Faculty's Leadership Role in Creating Climates of Academic Integrity

Victoria McCarthy,
Austin Peay State University

Robyn Hulsart,
Austin Peay State University

ABSTRACT

Student cheating and the growing problem of plagiarism in higher education is epidemic. This article defines cheating, how and why students cheat and faculty perspectives regarding cheating. Understanding these components, the article provides a model for creating an ethical classroom climate.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Higher Education, Student Cheating

INTRODUCTION

Research on academic cheating dates to the turn of the twentieth century with the earliest studies having been conducted in the fields of education and educational psychology (Campbell, 1931; Hartshorne and May, 1928). A 1941 study concluded that a fierce competition for grades fuels the engines of cheating (Drake). Since then it seems the problem has continued to grow, with students placing more emphasis on competition than on academic integrity (Nuss, 1984; Center For Academic Integrity, 2006). Adding to this is the much written about decline in ethical standards among leaders in both the public and private sector. Enron, Tyco, and WorldComm are but a few contributors to the national conversation on this perceived decline in ethics. Robbins, et al. (1996) wrote:

> In the United States, many believe we are currently suffering from an ethics crisis. Behaviors that were once thought unacceptable – lying, cheating, misrepresenting, and covering up mistakes – have become in many people's eyes acceptable or necessary practices. Managers profit from illegal use of insider stock information and members of Congress write hundreds of bad checks. Even college students seem to have become caught up in the wave where studies show significant increases in cheating on tests.

Ethics in the classroom has gained significant interest over the past several years with numerous studies demonstrating the pervasive nature of cheating among college students (Baird 1980; Haines, Diekhoff, LaBeff, and Clark 1986; Scanlon and Neumann 2002; McCabe, 2001). Since the early 1990s, the results of research in the area of collegiate cheating have raised concern among educators. In her *New York Times* article, Zernike (2002) quoted the Center for Academic Integrity's (CAI) statistics:

> [A total of] 27 percent of students questioned during the 2001-2 academic year said that falsifying laboratory data happened "often or very often on campus. Forty-one percent said the same for plagiarism on written assignments, 30 percent for cheating during tests or exams, and 60 percent for collaborating on work when a professor has instructed students to work alone. Moreover 55 percent of the students said it was not serious cheating to get questions and answers from a student who had previously taken a test, and 45 percent said falsifying lab or research data did not fall into that category either (p. A10).

Defining Academic Dishonesty
> Student cheating takes on many different forms. According to Pincus and Schmelkin (2003) "one of the main issues that emerge from the literature relates to inconsistencies in the definition of academically dishonest behaviors and the lack of consensus and general understanding of academic dishonesty among all members of the campus community," (Evans, McCarthy, & Hulsart, 2008).

Faculty members may classify plagiarism as an intentional or accidental act based on a variety of circumstances. The degree of seriousness as well as the criteria for determining

academic dishonesty may vary significantly among university faculty (Evans, McCarthy, & Hulsart, 2008). In their 1994 report, Gehring and Pavela defined academic dishonesty as:

> . . . an intentional act of fraud, in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization, or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic exercise. We also consider academic dishonesty to include forgery of academic documents, intentionally impeding or damaging the academic work of others, or assisting other students in acts of dishonesty (p. 5).

LaBeff, Clark, Haines, and Dickhoff (1990) suggest students employ the concept of situational ethics to rationalize cheating. LaBeff et al. conclude "that students hold qualified guidelines for behavior which are situationally determined. As such, the concept of situational ethics might well describe . . . college cheating [as] rules for behavior may not be considered rigid but depend on the circumstances involved" (p.191).

When questioned, students and faculty provide varying definitions of student cheating but the most important definition of cheating is the one that students themselves hold. Students are likely to sympathize with their colleagues who cheat thereby rendering the traditional definition of cheating anachronistic. Students respect the industriousness of their colleagues who cheat and may envy them as well. Modern cheating is far more tedious to define than cheating traditionally has been.

Stokes and Newstead (1995) state that while plagiarism and similar actions are universally accepted as cheating, such actions as neglecting to properly attribute sources in written work can be viewed from more than one perspective. Taking into account that students come from various cultural and educational backgrounds further blurs the definition of cheating. Students, both those that cheat and those that do not, perceive the lack of a tangible definition and the ethical and social implications of cheating as reasons why the practice has become a social norm, even if it is a social norm that is perceived by a faculty to be deceitful.

A cautionary word to faculty: to define student cheating is to put a transitory label on a process that is as ever changing and evolutionary as education itself. Rigid definitions of student cheating may, in fact, exacerbate the detection and the ongoing effort to detect and eliminate the possibility of cheating in the academic setting.

Who is Cheating?

According to Sclafani (2004), many parents believe that growing up in today's environment presents more complicated challenges for adolescents than in the past. Peterson and Seligman (2004) state teenagers need to develop certain attributes so that they are able to cope with the predictable difficulties they will face as they grow older. Farkas et al. (2002) surveyed from a national sample 1,600 parents with student in middle school and high school about the relative importance of teaching values are they relate to character development. The value ranked highest, chosen by 91 percent of the parents as absolutely essential to teach their children was "to be honest and truthful." During the spring of 2006, the Josephson Institute of ethics surveyed 36,000 secondary students and found that 60 percent admitted to cheating on tests and assignments. The easy answer is to assume that teens who cheat are those characterized by marginal abilities therein causing them to resort to academic dishonesty. However, when asked 3,000 students chosen for inclusion in the prestigious *Who's Who Among American High School*

Students, 80 percent acknowledged cheating on teacher-made and state test. According to Strom and Strom (2007), "The high proportion of these academic achievers who engaged in deception reflects a 10 percent increase since the questions was initially presented to honor students 20 years ago. Among the adolescent leaders who acknowledged that they had cheated on tests and assignments, 95 percent said that they were never caught and consider themselves to be morally responsible individuals (p. 105)". This last fact is in stark contrast to the 2002 Josephson finding in which 80 percent of respondents admitting to cheating believe that lying or cheating is not worth the risk because it hurt's one character (Smyth and Davis, 2004).

Research by McCabe and Trevino (1993) find that college business majors cheat more often than students from other academic disciplines, and Crown and Spiller (1998) report that business students are more tolerant of unethical behavior than are non-business students. Smythe and Davis (2004) conclude their research with:

> In a number of respects, business majors report a significantly lower degree of ethical behavior than non-business majors. Business majors are found to have a higher incidence of collegiate cheating and are more prone to consider cheating socially acceptable. In addition, although both types of majors consider falsification of a job application to be unethical, it is disturbing that business majors view it to be less unethical than do non-business majors (p. 106).

Why Students Cheat

It is intellectually convenient to associate student cheating with an overall decline in the ethical standards and morality of students today and although this may answer the question as to why students cheat, it fails to acknowledge that cheating has always been a part of academic life. Honor codes were not written in anticipation of a time when they would be needed; they were created in response to an existing problem. While intuitive explanations such as this are comfortable, research shows that a student's likelihood to cheat corresponds to their own self evaluation and perceived ability to succeed academically. Simply put, students with higher levels of self confidence are less likely to cheat or attempt to cheat than those with lower levels. Individuals cheat for different reasons. Some feel academic pressures are too much and course work too difficult to master by any other means. Others may feel that while earning a degree in a particular subject area will be of great benefit, the actual memorization and rigors of the curriculum is largely irrelevant in the real world.
According to Hutton (2007 p. 171), students cheat for the following reasons:
   (1) The benefit/cost tradeoff favors cheating. There is an extremely low probability of being caught and faculty are reluctant to report student cheaters;
   (2) the problem of unobservable behavior can be substantially mitigated by promoting academic integrity as the social norm, combined with better detection and reporting; and
   (3) the many factors that have contributed to the development of more and stronger relationships between college students have helped to promote cheating by making students more aware of its prevalence and influencing student perceptions of the acceptability of cheating among their peers.
 Hutton's conclusions are supported by results of the CAI survey in which 32 percent of students responding reported their primary reason for cheating was laziness, 29 percent said they cheat to achieve higher grades, and 12 percent cited pressures to succeed (p. 171).

What may be construed as the greatest concern of the CAI survey is fifty percent of students surveyed do not believe that cheating is wrong. Hutton writes that according to Ralph Wexler, vice president of the nonprofit Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics, "Being able to get away with cheating helps students justify it. Unfortunately, cheaters are rarely caught – less than 2 percent" (p.171).

How Students Cheat

Since students are aware that academic misconduct seldom results in punishment and therefore is a low risk venture, faculty must be on guard when administering tests. Recurring forms of student dishonesty involves writing on body parts, clothing, or belongings and copying answers from others. Technology has created many new, much more sophisticated methods with which to engage in cheating. Students with cell phones or personal data assistants (PDA's) can "beam" or call data to students wishing to cheat via text messaging, instant messaging, e-mail, and a camera or video recorder. These electronic devices are easily concealed by students under desk tops or in baggy clothing. The advent of Bluetooth technology is making this practice even easier than half a decade ago. Faculty utilizing PDA's and graphing calculators because they offer tools helpful in solving problems must be especially vigilant and understand the functionality of the device to curb such practices as pre-programming and multiple screens containing cheat data being minimized. Faculty using these devices need to remember that "technology contributes to learning and assessment, but devices must be applied in responsible and ethical ways" (Storm and Storm, 2007, p. 44).

Adults Model Cheating Behavior

Strom and Strom (2007) report students asked to identify situations that constitute cheating, conditions that might legitimize dishonest behavior, characteristics of cheaters, frequency of involvement in cheating, and motives for misconduct responded: "I need good grades to get into college, There is not enough time to do the work, everyone else is cheating, This course is not important to me, Other." What is disconcerting in this response is the "other". For this category, students often mentioned "adults teach this kind of behavior by example" (p. 43).
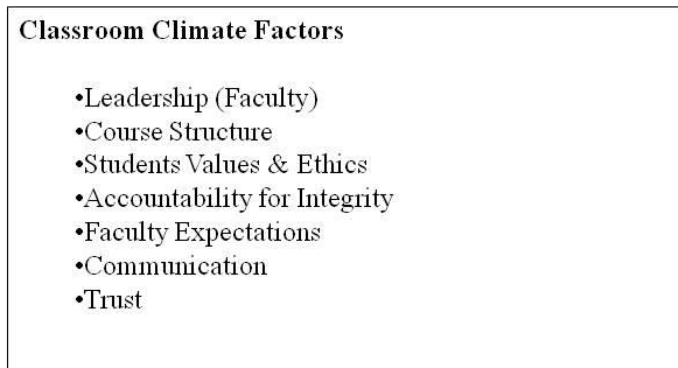
While faculty fixates on the academic misdeeds of students, we would do well to look within to our own transgressions. In October 2003, the U.S. Naval Academy demoted Brian Van DeMark, a member of the history faculty for plagiarism (Steinberg, 2003). In the fall of 2002, the president of Hamilton College, Eugene M. Tobin, resigned after plagiarizing a speech from an Amazaon.com book review (Lewin, 2002). Richard L. Judd, president of Central Connecticut State University, retired after he was found to have plagiarized material from the *New York Times* and other sources in 2004. Bartlett and Smallwood (2004) report the practice of plagiarism among faculty is widespread.

CREATING AN ETHICAL CLASSROOM CLIMATE

Climate is described as measurable dimensions of an environment. Factors that determine climate include leadership, structure, historical background, accountability, behavioral expectations, communication and trust (Vorbecke et. al., 1998). Within an academic course,

whether a traditional classroom setting or online, these factors are easily translated. Direct leadership is the faculty member teaching the course. Structure refers to the course setup to include lecture delivery, assessments, assignments and learning objectives. The personal values and ethical systems of individuals within the classroom are the factor historical background. Accountability refers to adhering to standards of academic integrity and the courage to confront academic dishonesty. Behavioral expectations for academic integrity must be explicitly stated by the faculty. Communication is important for reinforcing acceptable behaviors with direct, constructive and timely feedback. Finally, trust reflects feelings of mutual respect and support in an ethical classroom climate.

Figure 1. Factors Influencing Classroom Climate

Classroom Climate Factors

- Leadership (Faculty)
- Course Structure
- Students Values & Ethics
- Accountability for Integrity
- Faculty Expectations
- Communication
- Trust

Leadership and Ethical Classroom Climate

The most important determinate of an ethical classroom climate is the day-to-day style of direct leadership. Faculty members play an important role in the process of creating and maintaining academic integrity. Faculty members influence expectations and behaviors of students within their classes. For this reason it is important for a faculty member to asses one's own level of integrity. Kouzes and Posner (1993) pose four questions to measure one's own trustworthiness as a leader:

1) Is my behavior predictable or erratic?
2) Do I communicate clearly or carelessly?
3) Do I treat promises seriously or lightly?
4) Am I forthright or dishonest?

Because trust is a reciprocal process, faculty must take the lead for creating an ethical climate in the classroom. When trust is given and it is clearly visible that the person being trusted is acting in a trustworthy way, this ensures confidence in that trust to be increased (Galford & Drapeau, 2002). Leadership's role is to facilitate this process. Two important leadership roles include team building and modeling trust. Team building contributes to building trust because interdependence creates the dynamic for reciprocity. Reciprocity is set up by the complex task environment and the limitations of time, skill and control that the individuals possess (Reina & Reina, 2008).

Leadership within an organization includes direct leadership (faculty) and top leadership (the University). Distinguishing between these specific levels of leadership has been found to affect the outcomes of empirical studies of leadership and trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). In addition McCarthy (2006) found that direct leaders play an important role in facilitating top leadership. Faculty members act as a medium between the University leadership and students for promoting academic integrity.

Trust is a multidimensional concept that includes individuals within an organization as well as the nature of outcomes and the consequences of those outcomes. Trust in leadership is not only an attribute of the individual leader or collective leadership it is also a product of the outcomes of leadership actions (Galford & Drapeau, 2002). Below is a model of organizational trust that displays this concept as an essential element of the organizational system. A system is a collection of interdependent components acting together toward a common goal (Ronen & Pass, 2008). A system has boundaries that partition it from the environment in which it operates. In Figure 2, the Ethical Classroom Model**,** the t*rust climate* operates within the larger university environment. Within this trust climate is the reciprocal trust relationship between faculty and students.

Reina & Reina (2006) describe the "capacity for trust" as a result of three types of trust: competence trust, contractual trust and communication trust. Competence trust relates to individuals' abilities to complete work tasks. Contractual trust, as called "trust of character", refers to individuals' attributes such as honesty, consistency, and fairness. Communication trust refers to the dissemination and accuracy of information. Reina & Reina (2006) developed a model of trust capacity based on these three elements. Below is an adaptation of this model to create a new model of "Ethical Classroom Climate". Classroom climates are embedded within the larger university environment. Within the classroom climate there is a cyclical trust process being created by faculty and students.   This cyclical process is bounded by the individuals' (faculty and students) character, consistency of behavior, competency and communication. It is important to note that consistency is separated in this model from character because individuals of unethical character may also be consistent in their behavior. Consistent unethical behavior can have a detrimental impact on classroom climate.

Figure 2: A Model of Ethical Classroom Climate
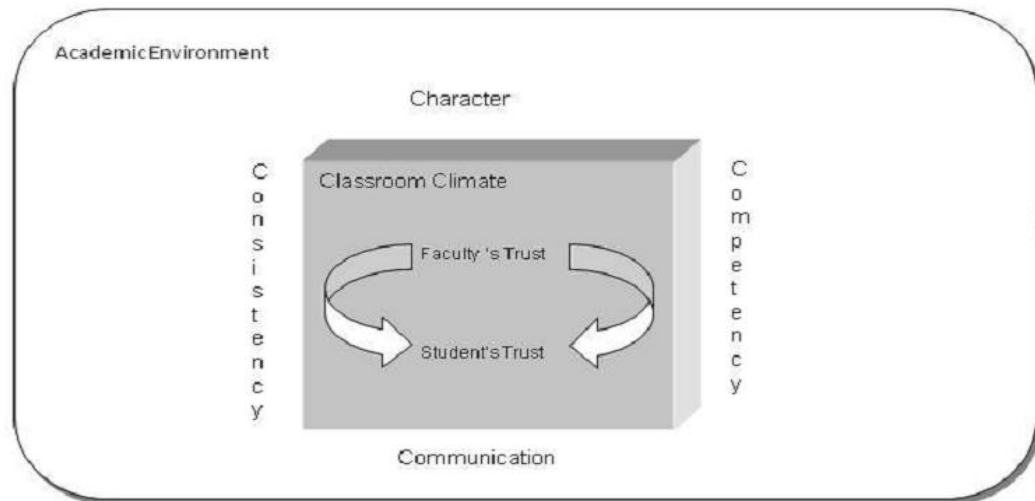
Instructional Methods and Ethical Classroom Climate

Course structure refers to the arrangement of the coursework and is an equally powerful determinant of ethical classroom climate. A paradigm shift in instructional and assessment pedagogy is needed. Creating a classroom environment where there are few cheating opportunities is one possible solution for addressing academic dishonesty. Educators can use reasons that students cheat to raise integrity in the classroom. Students are often frustrated with these assignments and assessments that require memorization and regurgitation (Strom & Strom, 2007). This is one reason students give to justify cheating (Genereux &McLeod, 1995) and could be circumvented by involving the student in assignment and assessment creation. Gardner (1998) argues that "the relationship between [students'] active involvement and effective learning is so strong that 'the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy to increase involvement in learning (p. 74).

Figure 3: Course Structure

Assessments & Assignments

▶ essays v. multiple choice
▶ proctored exams
▶ multiple assignments and quizzes
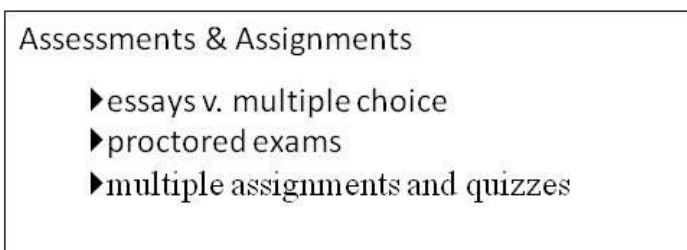
Another contributing factor to academic dishonesty is related to social networks of students (Hutton, 2006). Relationships established among students in teams and cohorts provide opportunities for unethical behavior (Hutton, 2006, p. 173). These same social networks can be used to deter academic dishonesty. Student teams frequently are used in business education for

completing projects (Bacon et al, 1999). Allowing student teams to also collaborate on instructional methods and assessments gives them ownership of the process (Scurrah, 2001) which may in turn lessen their desire to engage in academic dishonesty.

Conclusions

Previous suggestions for dealing with student cheating have either focused on institutional policies such as codes of conduct, preventing cheating through more controlled teaching environments, and educating students on the policies and consequences of academic dishonesty. While individual faculty members do not have direct control over institutional policy, they can control the learning environment. Faculty can enhance the classroom or online course climate by explicitly stating expectations for academic integrity. The ethical climate of the classroom can be reinforced by using preventative measures regarding student cheating such as vigilance in monitoring exams and checking for plagiarism. Being consistent and following through with consequences has been found to decrease instances of academic dishonesty. Faculty must also redesign assignments and assessments in an effort to deter academic dishonesty.

A current trend in higher education is to strengthen social networks to improve student retention. These social networks have, in turn, been cited as a factor in the increase in student cheating. This does not infer it is necessary to discourage collaboration and student networking in the classroom but suggests a paradigm shift in instructional and assessment pedagogy is needed. Creating a learning environment where there are few cheating opportunities is the best solution for addressing this problem. Methods advocated for creating such an environment include collaborative assessments, open book tests, and in-class writing and research assignments uniquely related to individual students. Moving away from assessments that encourage rote memorization and regurgitation will not only decrease opportunities for cheating but will also encourage student creativity and higher-order thinking.

Faculty must create an ethical classroom climate which can be accomplished with a twofold approach: First, individual faculty members must model integrity as well as communicate what constitutes cheating and the consequences of academic dishonesty. Second, opportunities for student cheating can be deterred through the redesign of the learning environment to include instruction and assessment pedagogy. The prescriptions for reducing academic dishonesty must be feasible for individual faculty members. Changing what instructors immediately control is the first step in lowering instances of academic dishonesty. Faculty must create ethical classrooms climates. Creating an ethical classroom climate can be accomplished with a two-fold approach. First individual faculty members must emphasize what constitutes cheating and the consequences of academic dishonesty. Second, opportunities for student cheating can be deterred through the redesign of the learning environment to include instruction and assessment pedagogy.

REFERENCES

Bacon, D.R., Stewart, K.A. and Silver, W.S. (1999). Lessons from the best and worst student. teams experiences: How a teacher can make the difference. *Journal of Management Education, 23*, 467-488.

Baird, J.S. (1980). Current trends in college cheating. *Psychology in Schools*, *17*, 512-

522.

Bartlett, T., & Smallwood, S. (2004, December 17). Four academic plagiarists you've never heard of: How many more are out there? *Chronicle of Higher Education.* Retrieved October 17, 2007, from http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v51/i17/17a00802.htm.

Campbell, W. (1931). Student honesty as revealed by reporting of teacher's errors in grading. *School and Society, 33*, 97-100.

Crown, D. & Spiller, M. (1998). Learning from the literature on college cheating: A review of empirical research. *Journal of Business Ethics, 17*, 683-700.

Drake, C. A. (1941). Why students cheat. Journal of Higher Education 12, 41820.

Evans, S., & Hulsart,R., & McCarthy, V. (2008). Mission Possible: Curbing Student Cheating. Proceedings from *North American Management Society 2008 Conference Focus on Change: Succeeding in a Global Environment April 2 - 4, 200. Drake Hotel - Chicago, IL.*

Farkas, S., Johnson, J., Duffett, A., Wilson, L, and J. Vine. 2002. *A lot easier said than done: Parents talk about raising standards in today's America.* New York, NY: State Farm Companies Foundation and Public Agenda.

Forte, A. (2004). Business Ethics: A Study of the Moral Reasoning of Selected Business Managers and the Influence of Organizational Ethical Climate. *Journal of Business Ethics*. *51*(2), 167-173.

Galford, R. & Drapeau, A.S. (2002). *The Trusted Leader.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Gardiner, L.F. (1998). Why we must change: The research evidence. *Thought and Action*, *14,* 71-88.

Gehring, D., and Pavela, G. (1994) *Issues and perspectives on academic integrity.* Washington, D.C.: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Haines, V., Dickhoff, G., LaBeff, E. & Clark, R. (1986). College cheating: Immaturity, lack of communication, and the neutralizing attitude. *Research in Higher Education*, *25*, 342-354.

Hartshorne, H. and May, M. (1928). *Studies in deceit.* New York, NY: MacMillian.

Hutton, P. (2006). Understanding student cheating and what educators can do about it. *College Teaching, 54*, 171-176.

Josephson Institute of Ethics (2002). The ethics of American Youth. Retrieved October 17, 2007 from, http://www.josephsoninstitute.org/98/survey/98survey.htm.

Kerkvliet, J. & Sigmund, C.L. (1999). Can we control cheating in the classroom? *Journal of Economic Education*, *30,* 331-51.

Kouzes, J.S. & Posner, B.Z. (1993). *Credibility: Why leaders gain and lose it, why people demand it.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

LaBeff, E., Clark, R., Haines, V. and G. Diekhoff (1990). Situational ethics and college student cheating. *Sociological Inquiry, 60,* p. 190-198.

Lewin, T. (2002, October 3). Hamilton College president resigns over speech. *The New York Times*, p. B10.

McCabe, D. (2001). Cheating: Why students do it and how we can help them stop. *American Educator*. *Winter*, 38-43.

McCabe, D. and Trevino, L. (1993). Academic dishonesty: Honor codes and other contextual influences. *Journal of Higher Education. 64*, 522-538.

McCabe, D. (1992). The influence of situational ethics on cheating among college students.

Sociological Inquiry, 62(3), 365-374.

McCarthy, V. M. (2006, Apr) "Facilitative Leadership: A Study of Federal Agency Supervisors" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the The Midwest Political Science Association, Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, Illinois*. Retrieved 2008-06-26 from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p137946_index.html.

Nuss, E. (1984). Academic integrity: Comparing faculty and student attitudes. *Improving College and University Teaching, 32*, 140-144.

Peterson, C. and Seligman, M. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press and the American Psychological Association.

Pincus, H.S, & Schmelkin, L.P. (2003). Faculty perceptions of academic dishonesty: A multidimensional scaling analysis. *Journal of Higher Education*, *74*.

Reina, D.S. & Reina, M.L. (2008) *Trust and betrayal in the workplace: Building effective relationships in your organization.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Robbins, S. & Coulter, M. (2005). *Management, 8th Edition.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Ronen, B. & Pass, S. (2008) *Focused Operations Management.* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Scanlon, P. & Neumann, D. (2002). Internet plagiarism among college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*, 374-385.

Sclafani, J. (2004). *The educated parent: recent trends in raising children*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Scurrah, W. L. (2001). Enclosure and the commons of the mind. Unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of College Composition and Communication. Denver, CO.

Smythe, M. & Davis, J. (2004). Perceptions of dishonesty among two-year college students: Academic versus business situations. *Journal of Business Ethics, 51*, 63-73.

Spears, L.C. (1998)*, Insights on Leadership: Serviced, Stewardship, Spirit, and Servant-Leadership.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Steinberg, J. (2003, October 29). Naval Academy demotes professor over work. *The New York Times*, p. A21.

Stokes, A. and Newstead, S. (1995, June). Studies of undergraduate cheating: Who does and why? *Studies in Higher Education, 20*(2), 159-72.

Strom, P.S. & Strom, R.D. (2007). Curbing cheating, raising integrity. *The Educational Forum*. Retrieved September 5, 2007, from www.eddigest.com.

Strom, P. and Strom, R. (2007, Winter). Cheating in middle school and high school. *Forum, 71*, 105.

Verbeke, W., Volgering, M., & Hessels, M. (1998). Exploring the Conceptual Expansion within the Field of Organizational Behaviour: Organizational Climate and Organizational Culture. *Journal of Management Studies*. *35*(3), 303.

Wexler, R. (1993, June). Update: Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics. *Signs of the Times,* 6.

Zernike, K. (2002, November 2). With student cheating on the rise, more colleges are turning to honor codes. *The New York Times,* p. A10.