

# Forum on Academic Integrity

## Notes

Three facilitators led the Forum on Academic Integrity, Dr. Waddah Nasr, Dr. Muhammad Ali Khalidi and Dr. Rami Zurayk.

### **Dr. Muhammad Ali Khalidi's Presentation:**

#### ***How to Combat Plagiarism: Some Unoriginal Ideas***

Socratic Principle: Immoral behavior arises from lack of knowledge:

- If you know what's moral, then you will perform moral acts.
- Therefore, immoral acts are a result of ignorance.

Plagiarism at AUB

- Socrates was certainly wrong about morality in general.
- But he may have a point when it comes to plagiarism at AUB:
  - \_ Much plagiarism seems to result from ignorance among students (and faculty).
  - \_ Some of it may be avoided by greater awareness, consciousness-raising.

A Seven-Step Program: The ASPRRIN formula:

–Announce

–Solicit

–Preempt

–Re-conceptualize

–Reduce opportunity

–Identify

–Notify

## ANNOUNCE

● Obviously, the first step is to announce it early, clearly, and as often as possible:

–On syllabus

–In assignments, list of paper topics

–In class pep talk

–In office hours

## SOLICIT

● Seek the response of students

– What do they think about plagiarism?

– Can they recognize it when they see it?

– Have they had any experience of it?

● One colleague's example

– Ask students to sign a pledge at the beginning of the semester.

## PREEMPT

● Mention possible sources of information (indicate on syllabus, WebCT, etc.).

● Direct students to relevant websites, links.

- Indicate awareness of a market in papers, both on-campus and off (internet, etc.).
- Discourage over-reliance on secondary sources in non-research papers.

#### REDUCE OPPORTUNITY

- Set specific, creative assignments.
  - Not: “Does Descartes manage to escape skepticism?”
  - But: “Compare Descartes’ attempt to escape skepticism with Ghazali’s.”
- Indicate the number and type of additional sources that students must use.
  - E.g. 2 journal articles, 1 website, 1 recent newspaper article, etc.
- Ask for a complete bibliography.

#### RE-CONCEPTUALIZE

- Two main things wrong with plagiarism
  - Violates Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of others
  - Discourages creativity in oneself
- Problems with conceiving it primarily in terms of IPR
  - Regurgitation and memorization are encouraged in school system.
  - University setting, not for public consumption or financial profit.
  - Principled questions about IPR (esp. in developing world).

#### Plagiarism & Creativity

- Re-conceptualize it as stifling creativity
  - Student: “So, is it OK to base a paper on someone else’s work—provided we footnote it?”

– This student thought that plagiarism was like an oversight, the dropping of a footnote

number

• Make students appreciate that the problem is one of blind regurgitation, not just theft of

intellectual property

## IDENTIFY

• Tools to identify plagiarism

– Set other types of assignment to get a sense of students' abilities (e.g. in-class tests).

– Internet searches of relevant materials

– Google!

## NOTIFY

• Temptation to deal with it in private

• But if there's no doubt as to awareness:

– Student Affairs Committee

## Conclusion

• Obviously, ASPRRIN alone won't cure the plague of plagiarism

• But before we clamp down harshly on students, we have an obligation to create a climate of awareness.

**Dr. Rami Zurayk's Presentation:**

***Academic Integrity and Its Violations***

It is not only about students--It is about the system.

AUB's Code of Conduct

(from the website: <http://pnp.aub.edu.lb/general/conductcode>)

- Cheating<sup>1</sup>: While taking a test or examination, students shall rely on their own mastery of the subject and not attempt to receive help in any way not explicitly approved by the instructor; for example, students shall not try to use notes, study aids, or another's work.  
Such cheating includes trying to give or obtain information about a test, trying to take someone else's exam, or trying to have someone else take one's own exam.

*<sup>1</sup>Adapted from the Villanova Academic Integrity Code*

Villanova Academic Integrity Code:

(from the website: <http://www.vpaa.villanova.edu/academicintegrity/code.html>)

*A. Cheating:*

While taking a test or examination, students shall rely on their own mastery of the subject and not attempt to receive help in any way not explicitly approved by the instructor; for example, students shall not try to use notes, study aids, or another's work.

Such cheating includes trying to give or obtain information about a test when the instructor states that it is to be confidential. It also includes trying to take someone else's exam, or trying to have someone else take one's own exam.

Violation of Academic Integrity in Universities

- Violations by Students: Cheating, plagiarism, dishonesty...
- Violations by Faculty: discrimination, intimidation, plagiarism, unfair evaluation,...

- Violations by Administration: nepotism, favoritism, yesmanship

#### Violation by students

John Sutherland, *The Observer* April 23 2000

The most recent surveys put the figure at 80%, even at top US schools.

- Cheats do prosper
- 90% of students believe that crime pays!

#### Violation by students

November 2003. Issue 08, Volume 01 [www.alternative-online.org](http://www.alternative-online.org)

"Four students from a prestigious private university in Lebanon who took the same course together reported that they bought a full computer course project. Three of them from a software development company for \$800, and one from the instructor assistant for \$650, just because "the project was too hard to be done, and was worth 35 percent of the course grade. It was also a required course for graduation.""

#### Violation by Faculty

- **"Professor plagiarism threatens academic integrity"** title of article [www.alternative-online.org](http://www.alternative-online.org)
- Appropriating material from other courses in other universities (leaving name of other instructor!)
- Claiming credit for student projects (publishing or selling them!)
- Delegating teaching and grading to assistants to concentrate on their promotion (Sutherland's article)

#### Violation by Faculty

John Crace Monday February 10 2003 *The Guardian*

- "A recent study by the University of Minnesota of 4,000 researchers in more than 100 faculties found that one in three scientists plagiarized, 22% handled data "carelessly" and 15% occasionally withheld unfavorable data."

Why? Some reasons:

- Pressure

- Reward system
- Free ride (it's so easy!)
- The rules of the game: our role models in today's world
- Codes of conduct: for students only?

***Self study, Task force 10: 6. Academic integrity***

“Reinforce the newly introduced Student Code of Conduct by employing new communication strategies and by developing policies and procedures to address accountability. Consider the development of a faculty code of conduct.”

A Faculty Code of Conduct?

- Some Universities have developed a FCC (U. California),
- ...and others have copied it verbatim (SEE University).
- Why not a unified code of conduct for all at AUB? After all, ethics and values are shared by all.

**Dr. Waddah Nasr's Presentation:**

***Three Questions on Plagiarism and Cheating:***

- 1) *Cheating as a form of dishonesty and its relation to integrity: Why is it wrong?*
- 2) *Does it take place?*
- 3) *What do we do to prevent it or at least reduce it?*

1) Why is it wrong?

Cheating is wrong, it affects both the integrity of the university and of the students themselves who cheat.

2) Does it take place?

In three years of surveying graduating students, the following results were obtained based on two yes/no and two open ended questions:

I have seen students cheat on a test at AUB:

79% Yes (2000)      82% Yes (2001)      78% Yes (2002)

I know AUB students who have handed in someone else's work:

70% Yes (2000)      72% Yes (2001)      66% Yes (2002)

Open ended question on students high and low points at AUB were answered with:

Stop cheating...better proctoring...stop negotiation of grades...

3) What do we do to prevent it?

This is open for discussion.

### ***Open Forum:***

The following pages recap the comments expressed by the 54 Forum attendees. In brief, the comments generally focused on the following areas:

- Explanations of why cheating and plagiarism are occurring:
  - Lack of English proficiency as a reason for plagiarism
  - Acceptance of cheating within society as a means to success and power
  - Tolerance of cheating at the secondary/high school level
  - Pressure on obtaining good grades, as opposed to learning, emphasized in the AUB environment
- Solutions to help resolve student cheating:
  - Contracts, both social contracts and paper contracts, between students and faculty
  - Essay and critical thinking tests that require original thought
  - Mixing up multiple choice tests and answer
  - Institute pass/fail classes

- Make sure students understand what cheating is and the ramifications of cheating
- Concerns about faculty integrity
  - Concern that class syllabi are outdated and embarrassing
  - Faculty concern about receiving good student evaluations
  - Emphasis on article writing and requirements for promotion by faculty over teaching skills
  - Recommendations for students are not always thought out and individualized by faculty
  - Call for a Faculty Code of Conduct

### **Audience Comments:**

- Most effective way is to start with the students. They have information. We need to instill cultural change and make changes in the minds of students. We need to look at the long term and change the culture.
  
- What's lacking in this discussion is how to stop cheating. We need to look at the social and psychological components. Integrity comes from socialization, and students learn that cheaters are leaders. We have failed to build the confidence of students and faculty. Have we praised them enough? We need to stress the positive more and we have taken the negative approach.
  
- Cheating is a learned behavior. Leaders are rewarded for cheating. Maybe it's not too late for AUB students, but we need to start with the Department of Education and need to begin at the kindergarten level and on through secondary school so that children learn that this is wrong.
  
- We should make it easier for instructors / professors to deal with and report cheating. It's a very time consuming process. Also, we should consider a zero tolerance policy.
  
- We shouldn't just equate plagiarism with cheating—we should distinguish intentional from non-intentional plagiarism. As part of the learning process, students take ideas from others and assimilate them into their own. Also, students have

learned that plagiarism is okay at the secondary school level, where there is a high level of tolerance for it. It has to be unlearned when students come to AUB. We need to explain what plagiarism is in the beginning of class and not punish those that unintentionally plagiarize.

- There should be consistency in policy while also allowing for the autonomy of the professors. Some professors are too lenient and others are too harsh.
  
- Our policy is a very short paragraph and we need a thorough policy. The one in the handbook is not sufficient. We need more details and examples.
  
- Let's put this issue in context—it's not the primary problem in undergraduate teaching. There are other problems, like getting the students to read the material, pacing, and getting students to ask the right questions. We need to remember the context that 20 percent of students are marginally engaged in class, and 80 percent are doing their best. Remember that there are other factors in these students' lives such as the transition to a new school system and growing up. Let's not get overly depressed about this issue, other things are happening here that are really good.
  
- When we don't understand something we blame it on "the culture". We can eliminate cheating if we change the way we teach our students. I proctor my own exams and have students write critically in their essays. I don't give exams that regurgitate material. Integrity is not just about the students, it's about the faculty too. For example, letters of recommendation for exceptional students to study abroad: some students are told "write your own recommendation and I'll sign it." Some professors send the same letter for all of their students. These incidents damage the university. Also, look at the syllabus of our courses on the web, some are out of date and some are embarrassing. The syllabi and reading lists of our courses reflect the identity of our university. Students are buying a service from us and some of them are being cheated.
  
- Three quick points:
  - 1) The two reasons for cheating suggested by Professor Khalidi should include one more: the anti-social connotation. Students who cheat are stealing the propriety of an idea and this is a bad precedent for the future. How would this behavior affect a company or business? Also, students compete with each other via evaluations, and cheating provides an unfair advantage to some students.

- 2) The ability of students to write essays in English is perhaps a reason why there is plagiarism here. Should essays be included while evaluating students, particularly those that are uncomfortable or less knowledgeable in English?
- 3) There needs to be a Faculty Code of Conduct to create a sense of balance between faculty and students. Faculty can get away with behavior that students can't address such as out dated syllabi. There needs to be a system where students can express concerns to the faculty.

- When cheating is easy, it's very tempting. There is an increase in the use of objective tests because they are easier to grade. Maybe we need to be more creative in the tests we give and really evaluate them. Make tests less straight forward and maybe use essay tests. Also, perhaps there isn't an increase in plagiarism now, there are just better tools to detect it like Google.

- Much cheating is in a gray area. Are we (faculty) willing to have our names appear in articles with other authors when we haven't contributed greatly? And how many say on their CV's that they are on committees when they don't put any time into those committees or even show up for meetings?

- We need to make sure that students understand the consequences of cheating and understand the costs this country pays. What are the consequences of making an error when applying what should have been learned in engineering or medicine? There are huge ramifications. We need to require students to understand this. We are working on this in engineering.

- There is a mechanism—course files for courses—that we should be continually reviewing. We should review the course syllabus, and assess the accreditation and

merit of each course. If students are supposed to know certain material, the faculty needs to know what is going on in each class.

- (USFC representative) We as students have frustration with the faculty level. They copy notes from books and don't do their own class lessons. They are doing projects in class for companies and getting paid for it, and don't tell the students. Some use the same exams year after year. Some give the same recommendations to all their students. On the student side, it's easy to cheat when the same objective or subjective tests are given year after year. And downloading papers is getting easier. We could strike a balance through a code of conduct for faculty and students. Also getting to know students better through office hours, etc... Students

need to know the integrity of the university and feel that their degree from AUB is worth something. If it means anyone can get a degree from here, then why go to AUB? If anyone can make it through, just finish courses and graduate and not care what happens to the university, then over time, the students will not have as good or valuable a degree as they used to have from here.

- (Medical student) The problem of previous exams that are given year after year and are in the hands of a chosen few, needs to be tackled as much as plagiarism. Faculty carelessness needs to be addressed and students currently focus less on education than on class rank.
  
- We need to build partnerships and communication with students. You do this by building relationships with them. Then we (faculty) stop slacking off and they start caring and feeling proud to be part of AUB.
  
- The students are focused on grades and they believe that grades alone get them into universities abroad and yet at AUB it is true—grades are what gets them into graduate programs here. We need some way to reduce the focus on grades and put the focus back on education.
  
- There is a high level of awareness on this issue by everyone in this room—I hope that all other professors have the same awareness. The focus should be on campus; we cannot and should not worry about outside cheating, it is not our problem. There are codes of conduct everywhere, in churches and religious centers, but we should focus on doing something here and the part of implementation is lacking. Proctors don't always see cheating and faculty is the big component needed to reduce cheating.
  
- Three points:
  - 1) We are looking at the problem as students alone or faculty alone. We should face this issue together instead of blaming each other. Unless student bodies and faculty associations look at the problems together, they won't be solved.
  - 2) Syllabus—courses are the responsibility of the departments, not of each professor. It is the responsibility of the department to see how each syllabus is written and what it contains.
  - 3) Grading system—what about looking into a pass/fail system of grading?

- This is a problem at the high school and elementary school level. 40 years ago, exams were sold to students by the printer and I was asked to solve the exam for some students who had gotten a copy. I think cheaters come from the departments, not students—sometimes they are sold. We need to use different versions of the same exam, and mix-up questions that are A,B,C,D answers.

- Every household has dirty linen, let's discuss ways to deal with cheating and plagiarism. We need a model to introduce change, not just knowledge. You need to change attitudes and practices. We need to make changes in faculty, administrators and students to eliminate cheating. We need education professionals and social scientists to stop these problems. Let's stop describing the problem and instead introduce practices to solve them.

- There is a tendency to accuse in this discussion—we have all generalized when we tell our students not to. The problem should be put in perspective, and the majority of students do not cheat. Where are the cheaters? Are they in the professional schools? The Internet is the ultimate cheater as it doesn't acknowledge copyrights. Our students learn that this is right. I'm not saying it is, but we need to find a way to make our students understand plagiarism. Also, as for the syllabus topic, I don't think anyone from other departments and faculties is entitled to say that a faculty or department is failing. I can't determine if FM or FEA has good or bad syllabi. I also think that most of the faculty is honest. The University is undermined by cheaters. But we fail as faculty, and cheat our students, when we don't deliver a balanced and educated graduate at the end of their college education.

- I think there are three main things coming up in this discussion: denial, coercion, and consent. As for denial, I hear people saying that it (cheating) doesn't exist, and they are justified in a way. In my opinion, the stats exaggerate cheating. With 80 percent of respondents saying they have seen cheating during their years in college—maybe they've only seen an incident once—there should be a distinction between a sometime occurrence and a continual occurrence. It doesn't mean cheating is happening all the time. As for coercion, I think that using that as a solution works for just part of the problem, and won't resolve the entire problem. As for consent (as a solution), if there is a mutual consent between students and professors—a social contract—not just a piece of paper, this can work. For example—I'll work hard to help you learn and put time into the tests I give, and in exchange you reduce the cheating. I've tried this and it works, but only in a small classroom setting, not in a large class where students are just taking required classes.

- Two points:

- 1) Essay writing is important and students need to know how to write. We need GA's in the English department to help students, and we need to provide a place for students to go and learn to write. This will also help reduce plagiarism.
- 2) There should be a change of attitude about the emphasis of professors writing articles. Saying "my main concern is to get promoted" used to be an embarrassment here, now all openly say they are pressured to get articles written and they focus more on what's needed for promotion. We need to change the emphasis back to teachers focusing on teaching. Since the war, the attitude is: publish or perish.

- Too many students don't know how to use the library and don't know how to do research. Also, some professors are concerned about student evaluations used for consideration in their promotions, so they look the other way about cheating. They feel pressured to get good evaluations from students.

- Cheating and terrorism: terrorism targets innocent people, cheating targets our values. Everyone wants to become "Hariri". We have no values anymore. A Faculty Code of Conduct should be implemented and each faculty should meet with students to discuss it.

- I detect defensiveness. We don't want to have either faculty or student bashing. I think all of us have a role to play, we need to create an environment so cheating and plagiarism don't prosper. I don't want people to walk away thinking we are bashing ourselves or students. We can't avoid talking about these problems since this is what the subject of the forum is about. We should be meeting to address challenges and we need to be open to topics that are challenging.

- AUB is an oasis, and we need to know what is going wrong and address these issues. This forum is a consciousness raising forum. There is not one solution. We just need to be aware of what's going on and we to talk about it. Also, English proficiency is a problem. Perhaps if that were addressed, plagiarism could be reduced. This is where we could make a difference.

- It's our duty as educators to do something on this topic. It's not just that we teach a particular subject, we need to think about these issues with our students. I feel like I'm policing students when I give a test, and need to offer them more than this. We need to deal with our students on this.