



Cheating: Are We Part of the Problem?

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I was saddened to read in the February issue of *The Teaching Professor* the article about widespread cheating in business schools, as reported in the *Journal of Marketing Education*. Saddened, not because of the prevalence of cheating, but because colleges and college teachers seem to have created such an adversarial relationship between themselves and their students. Grades seem to have taken precedence over learning. Indeed, ethical behavior and honesty are important issues, but perhaps it would be useful to look at ourselves, our courses, and our teaching methods, as well the ethical deficiencies of our students.

Cheating can occur only if there is a zero-sum relationship between the student and the teacher. The teacher controls something that the student wants — a high grade — and can offer or withhold it, and in this dynamic the competitive, an adversarial relationship thrives. How can we establish a more cooperative relationship with students so that they are not our competitors and so that the emphasis moves toward learning rather than merely grades?

Cheating is an issue only in relation to grading, not to learning itself. If a student really wants to learn, cheating to get a better grade is not part of the equation. It detracts from the student's sense of responsibility for his own learning, and obviously gets in the way of real learning. Students often are so eager to get a good grade that all their efforts are focused on the grades, rather than learning itself.

Cheating is possible only at the lower levels of learning, such as simple recall of facts. Cheating is not possible when students' work must demonstrate the analysis and synthesis of ideas. Most cheating would vaporize if we adopted integrative, student-oriented teaching methods, more appropriate than the simple transfer of information. Good teachers are more than experts, more than repositories and providers of factual information. Good teachers engage the student in the processes of learning, orchestrate the resources around the student, work with the student as a colleague in the learning process, and act as mentor and supporter, even friend.

In the most effective faculty support workshops I ever conducted, I asked teachers, in groups, to plan to teach a course in which they were not experts — management professors, for example, teaching a course in nursing; history professors teaching management, and mathematics professors teaching anthropology. In essence, I took away their content expertise and asked them to be only "teachers." They were upset, but the techniques they planned were wonderful — very student centered, team oriented, with the teacher as the students' colleague rather than expert, and no lectures. Together, the teacher and students sought resources and became a team in the learning process. In courses like this, cheating is all but impossible, and the motivation to do so is also diminished.

I am not advocating that we teach content that we know nothing about, of course, but rather that we downplay our role as experts, and help our students learn how to become their own learners.

Let me be specific and share approach-

es that diminish cheating and represent more integrative teaching.

- **De-emphasize grades as much as possible.** Involve students in the evaluation of their own learning. Emphasize objective, nonjudgmental feedback, teacher to student and student to student, rather than relying on grades and points to convey the most important part of the feedback message.
- **Emphasize the teacher's role, in relation to the student, as colleague, coach, mentor, co-learner;** one who orchestrates the resources rather than merely provides the information. Experts are a dime a dozen, but good teachers are rare.
- **Try to move beyond recall; the student as sponge.** As quickly as possible, get students into analysis and synthesis, implications and applications, developing generalizations, and theory building.
- **Give take-home, open-book exams.** Encourage appropriate teamwork in

PAGE 2

In This Issue

Effects of Feedback on Students	2
Evaluating Student Work: A Three-Part Conceptual Framework	3
Individual and Group Work: Perceptions and Experiences	3
Court Case Analogy Helps Students Write Better Research Papers	4
Student Presentation of Math Problems	4
Teaching International Students	5

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- Write with the understanding that your audience includes faculty in a wide variety of disciplines and in a number of different institutional settings; i.e., what you describe must be relevant to a significant proportion of our audience.
- Write directly to the audience, remembering that this is a newsLETTER.
- Keep the article short; generally between 2 and 3 double-spaced pages.
- If you'd like some initial feedback on a topic you're considering, you're welcome to share it electronically with the editor.

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What Students Take from the Feedback

Faculty interaction with and feedback to students is explored in several articles appearing in this issue. As I was editing the final copy, I had a vivid reminder of just how powerful that feedback can be.

I was passing papers back, before class started so not a lot of students had arrived yet. I returned a paper to a quiet but able student in the back. "You're really a good writer, Megan." She looked confused. "You don't think so?" I asked. "Well, I used to think I was," she replied, "but then I had English last semester." I looked as if I wanted to know more. "That English teacher really convinced me I couldn't write." "Really," I said, "that's what you learned in that course?" "Pretty much," was the reply.

Later, during office hours (I happen to have my office off a lounge in one of our residence halls, which it makes me wonderfully accessible to students), Megan appeared at my door. "I brought my papers from last semester. I thought I'd show you what I mean."

We sat at the table in my office and looked at her five major papers from that English course. The grades ranged from C+ to A-. They generally improved from the beginning of the semester to the end. "Well, these grades don't look to me like they belong to someone who can't write," I observed. "It's not the grades," she replied, "look at the comments."

I did, starting with the first paper. There were lots of them. All grammatical, syntactical, and spelling errors were noted. There were comments about common beginning writer problems with awkward sentence structures, vague references, redundancy, lack of transitions, and conclusions that didn't offer much in the way of closure. On each paper after the grade was a short summary statement that listed the major problems. On the A- paper the list was shorter but it still identified nothing but problems.

"See," she said, "there's isn't one positive comment on any paper."

Surely, that couldn't be right. I looked

carefully and by golly she was right. . .not one thing noted that she had done well. On some papers there were whole paragraphs not marked and those read well. I'd say they were well-written.

I made an attempt to cover for my colleague by explaining that some instructors emphasize feedback designed to help students improve. I could tell she didn't buy it. So I moved back to her writing in my class. I said specifically what I thought she was doing well.

It was her response that's been ringing in my ears as I've been writing comments on papers this morning. "Well, thanks, but to be perfectly honest, you don't teach writing. . .the teachers who do really know who can and can't write. And I know what this teacher was trying to tell me."

I can't believe that's what my colleague intended. . .a solid student who became convinced in the course that she couldn't write well. ♥

CHEATING FROM PAGE 1

learning. Use lots of small-group instruction, encouraging students to learn from each other, to cooperate rather than compete.

- **Provide assignment options.** Perhaps some students would learn more by doing a journal than a paper, or could profit by planning and conducting independent research. If appropriate to your content, consider field trips to provide an experience that you and your students can then analyze.
- **Help students focus on their own learning.** Ask often and sincerely "How do you know that?" "How did you learn that?" "What is your experience with this concept?" Help students to become learners, not only learned. ♥

Evaluating Student Work: A Different Kind of Feedback

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In the mid-1990s I worked in a small education studies department that used a wonderfully simple, three-part conceptual framework for responding to student work — whether oral presentations, written papers, or even student teaching. First, we modeled active listening by succinctly summarizing what we understood to be the students' theses or main points in their presentation, paper, or lesson. Next, we detailed their clearest strengths. Lastly, we recommended some next steps.

I continue to find this framework helpful. Students appreciate the “summary, strengths, next steps” rhythm of my responses. They like knowing that I have carefully attended to what they have said, written, or done. They like learning about what they have done well. They also seem to appreciate the sensitive and caring way I challenge them to improve. I've benefited from using this framework too. In taking the time to always find at least three strengths in each student's work, I have moved from the more common and ingrained deficit model of thinking to a much more constructive one.

In particular, the next step feedback has proved its worth. In contrast to “weaknesses” or “shortcomings,” “next steps” requires

me to think and communicate in a more constructive and forward-looking manner. For example, previously I would write something like, “The lack of a self-evident organizational framework made it difficult to follow your main points.” Now I frame the feedback like this, “Your next presentation will be even easier to follow and more effective if you provide an overview, use signposts to signal transitions, and summarize your main points.” The differences are subtle but significant. My current approach suggests the student is developing into a more competent presenter. It conjures up positive images of continuous improvement.

Interestingly, the A students are often the most appreciative of the next steps feedback. Too often, they lament, all they receive back from professors is an “A” letter grade. Of course, on one level, they like receiving “A's,” but on another level, they want and are open to feedback detailing ways they can become even better.

I also use the framework when teaching students to assess their own work and that of their peers. Before an in-class poster session, for example, I provide students with forms that include these grading criteria, two subheadings — “Clearest Strengths” and “Most Important Next Steps” — and three bullet points under each subheading. Students do not assign any sort of grades. While evaluating the

students' work and writing my own assessments, I quickly read the students' narrative assessments of one another's and their own posters. Often, the students identify strengths in their classmates' work that I have missed. Because providing assessment feedback is a new experience for students, the quality of the feedback they provide varies.

Although this framework has proved extremely helpful to me, it doesn't make assessment trouble-free. For example, despite using this approach, some students and I still have differing perceptions of what constitutes “A” work versus “B” work, etc. Other times, in the course of a semester, I see improvement in students' work directly tied to the next steps I have communicated to them, but not as often as I would like. This raises several questions relevant to my practice and that of any faculty member interested in delivering feedback to students that makes a difference. How much do we know about what students do with work that is returned to them? After checking out the grade, how thoroughly do they process the rest of the feedback? And how does their reaction to our feedback inform the ways we assess the next work they submit? I hope to explore these questions subsequently and share my insights. 🍀

Individual and Group Work: Perceptions and Experiences

A study done in an undergraduate geography class compared student perceptions of work they complete individually and in groups with their actual performance on completed individual and group work.

At the beginning of the course, students responded to a questionnaire that solicited their opinions about teaching methods, assessment, and group work. The questionnaire, included in an

appendix that accompanies the article, illustrates the kinds of interesting and valuable information that can be acquired by asking students about their previous learning experiences.

To illustrate, consider some examples of what this faculty researcher learned from the questionnaire. When asked about the sorts of evaluation information they would like to know, student responses indicated that they wanted a wide range

of information relevant to how their work in the course would be assessed.

Perhaps most interesting was what they were least interested in receiving: identification of skills useful in completing the work and descriptions of learning outcomes likely to result from the assigned work.

As for actual assessment feedback,

Student Presentation of Mathematics Problems

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The October 2004 issue of *The Teaching Professor* included an article titled “Learning by Doing: Teams Present Math Homework” that described a teaching method in which students presented mathematics homework problems to the class in teams. I have used a similar teaching technique in many of my mathematics courses, but mainly, content courses required of future elementary school teachers.

The homework requirements include two components that students are graded on: written work and presentation of problems. Each homework assignment has two deadlines, one for presentation of problems and the other (after the presentation) for handing in written solutions. I do not allow students to ask me for help on any exercises prior to the presentation deadline. This is to help students gain confidence in their mathematical abilities and to help them improve their ability to explain mathematical concepts. On those days when presentations are due, students who are prepared may volunteer to do an exercise. Generally, three or four students are writing solutions to different problems

on the board at the same time. Having more than one student at the board takes some pressure off the students standing in front of the class. Sometimes several students present solutions to the same exercise. This occurs when there is more than one way to solve the problem.

When all students are done writing, each student takes a turn explaining his or her solution. After one solution is presented, I ask the class if anyone has questions, and the student who presented is then required to answer the questions. I generally try to let the class decide whether the student at the board has presented a correct solution, however, if no one knows whether the solution is correct, then I will tell them. Sometimes this leads to class discussion of the problem and solution so students are learning from me and from their peers. It also gives me an opportunity to point out any interesting features about or extensions of the problem.

The possible grades I assign these presentations are 2.5, 1.5, or 0.5. A grade of 2.5 is awarded if the student gives a correct explanation and solution. A grade of 1.5 is awarded if the student gives a correct solution, but not a very good explanation. A grade of 0.5 is awarded if the student does not give a correct solution, and a score of 0

is given if the student does no presentations. Students are required to do a minimum of four problem presentations, but they are allowed to do more. The four best problem presentations are used to determine the student's presentation grade, which is 10 percent of their final course grade. Additional problem presentations beyond the required four presentations that are graded as 2.5 count toward a percentage of extra credit.

It is important for future teachers to be able to explain and write out a solution to a problem for their own students so having my students present problems at the board is one way to let them practice what they will need to do in their career. Students also receive immediate feedback on their written work and explanation. I let them know if more written justification is necessary before turning in their written work, and I am able to help them learn to better speak the language of mathematics by correcting the way they explain certain concepts. I try to help students understand that having the ability to write out a solution is not the same as being able to communicate those same ideas orally, and as a teacher, they need to be able to do both.

Making a Case for Writing Research Papers

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When asked to prepare a research paper, many first-year college students tend to submit a position paper filled with opinion and unsubstantiated claims rather than a research paper. Recently, I have tried a new approach that seems to be helping students understand the task more thoroughly before they begin. Through a series of three PowerPoint presentations that I prepared, I present to my students

the analogy that writing a research paper is like being a lawyer defending a court case. Students can relate to this analogy because there seems to never be a shortage of high-visibility court cases in the news to which I can refer. I draw out the analogy in terms of how lawyers frame their case (define their topic), search out evidence (search for sources), present the evidence (write the paper), and make the closing argument (draw a conclusion). I am finding that, if I frame their thinking in this way, the students write better papers.

First, I begin with the topic. I find that

students typically submit a topic that is too broad and lacks focus. For example, I typically get topics like “Distance Learning” or “Assistive Technology.” Before a lawyer begins a case, he/she has to frame the case properly. Similarly, a writer has to frame the topic so that it is definable and defendable. While the topic of “Distance Learning” is too general, “Is Distance Learning Effective in Teaching/Learning?” can be defended. Many students have wanted to research

PAGE 6

Teaching International Students

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Several important issues and classroom management strategies related to listening and speaking skills can make the classroom experience a positive one for international students. Most of the pedagogical suggestions below could be applied to all students, not only to those from different countries. At the same time, however, there are difficulties and needs unique to non-native English speakers. Domestic students may express concerns similar to those of international students, but the reasons behind those concerns are different. For instance, according to English-as-a-Second-Language faculty member Diane Belcher, “domestic students may choose not to participate in class discussion because of being introverted, uninterested in the subject matter, or unprepared for that day’s lesson. International students, on the other hand, may be silent for any of those reasons too, or for other quite different reasons having to do with linguistic proficiency, cultural conventions, or educational background.”

Research findings and pedagogical suggestions discussed in this article focus on three listening and speaking problem areas for international students: (a) difficulties in note-taking and comprehension, (b) a lack of second-language confidence, and (c) unfamiliarity with the U.S. academic classroom discourse patterns and expectations.

Note-taking and listening comprehension

Some researchers have documented that because international students don’t understand the language, they experience difficulty taking notes. This inability to comprehend may also contribute to their silence during class discussions.

Pedagogical suggestions:

- Speak clearly and at a reasonable pace.
- Avoid inaccessible vocabulary, culture-specific words, or slang.
- Make good use of non-verbal commu-

nication strategies (e.g., gesture and eye contact).

- Encourage students to audiotape the class, if they think it might help their comprehension.
- Encourage students to copy or borrow notes from peers and discuss the notes with peers.
- Write key terms on the board and ask comprehension-check questions.
- Invite students to ask questions if there is anything they do not understand.
- Use visual aids to enhance students’ comprehension.
- Provide an outline or key terms on handouts, the blackboard, and/or overhead projector transparencies.
- Post main points or any visuals used in class on the Web, or send via e-mail either to all students or upon request.
- Use legible handwriting on the board. Cursive script may be difficult to decipher.
- Encourage students to talk with you informally or during office hours so that they become familiar with your dialect.

A lack of second-language confidence

Other research documents that international students may not participate because they lack confidence. They do not think they can formulate ideas in English quickly enough to contribute to a fast-moving discussion.

Pedagogical suggestions:

- Recognize that language learning doesn’t happen at once.
- Be patient and allow for a longer wait-time when asking for oral participation.
- Ask the whole class to write down their ideas first, and then report them to the group.
- Design and use low-anxiety-provoking “structured” small-group activities, and then report to the whole class.
- Ask culturally relevant questions while not putting students on the spot to represent a certain culture.
- Consider activities that can raise inter-

national students’ self-confidence.

- Give feedback that emphasizes the value of students’ contributions.
- Use a listserv to provide an alternative way to raise the otherwise hidden voices of those who are shy and anxious or reluctant to speak up in class.

Lack of familiarity with U.S. academic discourse patterns and instructors’ expectations

Unclear and conflicting expectations between instructors and international students sometimes cause confusion and misunderstanding for international students.

Pedagogical suggestions:

- Be aware that international students may have different prior educational experiences and expectations.
- Don’t assume that international students naturally understand your expectations.
- Provide specific and clear instructions about classroom activities both in writing and orally.
- Have an open discussion on teachers’ expectations and the nature of the classroom.
- Encourage students to contact you personally if anything is still not clear.
- Be familiar with students’ cultural background, but at the same time be careful not to stereotype or over-generalize it.
- Be aware of individual differences.

We need to keep in mind that there are multiple factors affecting international students’ classroom participation patterns, even more than have been identified here. Teachers play a critical role in creating a positive learning environment for everybody, including international students.

Special note: Most of the pedagogical suggestions listed here came from the real voices of round table participants on “Teaching International Students” held by the Office of Faculty & TA Development at The Ohio State University on February 20, 2003. ♥

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP

FROM PAGE 3

students most wanted to know how an answer was wrong and how they could improve it. They strongly preferred individual feedback over that provided on a checklist.

Students in this cohort listed five times more advantages than disadvantages to group work. If given the chance to select group members, they were most motivated to choose friends, followed by hard workers.

The researcher then compared these and other student perceptions with their actual performance on individual and group assignments both completed in the course. Questionnaire “results suggest that student ‘gut reaction’ is that they work bet-

ter individually.” (p. 72) But performance results “suggest that the group exercise was most useful in developing both student understanding (deep learning) and key skills.” (p. 72) This appears to be especially true for students doing less well in the course whose grades improved substantially on the group assignments. The researcher notes that group grades on the assignment, which involved a group presentation, were higher (at statistically significant levels) and the number of failures fewer. The better students did not show the same level of improvement, leading the researcher to wonder if weaker students actually learned more in the group context or were simply pulled up the stronger students.

As for overall conclusions: “fundamentally, there are differences between stu-

dents’ perceptions and performance in both individual and group assessments.” (p. 75) As for one implication of that finding, the researcher believes teachers need to seek out more innovative assessment modes. All students need to acquire, practice, and be tested on all skills. Poor students should not be able to hide among their more accomplished colleagues. Individual grades and peer assessments could be used to hold all students accountable for the same learning outcomes.

Reference: Knight, J. (2004). Comparison of student perception and performance in individual and group assessment in practical classes. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 28 (1), 63-81. ♥

RESEARCH PAPERS

FROM PAGE 4

assistive technology, but did not know what to research or how to approach the task. If the topic is framed as “Benefits of Using Assistive Technology in the Classroom,” this is a case that can be defended. Defining topics in this manner guides students through the next steps in the process.

The second phase is searching out evidence to support the case. Referring to a current, highly visible court case, I indicate to students that although a lawyer might feel or believe certain “facts” about the client, these so-called facts are merely conjecture unless they are substantiated by evidence. Then I draw the analogy that the evidence researchers use is information from professional literature. This leads to several other discussions:

- **What constitutes believable evidence?** The sources must be respected, scholarly material. After all, not all witnesses are believable. A witness may not add to

the strength of the case, which may lead the jury to discount the testimony of that witness.

- **Is there sufficient evidence to support your case?** I prompt students to do a preliminary search of the professional literature to ensure there is sufficient research to support their topic. If not, I instruct them to either adjust the focus of their topic according to the material they are finding, or select another topic.
- **Selecting more sources rather than fewer is better because you have more on which to report.** I point out that it is difficult to write a multi-page paper using limited sources.

The third phase is presenting the evidence in court, which is analogous to writing the paper. At this point, I show students how to present their evidence in the context of the paper. Just like a lawyer would do, the students should introduce evidence to argue key points that will help them make their case. When viewed from this frame of reference, students can realize the importance of using an authoritative tone and of writing in the active voice.

After all, evidence is presented live by witnesses who are on the stand.

The fourth phase is making the closing argument, which is the most critical time in a court case. A lawyer begins by reminding the jury of the argument he/she was attempting to make. Then, using a persuasive tone, the lawyer briefly reviews the entire case, highlighting the key points. The lawyer then draws a conclusion, and rests the case. From this part of the analogy, students realize the important role of the conclusion section of the paper.

Finally, before actually going to court, a lawyer would review the entire case to make sure there are no “holes” in the case, areas that could be discredited due to lack of evidence. This is analogous to looking over the paper to ensure that sufficient sources were cited to support the claims presented, and to ensure that the student made no unsubstantiated claims.

To view my PowerPoint files and other teaching materials, visit my Web page: www.misericordia.edu/academics/education/drsteve. ♥