Academic Honesty

Student Affairs Sub-Committee on Academic Honesty
Purdue Student Government
Purdue University
April 1st, 2016

Summary

The Academic Affairs Committee is comprised of several faculty members and several undergraduate and graduate students; its Sub-Committee on Academic Honesty is comprised of several undergraduate students within Purdue Student Government who represent various demographics and students. The focus of the sub-committee was to research various methods of academic dishonesty that the students have either witnessed or have heard about during their time at Purdue. The committee chair, Renner Winston, was able to attend a seminar at Purdue University with a focus on academic integrity to provide information to the sub-committee before its first session. The students were also provided some common statistics from the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. The students researched different methods of cheating while coming up with a proposed solution for each method mentioned below.
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Statistics on Academic Dishonesty

The students were provided the following information from the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities from 2013: 676 total discipline cases have been adjudicated by the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities; 202 (9.8%) of those cases have involved violations of the policy on “Academic Dishonesty; All Other Dishonesty;” 98 (48.5%) students in those cases accepted responsibly for the charges that were assigned; 83 (41.0%) students in those cases were found responsible for the charges that were assigned; 21 (10.3%) students in those cases either had their university level charges dismissed or were found not responsible; 91 (45%) students in those cases self-identify as International students.

Several common examples of a violation were: unauthorized sharing of homework (most common in Engineering and Computer Science courses, specifically ENG 132, CS 159, CS 240); plagiarism and improper citations/references; cheating such as copying from others exams, using unauthorized material during an exam, or attempting to resubmit graded homework/exams for extra points. More egregious examples were: purchasing papers from internet websites and submitting those as original works; entering faculty member offices to remove exams/homework assignments without authorization; entering university computing systems to alter/change recorded grades; Attempting to have teacher/instructor manuals shipped to students enrolled in a class

As mentioned in the previous statistics, 45% of the cases in violation of the policy on “Academic Dishonesty; All Other Dishonesty” were international students. Some common reasons to explain this trend would include: different perceptions/understanding of what “collaboration” and “group work” means; lack of understanding of faculty member expectations for particular assignments/coursework; pressure centered on academic success coming from their home; concern over the creation of a “record” of the incident. It should be noted that many of these concerns are the same for domestic students as well.
Student Thoughts on Information Provided by the Academic Integrity Seminar

An Academic Integrity seminar took place on March 4th, 2016 at Purdue University with guest from other colleges around the area. Renner Winston, chair of the sub-committee on Academic Honesty, was able to take notes and provide them for discussion during the sub-committee meetings. The following paragraphs include the topic of discussion as well as the student’s thoughts and perspectives.

International Students view academic dishonesty differently than students in the United States do. Part of this issue is due to a different testing system to get in to college compared to our testing system. In some cultures, using someone else’s work can be perceived as a sense of honor for the other person; the issue with this is when there is not a proper citation of the referenced material.

Fraternity systems have a large amount of previous class files and binders that are used to help new members while helping to improve the chapters GPA. This was not perceived as negative by the committee, because if a professor were to hand back exams to the students after taking it, then it should be expected by the professor that it will be studied for future exams.

Some students are ashamed to reach out to their professors if they are struggling with their courses. If this is the case, then students will sometimes resort to cheating on their assignments in order to get the work done. This could be a result of students being unprepared academically when they get to Purdue, so we must trust that the Office of Admissions is recruiting the right students that are getting in to Purdue. If students are ashamed to reach out to professors, a method could be set in place to incentivize students to reach out if they are in need of help in lieu. It could also be recommended to professors by the university that this is a root cause of cheating, so that professors can promote their students to come to them if they need any help. It was also noted that a potential solution would be to reach out to the parents of the students who are in violation of the academic honesty policy.

In some rare cases, a student will give an emotional excuse as to why they cheated and convince the professor to not turn them in. This can end up doing more harm than good because the student could have given the same response to a different professor in a different class at a different time. The program is in place that if a student is caught cheating, then the Dean of Students will be notified. If there is a common trend with that student, then they are removed from the university. The issue is that some professors are not reporting every single case because it might be a minor infraction and they trust that the student will not do it again. The sub-committee did not know the correct solution, but it was recommended that there is a software that allows professors to record these “minor infractions” so that there is not a severe punishment the first time around for that student.
The final topic was on the website “Chegg,” an online homework help site. If the professor gives out problems from the end of a chapter from a well-known text book, the student is capable of going online to find every solution to their problems for a small fee. This is most commonly used by students with large course loads who have not properly managed their time to complete the homework on their own. It is much easier to “Chegg” their homework assignment for 30 minutes, than it is to actually work out the problem on their own for 3 hours. This is only helpful in the short-term, because when it is time for the exam, the student will not know how to properly think through a problem to solve it. Once a student uses this website for the first time, it becomes much easier to use it again because they do not want to face the time commitment of solving a lengthy homework assignment. It was recommend that professors give out homework assignments that were not previously recorded online or in a text book, because there will more than likely be a solution to it online.

Conclusions

The information provided by the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities to the sub-committee was very helpful in looking at common trends with academic dishonesty. The sub-committee was able to look at the data, analyze it, and relate it to the information provided by the Academic Integrity seminar. The information provided allowed the sub-committee to think about their own experience at Purdue and communicate a realistic student-perspective on the data that was provided.
References
