The Academic Honesty Policy at the Universal American School in Dubai

Walid Salameh

Hamdan Bin Mohamed Smart University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

*Corresponding author E-mail: wsalameh[at]hbmsu.ac.ae

Abstract: *Academic dishonesty is viewed as a major dilemma facing institutions of higher learning which comes in various forms of violations represented in cheating, plagiarism, fabrications, copying. etc. The main purpose of this study conducted at the Universal American School in Dubai is to evaluate the school's current academic policy in terms of its perception by the faculty as well as that of the students. Data was collected using the academic integrity questionnaire which is consisted of eight questions that are designed to check the students' understanding of academic dishonesty, as well their tendency to commit it. The findings of this study revealed significant differences in the students' responses in terms of their grade level, as well as their academic standing. The findings also revealed that the majority of the teachers found the current policy to be lenient and is not strict enough, and that amendments to it are vital, they also credited this high number of malpractice cases to the administration's somewhat lenient approach, as well as fulfilment of the consequences, while the minority found it to be fair and effective and that is due to different academic disciplines.*

Keywords: Malpractice, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, academic policy

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to observe and draw conclusions regarding academic honesty and integrity, which can be defined as "an uncompromising adherence to a code of moral, artistic or other values, utter sincerity, honesty and candor, avoidance of deception, expediency, artificiality or shallowness of any kind" (Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary 1174). Some people feel that in order to get ahead in life, they need to break certain rules. Academic honesty and integrity is a major problem at schools, and especially colleges. It is not easy for a teacher to determine if a student plagiarized, cheated, or maybe even had someone write his/her paper for him/her. Thus, most of the time, the teacher will just have to trust that the student is an honest person, while sometimes this is not the case.

There are probably many students who cheated their entire way through college, without realizing the opportunity they had wasted to actually learn something. These people graduate from college thinking that they are prepared to go out in the real world and start their career with a diploma that they do not really deserve. They do not realize that they just wasted all the money that they paid to go to college because the point of college is to learn what is needed in order to start a career in the specific field one majored in. By cheating their whole way through, they never really learn the skills and information they need to move on and carry out jobs successfully. One may be able to cheat his/her way through school, but it is highly unlikely that one will be able to cheat his/her way through a job.

Each school has its own academic policy. Academic honesty policy at the Universal American School in Dubai states that students should commit to the standards of ethics and avoid academic dishonesty by all means. This study will aim to evaluate the school's current academic policy in terms of the faculty's perception of it, as well as that of the students.

2. Literature Review

In all learning institutions, all the students are anticipated to come up with some academic exercises that are original and this calls for abiding by academic honesty. Any contribution by other people in the work of the student should be adequately acknowledged (Rettinger, Jordan & Peschiera, 2004). The rationale behind this concept is a requirement for honesty as one fundamental part of the education of the student. While putting the values of the institutions in the forefront, the students are encouraged to behave in responsible manner while maintaining the ethical as well as the honesty with regard to the intellectual property as well as authentic authorship (Storch & Storch, 2002). It is an expectation for all institutions to come up with independent procedures as well as practices that caters for the objectives as well as the aims of Academic honesty policy coupled with the spirit required of an academic honesty. The intellectual development of the students requires exposure and familiarization with the intellectual property and its incorporation in to copyright. It is common sense that instructions pertaining to the issue of academic honesty are a crucial part of education of each and every student (Pino & Smith, 2003).

The maintenance of a conducive academic climate to achieve the success of all members of an institution striving knowledge transmission requires that some policies as well as standards are put in place which should be followed by the entire community. During enrolment in to the institutions, the applicants are supposed to comply with these policies and standards which is an obligation to them (West, Ravenscroft & Shrader, 2004). The obligations have a close relationship with the academic setting which incorporates the behavior of the student in and out of the classroom. The bleach of Academic honesty

policy results to academic dishonesty that refers to any manifestation of cheating which is related to academic exercise in a learning institution (Davis, Grover, Becker & McGregor, 1992).

In all institutions of learning, the doctrine of upholding the highest level of academic honesty policy is an issue of great importance for achieving the academic excellence of all the students. It is a requirement that all the students comply with the existing academic honesty policy as well as procedures. This gives a definition to the climate of the highest level of academic honesty along with integrity in the learning institution (McCabe & Drinan, 1999).

The entire University fraternity are charged with the vital role of maintaining as well as upholding the most excellent and honest environment of academia and report any cases of dishonesty once it is detected. In a situation that there is a suspected bleach of the policies of academic honesty, there arises the need for designing applicable procedures that have the potential protecting the required integrity of the process of education while at the same time ensuring that the due process is uninterrupted. The system of academic honesty in the institution is a process of academia whose basis is educational opportunities (McCabe, 2005).

In the institutions, undergraduate education is based on the notion that freedom is a perquisite of excellence. On the other hand, Honesty in addition to integrity are other important prerequisites of the freedom (Rezaee, Elmore & Szendi, 2001). In the process of advancing knowledge in the institution, it is important to uphold the highest level of academic honesty. This is achievable only when the instructors together with their students show some respect to the work of others and appreciate the need for acknowledgement as well as safeguarding the existing intellectual property (Curphy, Gibson, Macomber, Calhoun, Wilbanks & Burger, 1998).

All the stakeholders should form an academic community in which all have a sense of belonging and therefore shares the distinctive responsibility. One of the most important responsibilities with this respect is to engage in a communication on honesty grounds. The involvement in some acts of academic dishonesty becomes a grave violation of any trust that is the pillar of any academic community (Kidwell, Laurel & Wozniak, 2003).

The Academic honesty policy in an institution of learning serves as an articulation of the trend of behavior which leads to the violation of the trust coupled with the means of its protection in addition to restoration. It is therefore a requirement for all members of an academic institution, including the staff, the students as well as the entire faculty to comply with Academic honesty policy (Livosky & Tauber, 1994).

The faculty Dean in the institutions of learning takes the initiatives of introducing to the freshmen the Academic honesty policy at the time of orientation in to the academic institution. The advisers on the other hand have the responsibilities of giving the freshmen a version of the policy, while the freshmen acknowledge the receipt of the policies relating to academic honesty (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001). The signed forms of acknowledgement are then collected by the advisors which are kept safely in the official files of the students. In case the students are on a transfer from a different institution, they are adequately briefed by the academic support about the requirements of Academic honesty policy in the institution that they are joining (Beemsterboer & Turner, 2003).

The purpose of the procedures of orientation is the reinforcement of the significance attributed to academic honesty in the institution. It is therefore the responsibility of all the students who have joined the institution to comply with the laid down Academic honesty policy in their institution. Any student is bound by the existing academic honesty during the time of submission of any work to the tutors. Any student who decides to ignore the standards shall have no valid defense or an excuse (Del Carlo & Bodner, 2004).

All the students in an institution carry the burden to uphold the policies as well as the regulations set out in the institution along with the directions given by the officials of the institution. The behavior of the students is anticipated to be a source of credit to them in addition to the entire institution. They therefore abide themselves to the behavior standards as stipulated in their institutions (Jordan, 2001). An indication of the steps taken in each faculty to encourage the application of the Academic honesty policy is an important requirement in all institutions (Roig & Caso, 2005).

In any institution of learning, a variety of academic dishonesty exists. One of the most common honesty violations involves the act of cheating. Students may opt to make use of notes that are not authorized or other aids of study at the time of an examination (McCabe & Trevino, 2002). Cheating may also involve the application of technology that is not authorized during examination time aiming at enhancing their performance. Cheating may also involve storing materials, notes or study aids in a manner to facilitate their use during the examination, or viewing the work of other students in the examination room in which case collaboration is prohibited. Attempts of communication in a similar scenario are also a form of cheating whose aim is to get some assistance in an environment of prohibited collaboration (Cunnings & Romano, 2002). Students may also attempt to alter the work grade then submit to the tutor for grading. In other cases, some students copy the work of other students and submit it as if it was the original work of the student. All these acts of cheating are against the Academic honesty policy in any institution and should be avoided at all cost (Symaco & Marcelo, 2003).

Another serious violation of the Academic honesty policy involves the act of plagiarism. This is particularly a serious offense in academia and any student suspected with the vice is severely punished (Roig & Caso, 2005). The implication of plagiarism is the use of the work of other people, either, unintentionally or even deliberately and

failing to acknowledge the source appropriately, meanings that the student has claimed the authorship of that particular work (Bolin, 2004). The other manifestation of plagiarism is online purchased papers, the use of sources that have been misrepresented in the student's work that he or she has claimed authorship, the improper application of the course materials, and submission of work that is copied from other students work (Bernardi, Metzger, Bruno & Hoogkanp, 2004).

Academic honesty policy may also be violated as a result of fabrication of information as well as data or citations in a formal exercise of writing. This is also considered a serious crime and consequently punishable if detected by the authorities. The students may also engage in acts of deception in which case false information is given to the tutors with regard an academic exercise. False excuses of a missed deadline and a false claim that the work has been submitted are also a common occurrence among the students (McCabe Trevino & Butterfield, 1999).

Due to the importance that is attributed to academic honesty in the learning institutions, the entire members of a specific faculty have a duty of discussing all the issues related to academic dishonesty and give a comprehensive explanation of the application of the policies to all their courses. The discussion of academic procedures is an issue of paramount importance.

3. Methodology

This study is conducted at the Universal American School in Dubai. It will aim to evaluate the effectiveness of its current academic honesty policy. As an International Baccalaureate school, UAS' policy reflects that of the IB Diploma Regulations. It defines malpractice "as behavior that results in, or may result in, the student or any other student gaining an unfair advantage in one or more assessment component." The policy is reviewed on a yearly basis to allow for amendments and improvements. This is mainly determined by observing the students' response to the consequences, as well as measuring the number of malpractice cases. Data collection techniques included interviewing members of the school's faculty, as well as some of the students. The interviews were conducted with the school's principal, the assistant principal, as well as five teachers from different departments. The students' input was collected using a simple questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by six students from every grade level (7 to 12), with different academic standings. The data will be analyzed with respect to the grade level and to the students' academic standing, separately.

4. Data Analysis

The interviews conducted with the faculty members showed some disagreement when determining whether the current academic honesty policy is effective or not. Simone Sebban, the secondary principal, stated that she was pleased with the policy, as she believes that the students have shown a great sum of commitment to it. However, she did mention that there were some cases were malpractice was detected, which was later reinforced by Terry Scott, the assistant principal, during his interview. He affirmed that the current policy is not strict enough, and that amendments to it are vital. He gave the example of four current students who have committed three malpractices so far, and are one short of an expulsion. He credited this high number of malpractice cases to the administration's somewhat lenient approach, as well as fulfilment of the consequences.

Three out of five teachers from different academic departments stated that the current policy was too lenient, and that students, in their classrooms, were not taking the consequences seriously. Brian Chesher, an English teacher, agreed that the administration was not implementing the consequences in accordance to what is stated in the Academic Honesty handbook. Ms. Baker, a social studies teacher, believes that detention, as a punishment is not harsh enough. A more strict approach is needed to decrease the number of malpractice cases.

The remaining two teachers found the policy to be fair and effective. David Paterson, a science teacher, finds that his students are responding to it. In his classrooms, he found a decrease in the number of malpractice cases. Sudha Sunder, an Information Technology teacher also praised the current policy, stating that it does in fact reflect that of the IB Regulations. She believes that it's an effective method of teaching students, especially the younger ones, how to go about conducting research. She admitted that the administration can be lenient in some cases, but this is only applicable when dealing with students from grades seven and eight.

As of the academic year 2011-2012, a new policy will be adapted. According to Terry Scott, it will be stricter in terms of dealing with the first offences (malpractice), as he believes that the first cases are the most dangerous ones. Instead of notifying the parents' via email, a meeting will be conducted to discuss the student's offence and outline a plan to deal with it. Scott believes that meetings are more effective than emails, as people tend to ignore most of them. Detentions are no longer the punishments in the new policy, a more rigorous approach is used. The offender is subjected to an in-school suspension which is mentioned in his/her permanent record. As mentioned previously, four offences result in an expulsion in the current policy, whereas only three will lead to that in the new one. Table 1 presents the students' responses to the questionnaire in terms of academic achievement (high or low), while Table 2 presents the responses in terms of grade levels.

Table 1: Students' Responses to Questionnaire Based on Academic Achievement

Question	Standing	Yes	No
Aware of Policy?	High	66.7%	33.3%
	Low	50%	50%
Agree with Policy	High	77.7%	22.3%
	Low	11.1%	89.9%
Copied classmates' assignment	High	0%	100%
	Low	83.3%	16.7%
Intentionally plagiarized	High	33.3%	66.7%
	Low	27.8%	72.2%
Unintentional plagiarism	High	66.7%	33.3%
	Low	72.2%	27.8%

Table 2: Students' Responses to Questionnaire Based on Grade Level

Question	Grade	Yes	No
Aware of Policy?	7	16.6%	83.4%
	8	16.6%	83.4%
	9	83.4%	16.6%
	10	100%	0%
	11	100%	0%
	12	100%	0%
Agree with Policy	7	33.3%	66.7%
	8	50%	50%
	9	33.3%	66.7%
	10	33.3%	66.7%
	11	50%	50%
	12	0%	100%
Copied classmates' assignment	7	100%	0%
	8	16.6%	83.4%
	9	66.7%	33.3%
	10	66.7%	33.3%
	11	66.7%	33.3%
	12	0%	100%
Intentional plagiarism	7	0%	100%
	8	0%	100%
	9	33.3%	66.7%
	10	0%	100%
	11	16.6%	83.4%
	12	100%	0%
Unintentional plagiarism	7	100%	0%
	8	100%	0%
	9	66.7%	33.3%
	10	100%	0%
	11	16.6%	83.4%
	12	0%	100%

5. Discussion of Results

By examining Table 1, it can be seen that 66.7% of the high achievers are aware of the policy, while 33.3% are not. On the other hand 50% of the low achievers are aware of it. It can also be seen that 77.7% of the high achievers agree with the policy, while 11.1% of the low achievers do. None of the high achievers admitted to copying a classmate's assignment, while 83.3% of the low achievers revealed that. It was also seen that 33.3% of the high achievers have plagiarized intentionally, while only 27.8% of the low achievers admitted to that. When it came to unintentional plagiarism, where the students did not have a clear idea whether using a specific source was considered plagiarism or not, 66.7% of the high achievers revealed that they faced that problem. 72.2% of the low achievers did admit to have plagiarized unintentionally.

Table 2 reveals that only few of the lower grades (7 and 8) are aware of what the policy is. This is due to their age and understanding of what academic honesty is. The ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders' answers showed that nearly all students surveyed were aware of it. When asked about whether they agree with the policy or not, the seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh graders had different responses. Twelfth graders disagreed with the policy, which is due to the fact that it affects their performance, which is reviewed by prospective universities. Hundred percent of the seventh graders admitted to have copied their classmates' assignments, while 16.6% of the eighth graders did. The ninth graders had different responses, as did the tenth and eleventh graders. None of the twelfth graders admitted to that. The seventh and eighth graders stated that they have never plagiarized intentionally, whereas the ninth graders had two different answers. Very few of the tenth or eleventh graders admitted to have plagiarized intentionally, but

100% of the twelfth graders did. This is due to their upcoming university applications which put a great emphasis on academic achievement. The low achievers will do anything to improve their grades. A great number of the students admitted to unintentional plagiarism. Nearly all the seventh, eighth, and ninth graders admitted to it, as they were unsure of how to cite sources and use them properly. The tenth graders had different answers, as they should be aware of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. This was also the case with the eleventh and twelfth graders who have had a lot of experience and can cite properly while avoiding malpractice.

6. Conclusion

- Academic dishonesty is an illegal and unethical behavior that students engage in to boost their learning performance, and comes in different forms which such as: cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication….etc.
- Due to the fact that academic honesty is highlighted in the learning institutions, it is the responsibility of all members of a specific faculty to discuss all the issues related to academic dishonesty and give a comprehensive explanation of the application of the policies to all their courses.
- Strict rules should be implemented against academic dishonesty in order to give education its true meaning.
- It can be deduced that the students' understanding of academic dishonesty, as well their tendency to commit it is related to both their grade level, as well as their academic standing. The high achievers are less likely to commit malpractice, while the low achievers need to improve their standing.
- The twelfth graders were the most likely to commit academic dishonesty due to their upcoming university applications. At the same time, they were the most ware of the policy and the consequences.
- The majority of the teachers found the policy to be too lenient, while the minority found it to be fair. This is due to different academic disciplines. The English teachers were the ones to experience it the most, as essays can be a treacherous area for most students. The science teacher had no problem with malpractice, as the only assignments are lab reports which are based on the students' findings.

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