



Academic Dishonesty: the Social Implications

by Gary Pavela

Setting and enforcing high standards for academic integrity goes beyond simple moralism. It also helps students develop values that are necessary for contributing to a society where people routinely depend upon the knowledge and integrity of others. Consider the following examples from the national press:

Cheating on nuclear power licensing examinations

1. "A former supervisor at the disabled Three Mile Island nuclear power plant was fined \$2,000 and sentenced to two year's probation for cheating on relicensing examinations. James F. Floyd was supervisor of operations at TMI's Unit 2 in March 1979, when it was the scene of the worst accident ever at a U.S. Commercial nuclear plant. He was convicted in November of two counts of making false statements on the federally required exams in June 1979."
"Exam Cheat Sentenced" March 13, 1985 Washington Post, (p.47).

Cheating on air traffic control examinations

2. "An instructor at the Federal Aviation Administration's air traffic control training school has charged that answers to the final exam were circulated among students and might have enabled failing students to pass. The instructor... said a packet of answers to problems from the exam might have been available to students for as long as two years before FAA officials began developing substitute questions."
"Exam Cheat Sentenced" March 13, 1985 Washington Post, (p. A7)

Faking scientific data or experiments

3. "At Yale University, an assistant professor fabricated data in his research on patients with anorexia nervosa, a personality disorder that results in life-threatening weight loss. So far, 11 scientific papers from the Yale laboratory have [had to be] retracted..."
"Behind the scandals in science labs" March 2, 1981 U.S. News and World Report, (p.54).
4. "After steady trickle of fraud in academic science, now comes a serious case of misrepresented data. Charles J. Glueck, of the University of Cincinnati, reported that children can effectively be fed a low-cholesterol diet to prevent heart disease. But the prescription may be false: a university committee found that the study was based on data that 'barely existed.' This month Dr. Glueck resigned.
"Credit and acreditability in science" (Editorial) July 26, 1986 New York Times, (p.26).
5. "U.S. District Court Judge John Vukasin ordered Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory chemist Ronald Stump to repay the government \$125,000 which he received from faking test results on an U.S. Department of Energy electronic device..." [When lab chemists tested the device, it would not work-- and they concluded Stump's experimental results were "impossible"].
"Livermore chemist punished for false test results" Daily Californian August 9, 1989, (p.1).



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6. "June Price Tangney, a lecturer in psychology at Bryn Mawr College, has explored the attitudes toward scientific misconduct among scientists at a 'highly ranked' research university and reported the results of her survey in a forum on scientific fraud at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Foundation... In what Ms. Tangney called the most disturbing finding, 32 percent of those surveyed said they suspected a colleague, either at the university or elsewhere, of falsifying data. Of the scientists with such suspicions, 54 percent had failed either to check the suspicions out or to take action to remedy the situation."

"One-third of scientists surveyed at major university suspected a colleague of fraudulent research" September 9, 1987 Chronicle of Higher Education, (p.A6).

Financial Fraud

7. "Solid numbers are hard to come by, since the cases fall across several legal and regional jurisdictions. But in the last year alone at least 20 public companies traded on national stock exchanges have come forward to disclose serious lapses in their past financial statements ranging from inflated sales and hidden ownership to the possibility of outright embezzlement... 'In the 1980's, most of the lawsuits were takeover-related,' said James Newman... publisher of the research service Securities Class Action Alert. 'In the 1990's, we've seen very significant fraud and failures to disclose losses or poor earnings.'

"Falsifying Corporate Data Becomes Fraud of the '90s" September 21, 1992 New York Times, (p.1).

Fraud in the courtroom

8. "Louise Robbins had but one claim to fame: She could see things in a footprint that nobody else could see... Show her even a portion of a shoeprint on any surface, Robbins maintained, and she could identify the person who made it. By her own account, Robbins appeared as an expert, mostly for the prosecution, in more than 20 criminal cases in 11 states... Her testimony had helped to send at least a dozen people to prison. Robbins was the only person in the world who claimed to do what she said she did. And her claims have now been thoroughly debunked by the rest of the scientific community."

Mark Hansen, "Believe it or not," American Bar Association Journal, June 1993, (p.64).

Fraud in Medicine

9. "This study demonstrates that cheating is extremely frequent (87.6 percent) among premedical students. Although the frequency of medical school cheating (58.2 percent) is significantly lower... the majority of students continue to cheat in medical school. The most disturbing finding was the positive correlation between cheating in school and cheating in patient care. There was a continuum from cheating in college, to cheating in medical school didactic areas, to cheating in clerkships in patient care."

Sierles, Hendrickx and Circle, "Cheating in Medical School" Journal of Medical Education, v.55 February 1980, pp. 124-125.



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10. "The results of 10,000 crucial internships-admission tests given graduates of foreign medical schools have been thrown out because an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 test-takers, many of them Americans, bought or saw the answers, Medical officials called it the largest such cheating scandal in recent history."

"Foreign Medical Grads Face Retest in Cheating Scandal" October 8, 1983 Washington Post, (p.A10).