

Study of academic dishonesty among students at a tertiary university: Forms, prevalence, and associated factors



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to analyze the prevalence of academic dishonesty among college students at a university and to investigate the different forms it can take and how common these behaviors are. Additionally, the study aimed to identify the factors related to academic dishonesty. The participants were undergraduates studying various subjects at the university. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews to gather both quantitative and qualitative information about experiences with academic dishonesty. The findings highlighted the common types of academic dishonesty among college students and revealed how often these activities occur. The research also identified potential factors contributing to academic dishonesty, such as peer influence, perceived academic pressure, and a lack of proper instruction in ethical principles. These findings enhance our understanding of academic dishonesty among college students and provide educational institutions and policymakers with valuable insights to develop effective strategies and interventions to address this issue and promote academic integrity.

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1. Introduction

Teachers, staff, and school personnel widely recognize that educating and shaping individuals is a challenging task. This collective effort is both fascinating and demanding. Educational institutions, both locally and globally, constantly face a range of simple and complex problems. One of the most common, yet often overlooked, issues is academic dishonesty among students at all levels of education. The occurrence of cheating among college students is a widespread phenomenon, raising questions about how, when, and why students are driven to engage in such behavior.

Cheating is a problem that affects both institutions and society. Academic dishonesty is more harmful to the educational community than stakeholders realize because it negatively impacts faculty, students, and administrators (Dendir and Maxwell, 2020; Elsalem et al., 2021; Eshet et al., 2023; Küçüktepe, 2010; Rahman et al., 2023). For

example, Dendir and Maxwell (2020) explained that academic dishonesty costs institutions administrative time, leads to a loss of integrity within the school, and results in students lacking respect for ethics and values. Faculty members highlight the failure of institutional leadership to establish and enforce integrity standards and practices across campus. Academic dishonesty is a serious threat to students and educational institutions worldwide. However, according to the Center for Academic Integrity factsheet, "cheating no longer carries the stigma that it once used to."

In 1940, only 20 percent of college students admitted to cheating during their academic years. Today, that number has increased to between 75 and 98 percent. A survey by Zhao et al. (2022b) of 2,000 high school students found that 74 percent admitted to cheating on an exam in the past year to get ahead (Henderson et al., 2020). The survey indicated that students are now more willing to cheat, and parents, teachers, and school officials are struggling to reverse this trend. Academic cheating is gradually eroding students' values, raising concerns about their willingness to commit other unethical acts to succeed in life.

What is more alarming about academic dishonesty is the apparent change in students' attitudes toward it. The study by Abusafia et al. (2018) found a modest increase in overall cheating

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but noted significant increases in the most explicit forms of cheating. Disturbing behavior was observed among female respondents, who engaged in collaborative cheating on assignments and homework that required individual effort. Although no significant increases were seen in cheating on written assignments and other academic exercises, the researchers concluded that this may be due to the changing attitudes of students toward cheating, influenced by personal and contextual factors.

In the Philippines, research on academic dishonesty primarily focuses on cheating in assignments and examinations. Several studies have examined college settings (Cerdeña-Navarro et al., 2022; Iberahim et al., 2013; Küküktepe, 2011; Zhao et al., 2022a), while others have investigated cheating in elementary and high schools (Alajami, 2021; Bin-Nashwan et al., 2023; Clemmons et al., 2022; Comas-Forgas et al., 2021; Humbert et al., 2022; Yee et al., 2024).

There is limited published literature on academic dishonesty in the Philippine setting. To address this gap, the researcher conducted an initial survey within the research locale. Questionnaires were distributed to 115 college faculty members teaching in a classroom setting to determine the incidence and prevalence of academic dishonesty among college students over the last two semesters. Out of the 115 faculty, 83 responded. The results showed that 76 (60 percent) of the respondents reported incidents of cheating in their classes, while only 7 (6 percent) reported no incidents.

When asked about the types of academic work where dishonesty was most commonly observed, 65 faculty members mentioned quizzes, 55 mentioned examinations, 35 mentioned assignments, 20 cited research work, and 14 mentioned projects. Regarding forms of cheating, 62 faculty members witnessed students copying answers from a seatmate, 32 reported cheating via cell phones, 31 observed the use of crib notes or cheat sheets, 22 encountered internet-related dishonesty, and 17 mentioned incidents of plagiarism.

The results of this initial survey indicate that academic dishonesty is prevalent within the scope of this research. This issue is serious and warrants further investigation. As a Christian academic institution committed to societal transformation through academic excellence and service grounded in Christian values, the primary aim is not only to produce academically qualified graduates but also to cultivate graduates who understand and value integrity in all aspects of life.

The purpose of this study is to explore the problem of academic dishonesty more deeply by understanding the underlying factors contributing to this widespread issue. The academic community can develop solutions through formative and institutional programs and policy development to address the factors influencing academic dishonesty among students. As a sociology student, the researcher believes this study is crucial for shaping an academic community where honesty and integrity

are valued. This is essential for realizing the Vision and Mission of the tertiary university in the Philippines, aiming to produce graduates who can contribute to societal transformation.

2. Methods

The methodology used in this study was the descriptive correlational method of research. The descriptive method aims to describe "what exists" or "what is" about a particular phenomenon, while the correlational study examines the relationship between variables by determining how changes in one variable relate to changes in another variable.

The study was conducted in the different colleges of the tertiary university located in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija. The respondents of the study were 400 freshmen and graduating students of this university who were enrolled during the first semester of the school year 2015-2016. Purposive sampling was used, and the selection of respondents was based on specific criteria set by the researcher. The 400 respondents were equally obtained from freshmen and graduating students of the university.

A survey questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data gathering. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Socio-demographic profile, forms and prevalence of academic dishonesty, prevalence of academic dishonesty in academic exercises, and respondents' level of agreement with factors influencing academic dishonesty. The questionnaire items were constructed based on reading materials that identified factors associated with academic dishonesty.

The validity and reliability of the instrument were established through a dry run and pre-testing with a panel of experts and a small sample of college students. The questionnaire was reviewed for clarity, appropriateness, and length of time needed for completion.

Data were gathered by distributing the survey questionnaires to the identified respondents in their respective college classrooms. After retrieving the questionnaires, the data were encoded in MS Excel (Hernandez, 2023) and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

The data analysis included using frequency and percentage distribution to describe the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. The weighted mean was employed to depict the prevalence of academic dishonesty and the agreement level regarding factors influencing it. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient measured the relationship between variables, while paired sample T-Test statistics tested significant differences in academic dishonesty prevalence across different year levels.

3. Results and discussions

The majority (57.5%) of the respondents were female, aged 15 to 18 years. Most of them, 394 or

98.5%, were single, and 282 or 70.5% were Roman Catholic. Most of the respondents' parents were college graduates, with a combined monthly income between 21,000 and 40,000. The majority of respondents, 297 or 74.26%, were living with their families, while 81 or 20.5% were not. The findings showed an overall weighted mean of 3.10, interpreted as "sometimes," indicating that respondents engaged in academic dishonesty 1 to 3 times in the last three months. The most common form of academic dishonesty was "discreet verbal sharing of answers," with a weighted mean of 2.1, followed by "use of mobile phones through text messaging," with a weighted mean of 2.18, and "making hand gestures or sign language" with a weighted mean of 1.95. These forms were all interpreted as "sometimes," meaning respondents engaged in these forms of dishonesty at least 4 to 6 times in the last three months.

The overall weighted mean for academic exercises where respondents usually commit academic dishonesty is 1.85, interpreted as "sometimes." The top three academic exercises where students usually cheat are "assignments," with a weighted mean of 2.39, followed by "short quizzes," with a weighted mean of 1.97, and "group requirements," with a weighted mean of 1.94. All of these are also interpreted as "sometimes." This indicates that respondents have committed academic dishonesty in these exercises at least 4 to 6 times in the last three months.

Respondents description of the factors associated with academic dishonesty:

- a) Attitude factor: The description of the respondents' attitude in terms of academic dishonesty got an overall weighted mean of 2.62 and was verbally interpreted as "moderately agree." This means that the respondents were tolerant of academic cheating despite their disagreement that it is an acceptable and necessary behavior. However, it becomes acceptable to them if they see that everyone is cheating and gets away with it.
- b) Teacher factor: The description of the respondents of the teacher as a factor in academic dishonesty got an overall weighted mean of 3.10 and was verbally interpreted as "moderately agree." This means that the respondents moderately agree with the statements describing teacher as a factor associated with academic dishonesty. Though they revere teachers as someone who are not tolerant of cheating, their description changes when teachers don't reprimand cheaters, when they are "close-knit friend groups" with their classmates, and when they are lenient and don't discuss the lesson well.
- c) Subject factor: The description of the respondents of the subject as a factor associated with academic dishonesty got an overall weighted mean of 3.11 and was verbally interpreted as "moderately agree." This concludes that the respondents moderately agree with statements about subjects that may promote academic dishonesty. The

respondents consider cheating behavior if their subject is not interesting, not directly related to their courses, and if the subject is heavily loaded with too many requirements.

- d) Test factor: The description of the respondents of the test as a factor associated with academic dishonesty got an overall weighted mean of 2.85 and was verbally interpreted as "moderately agree." This means that the respondents may be influenced to commit academic misconduct when they experience complexities in their tests or exercises. The respondents consider resorting to an academic misdemeanor if the questions in the examination were not discussed, were too difficult to understand, and a sudden change of test schedule was made.
- e) School-related factor: The description of the respondents of school policy as attitude in terms of the teacher as a factor associated with academic dishonesty got an overall weighted mean of 3.23 and was verbally interpreted as "moderately agree." Though the respondents were fully aware of the school policy about cheating, it becomes favorable to them if these policies were not being implemented and not properly broken down into creating an environment that will reduce the opportunity to cheat, such as lack of supervision during examination, crowded classroom and free sitting arrangement.
- f) Peer influence: The respondents' views on peer influence in relation to academic dishonesty had an overall weighted mean of 2.96, which was verbally interpreted as "moderately agree." The respondents were more likely to engage in academic dishonesty if friends or classmates were involved. Additionally, the perception of cheating as a negative behavior diminishes when cheating is done to help a friend. A significant relationship was found between the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and the prevalence of academic dishonesty. Specifically, the year level was significantly related to planning with friends or classmates to cheat during tests, quizzes, or exams. The age of the respondents also showed a significant difference in the likelihood of planning with others to cheat. Moreover, living arrangements with family were correlated with the use of the internet, such as social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, estimated monthly income was significantly correlated with presenting someone else's finished work as one's own and tampering with answers or scores during self or peer-checking. This relationship between the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and the forms and academic exercises where students typically commit academic dishonesty highlights various influencing factors.

The results showed a significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and the academic activities in which they typically commit academic dishonesty. There was a significant

correlation between the civil status of the respondents and their engagement in individual assignments, term papers, and research. This correlation extended to long quizzes and preliminary examinations. The respondents' living conditions were also linked to group assignments, term papers, and research. Specifically, civil status significantly correlated with individual tasks such as term papers and research, as well as preliminary examinations. This may be because many single students view passing preliminary examinations as a confidence booster for succeeding in the subject. Additionally, the living arrangements of students significantly correlated with group assignments (term papers and research). This may be due to the preference for group study to leverage collective effort. However, without clear guidelines on the limits of

collaboration, this can lead to opportunities for academic dishonesty, particularly when students face deadlines for reports, research, and other academic requirements. Table 1 shows the summary results of relationships.

The respondents agree that peer pressure greatly influences their decision to commit academic dishonesty. Cheating becomes acceptable if everyone is doing it. There is a significant difference in the prevalence of academic dishonesty when comparing different year levels. It was found that academic dishonesty is more common among fourth-year college students than among freshmen. Graduating students feel more pressure to finish their studies and graduate on time, making them more likely to engage in academic dishonesty.

Table 1: Relationship between the forms and prevalence of cheating and the factor influencing academic dishonesty

Factors	Description
Attitude	The attitude factor does not have a significant relationship with academic dishonesty. The respondents do not engage in academic dishonesty practices. This suggests that academic dishonesty can be reduced, if not completely eliminated, with the right approach. However, the strong influence of other related factors discussed in this study undermines the respondents' positive attitudes toward avoiding cheating
Teacher	The teacher factor has a significant relationship with the use of cheat sheets, impersonating someone to take exams, sharing test papers, using the internet (e.g., social media like Facebook), presenting someone else's work as one's own, and tampering with answers or scores during self-checking or exchange checking. Students agree that the presence and quality of the teacher influence the occurrence of academic dishonesty
Subject	The subject factor is related to all forms of cheating mentioned in this study. It is connected to discreet verbal sharing of answers, using cheat sheets during tests or exams, using mobile phones for text messaging, making hand gestures or using sign language, sharing test papers, planning with friends or classmates to cheat, presenting someone else's work as one's own, and tampering with answers or scores during self-checking or exchange checking. Respondents agree that the perceived importance of subjects influences students to engage in academic dishonesty
Test	A significant relationship was found between tests as a factor influencing academic dishonesty and the use of cheat sheets, making hand gestures or using sign language, sharing test papers, planning with friends or classmates to cheat during tests, quizzes, or exams, and tampering with answers or scores during self-checking or exchange checking Respondents agree that the level of difficulty and their understanding of test can influence cheating.
School policy related	It showed that school-related factors are correlated with the use of cheat sheets, impersonating someone to take exams, sharing test papers, planning with friends or classmates to cheat during tests, quizzes, or exams, using the internet (e.g., social media), presenting someone else's finished work as their own, and tampering with answers or scores during self-checking or exchange checking. The respondents' respect for school policy was a determining factor in the occurrence of cheating practices
Peer related	A significant correlation was found between peer-related factors and various forms of academic dishonesty. These include using cheat sheets during tests or exams, using mobile phones for text messaging, making hand gestures or using sign language, sharing test papers, planning with friends or classmates to cheat during tests, quizzes, or exams, using the internet, presenting someone else's finished work as one's own, and tampering with answers or scores during self-checking or exchange checking

4. Conclusion

This investigation yielded these conclusions:

- 1) Most responders were young girls, single, Roman Catholic, living with their families, and earning 21,000 to 40,000 a month.
- 2) Respondents have committed academic dishonesty 1 to 3 times in the past three months, with "discreet verbal sharing of answers," "use of mobile phones via text messaging," and "making gestures or sign language" being the most common. Respondents have undertaken these activities 4–6 times in the last 3 months.
- 3) Respondents generally cheat on "assignments," "short quizzes," and "group requirements (term paper/research)." The responders have committed academic dishonesty in these academic tasks at least 4–6 times in the past 3 months.
- 4) Responders academic cheating factors: Attitude factor. Respondents respect academic honesty. Cheating becomes acceptable when everyone does it and gets away with it (Yee et al., 2024). Teacher

factor. Respondents view teachers as anti-cheating. If their teacher doesn't admonish cheaters, be friends with their peers, be lenient, or communicate the material adequately, they may contemplate academic dishonesty. Subject Factor. If their subjects are boring, unrelated to their courses, and overloaded with requirements, responders are prone to cheat. Test Factor. Complexities in tests and exercises, such as unanswered questions, tough questions, and rapid schedule changes, may lead responders to commit academic misconduct (Ibrahim et al., 2013). School Policy-Related Factor. Though they knew the school's cheating policy (Alajami, 2021). If policies were not implemented and effectively broken down to create an environment that reduces the opportunity to cheat, such as lack of supervision during exams, crowded classrooms, and free seating, they would benefit. Peer influence. Friends or classmates will cause responders to cheat. Respondents are unlikely to view assisting a friend as cheating.

5) Correlation results: Year level and planning to cheat on a test, quiz, or exam, as well as age and planning to cheat, were found to be significantly related by statistical analysis. Family living arrangements and internet use (FB, Twitter). Presenting someone else's finished work as your own and manipulating answers or scores during self- or exchange-checking are similarly strongly connected with estimated monthly income. These variables are not unrelated. It showed that students' sociodemographic profiles were linked to academic dishonesty. Civil status affects individual requirements, term papers, and research. Long quizzes and prelims were also linked. The respondents' living conditions also affected group requirements, term papers, and research. The respondents' civil status is also connected with academic exercises, particularly term papers and research. Student living arrangements also affect group requirements (term paper, research). Cheating was linked to teacher, subject, exam, school, and peer influence. Attitude did not correlate with academic dishonesty. Fourth-year students are more likely to cheat than first-year students. Graduating students may feel extra pressure to finish their coursework on time to graduate. They are most prone to cheat since they cannot afford to fall behind.

4.1. Recommendation

- 1) Academic institutions must work passionately to reduce or eliminate cheating. Regular meetings should produce effective responses to advanced cheating strategies.
- 2) Faculty and counselors should be aware of cheating strategies and limit cell phone use in class. Avoid cheating by assigning seating. Proctors should verify student identification and teachers should monitor cheating.
- 3) Academic heads should collaborate to review academic exercises and ensure they are cheat-proof. Plagiarism workshops and assignments should encourage originality.
- 4) Implementing stringent no-cheating policies, minimizing bias, and maintaining excellent teaching standards should regulate contextual elements promoting academic dishonesty. Innovative teaching methods should engage students.
- 5) Schools should enforce cheating policies, educate incoming students on discipline, and run anti-cheating initiatives. Consistent orientation and therapy reduce peer influence.
- 6) Offices should track cheating and evaluate countermeasures. Academic integrity codes foster ethics and discipline.
- 7) Additional studies should examine academic integrity variables and create institutional initiatives and links to combat academic dishonesty.

Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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