percent), whereas majors in the posttest group were dominated by management (26 percent), accounting (17 percent), and marketing (13 percent). The mean GPA of pretest respondents was 2.98 (3.06 posttest) and the average age was 20.6 years for the pretest group (21.2 posttest).

Scale development: study items

The final item pool for Academic Dishonesty contained twenty-one items noted frequently in the literature to reflect academic dishonesty. The majority of these items came from McCabe and Trevino's (1993) academic dishonesty scale. Fifteen items were similar to that used by Brown (1996; 2000) and Kidwell et al. (2003). Three additional items addressed changes in technology: using a cell phone to text message for help during an exam, using a cell phone or another device to photograph an exam, and purchasing or finding a paper on the Internet to submit as one's own work (Eastman et al., 2008). The measure of academic dishonesty was scaled on a five-point scale (never, once, few times, several times, and many times).

Responses to these twenty-one attitude statements were factor analyzed using the principal axis extraction method. The solution was followed by a varimax rotation because it was assumed a priori that some of the attitudes might be correlated (see Ford et al., 1986; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted. The items, "Have information programmed into a calculator during an exam" and "Have someone check over a paper before turning it in," were deleted due to cross-loadings, resulting in nineteen items. Thirteen of the nineteen items are similar to those used by Brown and McInerney (2008) in their longitudinal study of sixteen unethical practices. The rotated component matrix, showing the items and their factor loadings, appears in Table 1. The four factors were reflected in the following four dimensions: (i) Exam Cheating (made up of seven items), (ii) Illicit Collaboration or Unapproved Outside Help (made up of five items), (iii) Slacker Behavior or Free Rider Behavior (made up of six items), and (iv) Plagiarism (made up of two items).

Table 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Items	Factors			
	Exam Cheating	Illicit Collaboration	Slacker Behavior	Plagiarism
Used crib notes on a test.	0.46	0.42	0.27	0.04
Copied from another student on the test.	0.58	0.49	0.16	0.12
Helped someone cheat on a test.	0.68	0.45	0.08	0.19
Manually passed answers in an exam.	0.72	0.18	0.41	0.06
Used a cell phone to text message for help during exam.	0.70	0.10	0.10	0.03
Used a cell phone or another device to photo an exam.	0.64	-0.10	0.15	0.01
Cheated on a test in any other way.	0.61	0.44	0.14	0.20
Asked someone about the content of an exam from someone who has taken it.	0.17	0.77	-0.13	-0.02
Give information about the content of an exam to someone who has not yet taken it.	0.16	0.79	-0.11	0.09
Worked with others on an individual project.	0.03	0.65	0.34	-0.01
Collaborated on an assignment when the instructor asked for individual work.	0.07	0.55	0.41	0.25
Taken credit for full participation in a group project without doing a fair share of the work.	0.43	0.02	0.48	0.11
Visited a professor to influence a grade.	-0.01	0.22	0.55	0.02
Turned in work done by someone else.	0.47	0.06	0.56	0.03
Received substantial, unprecedented help on an assignment.	0.37	0.33	0.43	0.21
Used a false excuse to delay an exam or a paper.	0.44	0.07	0.48	0.48
Purchased or found a paper off the Internet to submit as your own work.	0.23	-0.13	0.61	0.60
Copied a few sentences of material from a published source without footnoting it.	-0.05	0.19	0.04	0.84
Fabricated or falsified a bibliography.	0.26	0.02	0.29	0.61
Eigenvalue	6.68	2.14	1.30	1.15
Percent of variance	31.82	10.21	6.21	5.51

The resulting Exam Cheating Scale was made up of seven items utilized in previous studies (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; 1997; Brown, 1995; 2000) and two of the three items mentioned earlier to reflect the increase use of technology, i.e., “Used a cell phone to text message for help during an exam” and “Used a cell phone or another device to photograph an exam.” The Illicit Collaboration Scale was made up of four items, three of which were utilized by Brown (1995; 2000). The six-item Slacker Behavior Scale included three items that were utilized by McCabe and Trevino (1993; 1997), one item from Brown (1995; 2000), and one item from McCabe and Trevino (1993; 1997) that was updated to include the Internet, “Purchased or found a paper off the Internet to submit as your own work” (Eastman et al., 2008) rather than “Copying material and turning it in as your own work” (McCabe & Trevino, 1997, p. 386). Finally, the Plagiarism Scale was made up of two items from McCabe and Trevino (1993; 1997).

Internal consistency was evaluated by computing coefficient alpha. These values (see Table 2) were at least the 0.70 value recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), with the exception of the pretest sample for the Slacker Behavior factor, which was 0.66. The correlation of the two-item Plagiarism Scale was 0.42 for the pretest sample, 0.59 for the posttest sample, and 0.53 for the total sample.

Table 2: Reliability Estimates of the Factors

Items	Pretest Sample	Posttest Sample	Total Sample
Exam Cheating	0.82	0.89	0.86
Used crib notes on a test. (EC1)			
Copied from another student on the test. (EC2)			
Helped someone cheat on a test. (EC3)			
Manually passed answers in an exam. (EC4)			
Used a cell phone to text message for help during an exam. (EC5)			
Used a cell phone or another device to photograph an exam. (EC6)			
Cheated on a test in any other way. (EC7)			
Illicit Collaboration	0.74	0.77	0.76
Asked about content of an exam from someone who has taken it. (OH2)			
Give information about an exam to someone who has not yet taken it. (OH3)			
Worked with others on an individual project. (OH4)			
Collaborated on assignment when instructor asked for individual work. (OH5)			
Slacker Behavior	0.66	0.76	0.71
Taken full credit in project w/o doing fair share of the work. (SB1)			
Visited a professor to influence a grade. (SB2)			
Turned in work done by someone else. (SB3)			
Received substantial, unprecedented help on an assignment. (SB4)			
Used a false excuse to delay an exam or a paper. (SB5)			
Purchased or found a paper on the Internet to submit as your own work. (SB6)			
Plagiarism	0.42	0.59	0.53
Copied sentences of material from a published source w/o footnoting it. (P1)			
Fabricated or falsified a bibliography. (P2)			
Reasons for Unethical Behavior	0.93	0.94	0.94
According to you, <u>you would engage in unethical behavior</u> :			
UB1 When you want a get a high grade.			
UB2 When you have the time but do not want to study.			
UB3 When you do not have time to study.			
UB4 When nobody is hurt by your behavior.			
UB5 When the material is difficult to understand.			
UB6 When there is a low risk of getting caught.			
UB7 When the work is irrelevant to your major coursework.			
UB8 When the instructor is poor or indifferent.			
UB9 When everyone else does it.			
UB10 When doing it is a challenge or thrill.			
UB11 When peer pressure makes you do it			

To measure unethical behavior, the eleven items from Brown's (1995; 1996; 2000) "Reasons for Unethical Behavior" on a five-point scale were used: "not at all likely," "somewhat likely," "neutral," "likely," to "very likely." These items measured reasons for unethical behavior, such as to get a high grade, feels no one is hurt by behavior, everyone does it, to name a few. Brown (1996; 2000) did not report any reliability or factor structure on these items. Factor analysis of the scale on Unethical Behavior revealed that it was a unidimensional construct. The items used to measure Unethical Behavior and their reliability are reported in Table 2. Brown's Unethical Behavior scale is both unidimensional and has good reliability. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted and the items significantly loaded on the hypothesized factors ($p < 0.05$).

RESULTS

The means of the variables for the pretest and posttest samples were compared via t-tests. The differences between the means for each of the factors examined were non-significant except for Illicit Collaboration, which was significant at $p < 0.05$ (see Table 3). In other words, even though the means were slightly different for the factors, Exam Cheating, Slacker Behavior, Plagiarism, and Unethical Behavior, none of the differences was significant. Therefore, H_2 was supported and H_1 , H_3 , H_4 , and H_5 were not supported. It can also be noted that Illicit Collaboration was higher than any of the other variables for both pretest and post-test group means.

Table 3: T-Tests Comparing Pretest and Posttest Samples

Variable	n (pretest) (posttest)	Mean (pretest) (posttest)	Std Dev (pretest) (posttest)	t-value*	Degrees of Freedom	p-value (two-tailed)
Exam Cheating	193 143	1.55 1.56	0.60 0.71	-0.16	334	0.87
Illicit Collaboration	201 146	2.90 2.69	0.86 0.84	2.26	345	0.02**
Slacker Behavior	200 145	1.51 1.53	0.53 0.61	-0.39	343	0.70
Plagiarism	199 147	1.70 1.69	0.73 0.81	0.12	344	0.91
Reasons for Unethical Behavior	190 143	2.19 2.15	0.88 0.94	0.39	331	0.70
*equal variances not assumed						
**significant at $p < 0.05$						

DISCUSSION

There are several possible reasons to explain the largely non-significant results. First, the test course for this study, “The Environment of Business,” covered a variety of topics, including business ethics. Thus, the ability of the course to change students’ report of their ethical behavior may have been limited since ethics was not the only focus of the course. Second, the non-significant results correspond to the results of similar work done by Bloodgood et al. (2008), which found that, on average, students who had taken a business ethics course cheated as much as those who did not take a business ethics course. Their findings concluded that business ethics instruction generally had no effect on the extent of cheating. Third, the issues covered in business ethics courses are business ethics issues versus personal ethics issues. Students may not apply appropriate ethical behavior for organizations to their own ethical behavior. Fourth, Griseri (2002, p. 371) notes that, “it is better to regard this field as a *form of personal development* than a subject which gets taught.” One course may not be enough to significantly affect a construct that evolves, such as ethical behavior.

In contrast, the sole significant finding of a lower level of illicit collaboration in the posttest group is encouraging. This finding is in contrast to the work done by Bloodgood et al. (2008) that found no significant differences at the course level, in which students who had taken a business ethics course cheated as much as those who did not. It also contrasts with Brown and Choong (2005), who found no significant differences in levels of academic dishonesty between management majors at a public and at a private, Catholic university. The private, Catholic university placed more emphasis on ethics and values, based upon statements of educational philosophy, educational goals, and course requirements. Moreover, the Illicit Collaboration factor consists of activities that may be considered as more subtle forms of academic dishonesty, such as having someone check over a paper before turning it in. Students may have become sensitized with these more subtle forms of academic dishonesty more quickly the other more overt activities, which are captured in the Exam Cheating, Slacker Behavior, and Plagiarism factors. These behaviors may be more challenging to change.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has yielded several implications for the business curriculum in regard to ethics-based courses. Based on the results of this exploratory study, it is concluded that a business course with an ethics component may affect students’ level of academic dishonesty. Although Illicit Collaboration was the only facet of academic dishonesty that was significant, the reduction of Illicit Collaboration provides support that academic dishonesty can be addressed in the classroom. Additional courses in business ethics may be necessary to further positively influence students’ ethical behavior. Therefore, this study suggests a prominent representation of

ethics in the business school curriculum, whether as an element in a class or in classes focused solely on the topic.

Furthermore, this study has raised an interesting point. Business courses that focus on ethics may need to target students' personal ethical behavior. Does the student's personal ethical behavior need to be addressed first in order to prevent future unethical business behavior in the marketplace? It seems that teaching business ethics may be premature if a student's personal ethical behavior is not affected first. Is it possible to curtail future unethical business behavior in the marketplace without first improving personal ethical behavior in the classroom? Intuitively, changing an individual's ethical behavior would be a necessary first step in influencing his or her professional ethical behavior in the marketplace in later years. Moreover, students will better identify with changing their own ethical behavior than reviewing case studies that focus on the ethical behavior of business professionals. The issue may be addressed by incorporating personal ethics, versus business ethics, into the business curriculum. These courses could serve as a foundation or prerequisites for courses focusing on appropriate business ethical behavior.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several potential limitations. Although a student sample was appropriate for this study, the sample of largely traditional students (age 18-23) may not be representative of other student populations, due to demographic or geographic differences. Furthermore, variations in demographic variables may influence the level of academic dishonesty, as illustrated in previous research. For example, age may have an impact on the level of academic dishonesty. Older or non-traditional students may have a different outlook or perspective toward academic dishonesty, based on changes in their life situation or simply maturity.

Additionally, even though the respondents remained anonymous, a level of respondent bias may have been present due to the classroom setting for the administration of the instrument. Questionnaires were completed in the classroom, so student respondents may have reported a higher or lower level of academic dishonesty. Private or off-campus facilities for each respondent may have addressed this limitation.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are possible future research directions for this study. First, although the sample was appropriate for this study, since most subjects were traditional undergraduate students (had not entered the workforce), different results may be obtained for non-traditional students and/or those entering professional and graduate schools. Second, because the sample was drawn from a mid-size university in the southeastern United States, future studies with schools of other sizes in other regions are needed to establish external validity. Third, although many of the items used in the instrument were those that have appeared in previous work, there may be other items that

could be included in future work. Fourth, and similarly, there may be other types of academic dishonesty that could be examined in future studies. Fifth, the scope of the study could be changed or broadened to include various other issues that have been a focus of previous research, such as religiosity and intelligence (Bloodgood et al., 2008). Sixth, this study did not focus on the issue that particular demographics (e.g., age, GPA, and gender) may influence the degree to which students' level of academic dishonesty may be affected.

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