Educational Developers Caucus Grants 2007

Why Do Faculty Members' Attitudes Toward Academic Dishonesty Change Over Time?

Findings from grant-funded research on 'A National Needs Analysis and Recommendations for Targeted Programming for Mid-Career Faculty'

Through routine interactions with faculty as a faculty developer it is readily observed that faculty attitudes toward academic misconduct vary. Many want the ability to deal with academic offences themselves within the context of their course. Some would rather have administration completely take it off their hands (our current policy at Carleton). Faculty often say they feel they don't have time to worry about building course activities to discourage cheating, or to detect those who have cheated. And most feel that too many students are exonerated, and that sanctions are not strong enough against those who are not. More recently, faculty members have shown concern about increases in Internet-related cheating behaviours. An attitude that is most likely fueled by hearing snippets of information/misinformation about internet plagiarism detection programs like TURNITIN.COM. It is also interesting to note that during New Faculty Orientation discussions it is quite common for new faculty to express an overzealous sense of the need to eradicate cheating from university classrooms. Yet when you discuss academic integrity with senior faculty members they yawn, roll their eyes, and tell you there's nothing they can do about it; if a student is going to cheat, they will cheat, and nothing dramatic will happen to them if they got caught. This is quite a contrast from the eager, overzealous cheating-police attitude express by new faculty.

Such observations prompted us to get a better handle on the changing attitudes of faculty at different stages in their careers so that we could offer effective support and programming around the academic integrity issue. To that end we conducted an online survey which was distributed to full-time faculty members and contract instructors through a faculty listserv. The survey included 20 questions (likert/closed/open-ended) asking for a few demographic details and focusing on faculty attitudes to various academic integrity issues in the Carleton classroom. There were 161 respondents which 140 full time faculty [33 early career [1-5 years], 37 mid career [6-15 years], and 70 late career [15+ years]] and 21 contract (sessional) instructors.

When asked if most students are generally aware of what constitutes academic dishonesty prior to entering university 85% of new faculty respondents said "No" in contrast with 51% of senior faculty respondents who said "No" However, when asked if most students are generally aware of what constitutes academic dishonesty after completing their first year of studies, faculty at all levels tended to agree. This transition in responses implies that there is a belief that students are learning about this in their first year of university. When asked who they believe is responsible for informing students of the various types of dishonesty and the consequences of getting caught the majority of respondents believed that professors are responsible. However when asked to indicate whether they discussed academic integrity issues in all of their courses, the majority of early- and late-career faculty claimed that they do, whereas only about half of mid-career faculty claimed to do so.

When asked about classroom specific activities to discourage academic dishonesty, the majority of respondents *say* that they do design tests and assignments in such a way as to discourage cheating. This does not provide evidence of the success of the strategies that they are using, however. Newer faculty were mixed on claiming that they actively seek signs of cheating when marking students' work with half reporting that they do and half reporting that they do not. In contrast, the majority of mid- and late- career faculty claim that they do. However, results from the open-ended responses to this question seem to indicate that many faculty members rely on Teaching Assistants to detect incidences of academic dishonesty, and don't do it personally, so they are reporting what they **hope** is happening.

All levels of faculty identified downloading from the Internet as either a serious or the most serious threat to academic integrity in the Carleton classroom. In particular faculty with 11-15 years experience most heavily identified downloading from the Internet as a serious threat. In addition, new faculty strongly indicated concern for someone else doing the work and for inappropriate collaboration as a serious threat. When asked which behaviours they believed occurred most often in the Carleton classroom, new and early-mid [6-10 years] career faculty responded that they believe paraphrasing without citing and collaborating happens most often. In contrast, later-mid [11-15 years] and late career faculty reported downloading from the internet as happening most often. Perhaps early concerns with paraphasing indicates the oft-idealistic view of academia held by graduate students and early-career professors whereas concerns of later career faculty might reflect a more realistic approach to what students can and will do. That said, a fear of the unknown world of the influence of the internet on the learning process [the internet did not exist when later career faculty members were undergraduate students] seems to make them a bit unrealistic about the use of internet downloading to aid cheating.

One of the more surprising findings was that few faculty members expressed concern about cheating on exams. There is a wealth of literature supporting the notion that cheating on exams is a primary concern of faculty. There are mechanisms in place in every institution to discourage cheating on exams and promote individual work. One could speculate that cheating on exams was not identified as a concern because faculty feel that a lot is already done to prevent it so it can't be a problem in their classroom.

Faculty at all levels strongly felt that that academic dishonesty is not one of the biggest problems at Carleton today. Some said it was a problem for students, not faculty, while others pointed out that there were other bigger problems in the modern university and cited space and funding as examples.

In general we seem to see some differences in faculty members' attitudes towards academic integrity based on amount of teaching experience. New faculty seemed almost overzealous in their desire to eradicate cheating and more concerned with someone else doing the work for the students than internet plagiarism. Mid-career faculty members were the most concerned about internet plagiarism, and appear almost cynical about how much can be done to prevent academic dishonesty. They seem to express the least hope that they can have an impact on

their students' academic integrity. This may indicate that mid-career faculty need special support from teaching and learning centres and other faculty support areas. Late-career faculty seem more laissez-faire, and even a bit more optimistic.

Perhaps new faculty are so close to the student life that they feel academic integrity is a priority in their classrooms? They were just recently TAs, and their primary jobs were often to detect cheating when marking papers. So perhaps this is an artifact of their graduate student training and experiences? Perhaps mid-career faculty members are experiencing some form of mid-career crisis and as such have a focus shift or loss of idealism? Perhaps as faculty members get closer to retirement they stop "sweating the small stuff" and they think that academic dishonestly *is* the small stuff?

The new web-savvy faculty members: Do their attitudes toward students' internet plagiarism differ from the attitudes of others?

The academic integrity survey specifically asked faculty members about two aspects of their Internet/computer use: did they use the internet in their undergraduate and graduate studies and did they regularly use WebCT [an online teaching support tool used across campus to support courses].

There is an obvious relationship between length of time teaching and Internet use. Most early-career faculty used the internet during graduate school and very few respondents used the internet during their undergraduate studies. All new faculty members use WebCT to support their courses, whereas a few more seasoned faculty reported not using WebCT. The interesting finding about web experience and faculty attitudes was that the group most concerned about downloading papers for the internet as a serious problem that happens most often in the Carleton classroom were mid-career faculty [11-15 years] who do not use WebCT to support their courses and had no experience with the internet in their studies. Fewer mid-career faculty who do use WebCT to support their courses were concerned about downloading from the internet as a problem in the Carleton classroom. Those faculty with internet experience from graduate school were slightly less likely to view downloading as a problem than those without internet experience.

This suggests a sort of fear of the unknown at play. If faculty are not using technology and had little experience with it as students, they tend to be concerned that students are using it to cheat in the classroom.