

ACADEMIC COMPETITIVENESS AMONG
GRADUATE STUDENTS

by

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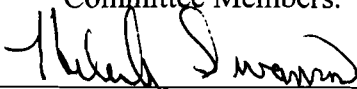
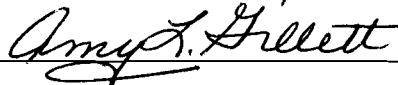

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to conduct a literature review investigating the level of academic competitiveness among graduate students in campuses across Wisconsin. Academic competition is impacting the students in our educational system. The pressure to excel has become a motivation behind many students engaging academically dishonest behaviors. These pressures have been associated with three areas of focus. These areas can be referred to as (1) real competition, the competition between peers; (2) perceived competition, the competition a person believes is occurring between themselves and others; and (3) self competition, the way a person continuously pressures himself to become better than he is in academics. These pressures are creating a competitive environment in schools, leading students to use alternative methods to cope with their pressures, such as academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty entails different variations

of dishonest behavior. The variations on which this study focuses are cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and facilitating others in performing acts of academic dishonesty.

The educational system has been impacted by students using a variety of forms of academic dishonesty. Schools have been placed in a situation where they are searching for effective interventions to help prevent academic dishonesty. Two of the approaches being utilized by many of the educational institutions to deter academic dishonesty are honor codes and strict consequences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	1
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	4
<i>Significance of the Study</i>	4
<i>Limitations of the Study</i>	5
<i>Assumptions of the Study</i>	5
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	6
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	7
<i>Premise of Academic Competitiveness</i>	7
<i>Different Perspectives of Academic Competition</i>	8
<i>Pressures Placed on Students to Succeed</i>	9
<i>Impact of Academic Competition</i>	16
<i>The Lengths Students will go to be Successful</i>	17
Chapter III: Methodology.....	24
<i>Subject Selection and Description</i>	24
<i>Instrumentation</i>	24
<i>Data Collection Procedures</i>	26
<i>Data Analysis</i>	26
Chapter IV: Results.....	28

<i>Academic Environment</i>	29
<i>Specific Behaviors</i>	33
<i>Summary</i>	42
Chapter V: Discussion.....	44
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	44
<i>Methodological Procedures</i>	44
<i>Major Findings</i>	45
<i>Critical Analysis</i>	48
<i>Limitations</i>	51
<i>Suggestions for Future Research</i>	52
<i>Recommendations</i>	52
<i>Conclusions</i>	53
References.....	55
Appendix: Research Instrument.....	58

List of Tables

Table 1: Graduate Students' Perceptions of their Academic Environment.....	30
Table 2: Number of Times in the Past Year Instructors Discussed School Policies ...	31
Table 3: Percent of Graduate Students Who Engaged in Academically Dishonest Behaviors.....	31
Table 4: Frequency Graduate Students Believe these Behaviors Occur... ..	32
Table 5: Number of Times Graduate Students Witnessed Academic Dishonesty.....	33
Table 6: Number of Times Graduate Students Reported a Student for Cheating.... ..	33
Table 7: Graduate Students Reported Participation in Academically Dishonest Behaviors.....	34
Table 8: Graduate Students Perceptions of the Seriousness of Each Behavior.....	37
Table 9: Perceived Likelihood of a Graduate Student's Behavior.....	39
Table 10: How Strongly Graduate Students Agree or Disagree.....	40

Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

A current and deeply entrenched issue in society has begun to surface as a prevalent concern in our educational institutions. The issue of competition amongst students has been impacting our educational environments for over a decade, but the implications of its impact are just beginning to be explored.

The current societal trend in our school systems appears to be a “cut-throat” approach where the environment seems to teach individuals to do what they must to get ahead of the next person (Johnson, 1997). This “cut-throat” approach has evolved to the level it is today through the generations, impacting our professions, our universities, and our primary school systems. The need to be the best has become the motivation behind many students in today’s academic settings, which has reinforced their competitive nature and shaped it into something that our society, based on morals and values, was not prepared for. In order for students to meet their own high expectations, some students have turned to using academically dishonest behaviors to enhance their academic abilities. These behaviors are negatively affecting our post-secondary institutions. Researchers are discovering that our universities are not prepared to cope with the increase of students who carry out academic dishonesty in order to edge out their fellow students, and/or attain a higher level of prestige (Johnson, 1997).

The pressure to succeed has a profound meaning to students of all ages (Raffini, 1986). These pressures may come from an array of sources, both externally and internally. Sources of pressure may come from their parents (Harp, 1995), from their peers (Tang & Zuo, 1997), and/or from themselves (Tang & Zuo, 1997). Covington and

Beery have investigated self-worth and its association to school learning. They stated, “Students’ self-worth is directly related to their ability to achieve—and to achieve is to be of value” (Covington, & Beery, cited in Raffini, 1986, p. 53). This statement has not only remained accurate, but has become more evident in our education system. At the collegiate level, the pressures students place on themselves becomes more strenuous than in high school. Students attending colleges and universities across the nation put tremendous pressures on themselves to achieve at a maximum level in all their classes. Their motivation may be that they want to get into graduate school (UCLA Academic Climate, n.d.), or they want to have an opportunity for a high-paying position once they finish their schooling, or it may be that they want to keep their image intact with their peers (Tang & Zuo, 1997). There is a wide array for possibilities of why students put the pressures on themselves to the extent that they do, but this is not the only pressure these students may be feeling.

External pressures are also placed on students to succeed in academics. The pressure to succeed is placed on students very early in their academic careers by their teachers (Raffini, 1986). As students progress through the levels of academia, certain academic expectations follow them. The pressures associated with the categories teachers place students in, if they are “good” students, meaning they do well in their subjects, or “poor” students, meaning they struggle with their course work, is continuously reinforced by educators (Bloom, cited in Raffini, 1986).

Current trends in classrooms are to use different forms of pressure to motivate students to do well. Often educators use forms of pressure that cause embarrassment or negative reinforcement for their students. The pressures to succeed academically from

both internal and external sources are driving students to discover ways to give them an edge on their peers. Unfortunately, many students are taking a path of deception and dishonesty (Aggarwal, Bates, Graham, & Khan, 2002).

Academic dishonesty is thriving at all levels of our education system. “Dishonest behaviors at universities have been associated with high achievers and a desire to get a better mark” (Aggarwal et al., 2002, p. 532). There is a consensus among researchers that academic dishonesty has been on the rise over the past two decades (Aggarwal et al., 2002; Athanasou, 2001; Brown & Emmett, 2001; Gerdeman, 2000; Glick et al., 2001; Pullen, et al., 2000). Dishonest academic behaviors are having an impact on our educational institutions. Schools now have to pay for screening services to evaluate students’ papers and assignments in order to assure that the submitted materials have not been plagiarized (Athanasou, 2001).

A wide variety of forms of academic dishonesty are predominant in our educational system. Some examples of the types of academic dishonesty students resort to include copying peers’ assignments and using crib notes (Gerdeman, 2000). Students are obtaining copies of their tests prior to the examination, and they have been known to illicitly collaborate with peers on assignments and/or exams (Gerdeman, 2000). They are even going to the extent of using blackmail and/or bribery (Athanasou, 2001). This is affecting the teachers’ ability to trust their pupils. Many new rules on academic dishonesty and honor code have been put in place to help combat this growing concern, especially at the collegiate level (Academic Dishonesty, n.d.).

As the level of competition between students continues to increase, so may the number of students who are willing to disregard the rules so they can keep their academic

edge on their peers (Brown & Emmett, 2001). Although most people can identify former or current classmates who appear extremely conscious of academic ranking and who are very competitive in nature, little empirical research is available on the topic.

Purpose of the Study

Although there is an abundance of news media reports and articles pertaining to academic dishonesty and competitiveness, particularly at the undergraduate level, there is little empirical research focusing on problems at the graduate school level. The purpose of this study is two fold. The first purpose is to complete a review of the literature discussing the prevalence and impact of academic competitiveness and dishonesty at the graduate school level. This information will be used to (1) explain the premise of academic competitiveness (2) discuss different perspectives of academic competition, and (3) discuss the pressures involved to succeed. The second purpose is to assess the impacts of academic competition on graduate students through survey administration, and examine examples of the extreme lengths students go to in order to succeed through survey administration.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to assess the impact that academic competition is having on our educational system, how it is affecting the students, and the effects on the academic institutions they attend. This information can help determine if the current framework for our educational system is acting as the most conducive learning environment for students or as an obstacle for student achievement. It will also help identify how schools can reduce the amount of academically dishonest behaviors that occur through understanding the types of internal and external pressures students feel. It

will also make universities more aware of the types of academically dishonest behaviors are most prevalent and provide some insight to how frequently they are occurring.

Limitations of Study

The following limitations must be considered, which may impact the integrity of the information being presented. There are four projected limitations that may impact the information presented. The first limitation is use of an online survey to collect information. Historically, online surveys have a poor response rate overall, therefore limiting the research sample size. The second limitation is the way prospective respondents are contacted and asked to be a participant in the study. Traditionally, prospective online survey participants are contacted through a message via electronic mail. Because of this technique, many of the prospective respondents may choose to not open the electronic message and view the contents for a wide variety of reasons. The third limitation is the type of information being collected through the survey. The type of information needed to address the research questions requires the survey to ask very personal questions about perceptions and behaviors of the respondents. This may deter many prospective respondents from participating in the study. The fourth limitation is the research available on the topic. Researchers have not specifically studied this topic, so there is not any direct research available from which to compare. Because there is no direct research, the information collected and used for this study had to be drawn from many different topics of research.

Assumptions

When embarking on this study, the researcher made several assumptions. The first assumption is that people are competitive and it is in their nature to compete against

others. The next assumption is that people want to be the best at what they do when it is important to them and will go to great lengths to be the best. The last assumption is that many people are not honest when faced with adversity; therefore they tend to choose the easiest path of obtainment.

Definition of Terms

Academic Competitiveness: The act of competing in an educational setting, (school, university), against one's peers and/or classmates.

Academic Dishonesty: Definitions of academic dishonesty provided by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. The definition includes:

Cheating: Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise.

Fabrication: Intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

Facilitating Academic Dishonesty: Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism: Intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as your own in any academic exercise.

Graduate Student: A person who has graduated from a 4-year academic institution and is attending or has attended a professional school.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This review of literature addresses the current issues and concerns associated with academic competitiveness. The topics to be addressed are the premise of academic competitiveness, the different perspectives of academic competition, the pressures placed on students to succeed, the impact of academic competition on students, and the lengths students will go to be successful; including academic dishonesty.

Premise of Academic Competitiveness

The premise of academic competitiveness stems from our society. In order to understand this concept, looking at competition as part of a large and complex system is required. The main foundation to our system is society. The social masses work together and determine what is considered to be important and of value. Over the years, the masses have placed a high value on being recognized for high achievement in any area. Because society has placed such an emphasis on high obtainment, it creates and reinforces a society embedded in competition. This competitive society impacts most every aspect of our daily lives, especially in our academic settings.

Educational systems begin perpetuating competition in the early years of education. Teachers begin by reinforcing competition through giving more attention, incentives, and social prestige to students who excel in their classes. The school system then tracks such items as class ranks and performance on local, state, and national academic tests, comparing students against their peers. It utilizes a grading system that evaluates and places a value that can be compared to others on their work. As students get older, schools utilize competition to determine which students qualify to attend post secondary education. From that pool of individuals, competition is again utilized to

determine which students are allowed to continue on to graduate or professional schools. These individuals are typically rewarded by receiving employment in positions that are more prestigious and have a higher salary. Unfortunately, a society based on competition is negatively impacting our entire educational structure and placing educators in a difficult situation on how to effectively deal with the negative implications of academic competition.

Different Perspectives of Academic Competition

The word "motivation" is derived from the word "motive," which is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "the force that causes a person to act" (Merriam-Webster, 1989, p. 479). Motivation can come in positive forms, such as receiving praise and rewards, or in negative forms, such as humiliation. A student's motivation can stem from many areas. Some forces that may motivate students are: wanting to be the best in their classes, wanting to be looked up to by their peers, trying to get into the college or graduate program they desire, trying to gain employment with the employer they wish, or perhaps financial goals.

Researchers have investigated students' motivations. In Bandura's social cognitive paradigm, he discussed two factors that are considered important for motivation. These two factors are self-efficacy and the perceived value by the student. (Bandura, cited in Sadrine, 2000). Bandura suggested that individuals are motivated by attempting to maintain or enhance themselves, and the value the person places on the goal. A different perspective, known as the expectancy theory, suggests that individuals determine the amount of effort they are willing to exert based on three perceptual relationships, which are: a) expectancy--an individual's subjective estimation of the

likelihood of successfully performing a particular behavior; b) instrumentality--a person's subjective estimation of the likelihood that a particular behavior will be rewarded; and c) valence--the positive or negative value that a person places on a reward (Hancock, 2001). This theory suggests that a person's motivation to perform a behavior is weighed by the person's belief that the behavior is likely to elicit a reward, and the value the individual has placed on attaining that reward. In both models, researchers agree that the basis behind a person's motivation is the value they place on their goals (Hancock, 2001).

Little research has been done that focuses on how motivation impacts students at the collegiate level. The prevalent literature suggests that some of the motivational factors that drive competition between students are trying to obtain higher grade point averages to enter graduate school, competition for employment following graduation, and financial rewards such as their salary (Pullen et al., 2000). Although there is scant research available discussing motivation, it appears to be an underlying driving force behind a student's competitive nature. Based on the expectancy theory, competitive students appear to be highly motivated individuals who are focused on obtaining their goals. Their motivation and efforts have been found to have an impact on their academic achievements.

Pressures Placed on Students to Succeed

An underlying issue to address when discussing academic competitiveness is the pressure students feel to succeed. The pressure to perform well in academics comes from both internal and external sources. These sources may take many forms, such as peer pressure, parent expectations, teacher expectations, self expectations, or preservation of self-image.

Researchers have discussed that competitive students begin feeling pressures to succeed in academics at a very early age (Raffini, 1986). They discovered that the students who perform well in first grade were expected by their teachers to perform equally as well in the 11th grade. When looking more indepth at this trend, they went on to find, "...the correlation between measures of school achievement at grade three and grade eleven is about .85, demonstrating that over this eight year period the relative ranking of students in a class or school remains almost perfectly fixed" (Bloom, cited in Raffini, 1986).

The pressures felt by students to succeed appear to be a driving force in their lives. This is then used to create their motivation to perform well in academics. These factors all act as underlying dynamics which all interact to create competition. Competition can be thought of as the act of attempting to attain a goal to the exclusion of others attempting to obtain the same goal. There are three variations that are discussed when looking at competition: 1) real competition, 2) perceived competition, and 3) self competition.

Real competition. The concept of real competition is the topic most discussed in the literature (Johnson, 1997). Real competition is competition between students that has been measured through research. These are students and educators who have participated in surveys and studies that have provided researchers information to determine if students are competing against one another. Competition is not an unhealthy act. On the contrary, competition is beneficial in that it motivates people to perform at their highest potential, however, overemphasis on competition can be detrimental. Two areas where you may see real competition are in classes and for positions with employers.

A study conducted in 1998 by Zeng and Le Tendre investigated adolescent suicide and academic competition in East Asia, where there is speculation that their society is the most competitive in the world. The investigators found through their research on middle school and high school age students that overall competition appears to have increased between 1955 and 1990 (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998). Zeng and Le Tendre also noted that even though the rate of suicide has fallen during that time period, the number of student suicides that are associated with academic competition has increased. Le Tendre's research also examined the same variables in college and university students. He found that "the average competition ratio for all universities increased from 4.9 to 9.4 from 1960 to 1990, most notably among private universities" (Le Tendre, 1998, p.520).

Raffini has also discussed how competitive students are in the United States (Raffini, 1986). In the United States, real competition between students has been found to begin early in their education. Our educational system is designed so that most schools rely heavily on using norm-referenced materials. The purpose of norm-referencing is to evaluate and compare one student's ability with that of other students. By using norm-referenced evaluations, educators may determine what is considered "average" performance. This allows them to formulate a baseline so they can then determine other categories for students to be placed, such as "high" performance and "low" performance (Raffini, 1986). By using this type of evaluation system, students learn that their value and image is based on how well they perform (Raffini, 1986). Students are consistently made aware of their value by their instructors through testing, quizzes, and assignments which provide them with constant feedback on their level of performance. This

information is sometimes used to organize students in the classroom by their performance (Raffini, 1986). This evaluative process is utilized throughout the entire educational system. Many states have students take national achievement tests each year, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, to assess their ability level from year to year. Guidance and career counselors create norm-referenced databases that rank students against their classmates. Most universities require information from norm-referenced tests, such as the ACT or SAT, to help determine if the students demonstrates the level of performance they are looking for in their students. This system of evaluation helps create real competition between students.

Real competition can also be seen for positions in the workforce. The job market is a highly competitive atmosphere where many individuals compete for the few positions available in their chosen field. Positions with agencies such as the FBI (Honors Programs, n.d.) are highly sought after by many individuals. Unfortunately, the reality is that there are very few positions available in these agencies. Because these positions are rare, yet highly sought, these agencies can be highly selective in their hiring process. This creates a highly competitive environment between those individuals vying for these positions. Only individuals with strong academic credentials, a particular type of personality, and a high level of motivation are considered for these programs (Honors Programs, n.d.).

Perceived competition. Trusty, Robinson, and colleagues described how perceived competition is seen as the situation whereby a person feels that he or she is competing against someone else, but have no evidence that the other person is competing against them. An area in the literature where perceived competition has been examined is

between genders (Trusty et al., 2000). There are stereotypes for both males and females that circulate throughout society. In order to try to eliminate stereotypes between genders, those perceived as having weaknesses in certain areas will often attempt to overcome the stereotypes by competing with those perceived to be strong in those areas.

A study was conducted in 2000 to evaluate the effects of gender on socioeconomic status and its implications on academic performance for males and females (Trusty et al., 2000). In the article, Trusty and colleagues discussed the academic stereotype that males have a tendency to perform better in mathematics and females have a tendency to perform better in reading. The researchers took these stereotypes and looked at how each gender's performance in their area impacted their choice of which field to study in postsecondary education. They concluded that "over the last three decades, girls are becoming less stereotypical than boys in their occupational aspirations" (Trusty et al., 2000).

A different study, completed in 2001, looked into sex and ethnic group differences in accomplishment measures at the graduate school level (Stricker, Rock, & Bennett, 2001). The foundation for Stricker and his associates' research was based on the stereotype that males have a higher level of performance in mathematical areas and females perform better in language areas, regardless of ethnicity. Their findings indicated that these stereotypes were inconsistent. Males and females did not differ in their levels of performance (Stricker et al., 2001).

Self-competition. Self competition is the third area relating to academic competition. Self-competition is when a student continues to push her or himself to perform better. They compete with themselves, in a sense. These are the students who

are not satisfied with their performance unless they have obtained perfect marks in their classes. These individuals can be identified as the ones who need to be the best at whatever they do (Harp, 1995, p.117).

The literature on self-competition does not discuss any positive outcomes for it, but focuses on its negative aspects. Students reported to researchers that most of the academic pressures they feel are “self-induced” (Harp, 1995). These self-induced pressures are seen as a starting point where other reactions culminate. Zeng and Le Tendre (1998) suggested that adolescent attempted suicide and academic competition are related factors. Their thoughts were that students who attempt suicide may be responsive to scholastic pressures to succeed (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998). Their model of the “Impact of Academic Competition on Adolescent Suicides” displays a three step progression. The first step is “increased awareness of competition for high school and college placement over time” (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998, p. 527). This leads into “heightened perception of competition among students” (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998, p. 527). The model concludes with “higher likelihood for emotionally troubled adolescents to cite ‘school’ or ‘exams’ as reason for suicide” (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998, p. 527). Based on their model, Zeng and LeTendre indicated that the pressures students put on themselves to perform well in school may cause emotional difficulties. They also found that “pressures caused by competition on entrance exams have been linked to higher rates of juvenile delinquency, bullying, and suicide” (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998, p. 519).

Similar findings about the impact of self-competition are discussed in research done in 1995 by Harp. Harp investigated students who become involved in academic decathlons. He discovered that students created a lot of pressure for themselves as they

competed for places on their school's team (Harp, 1995). Students study year around just to compete for one of the nine spots on the team. They go to the extent of not participating in other extracurricular activities that may interfere with their study time. If the students are deemed capable enough to be one of the team members, the pressure and dedication required of themselves increases. These students do not have part-time employment because it interferes with their study time. The members of the teams put pressure on their peers to study with partners on weekends, and each student's average evening study time was approximately five hours long (Harp, 1995).

Another negative implication of self-competition is when it is indirectly forced upon students. These situations occur when students find themselves in competitive classrooms where their teachers use such tools as class rankings to motivate their students. Gay and Rueth's (1992) study on the negative side effects of competition and retention included an example of such a situation. An educator decided to give a test to her students. She then took their results and had them sit in the classroom in rank order so that the students who did the best in the class sit in the front row and the students who did the worst sat in the back row (Gay & Rueth, 1992). From their research they found that in situations where the educator places his/her students in an order based on their performance on an assignment, approximately 25% of the class who had a history of academic difficulty were focused on finding a way to stay out of the "stupid seat" (Gay & Rueth, 1992).

The Impact of Academic Competition

Academic achievement, or how well a student performs in school, is suggested to be a related factor to motivation (Hancock, 2001). The degree to which a student is

motivated to do well on a task will have an impact on how well he or she performs on that task. Research was conducted that focused on how motivation impacts a student's academic achievement (Hancock, 2001). Hancock proposed from his findings that "a student's motivation parallels their findings related to a student's achievement" (Hancock, 2001, p. 6). In other words, the amount of motivation people feels towards obtaining their goal is equal to how well they will succeed in obtaining the goal.

Other researchers have similar findings relating to how motivation relates to achievement (Albaili, 1997). Albaili looked at the differences between low, average, and high-achieving college students. He found that motivation was the most powerful factor separating low-achieving students from high-achieving students (Albaili, 1997). Those students who were highly motivated to perform well put forth the most effort preparing for their classes. They attended all their classes and reviewed their materials every night for 2 to 3 hours. These students consistently performed at a higher level than their peers. Albaili's research also suggested that students who do not perform well in academics have a tendency to not be motivated and did not put in much effort preparing for their classes. The literature suggests that a person's motivation drives his/her achievement in academics.

A team of researchers led by Raffini investigated the effects of competition on young students (Raffini et al., 1986). The results of this study indicated that teachers often use competition as a means to motivate their students. One method the researchers commented on was the use of impacting the student's image. An example of how this strategy works is the instructor will inform the students that they will be taking an exam. The teacher then seats the students by test performance, placing the students who

received the highest marks in the front row from left to right. This rank order placement continues until the student who performs the poorest on the exam is seated in the last seat in the classroom (Gay & Rueth, 1992). The researchers found that this procedure has a negative effect on the students in many ways. The students in the class were forced to become competitive and compete among one another because they were trying to avoid the shame associated with being known as the one who did the poorest on the exam.

The Lengths Students will go to be Successful

Academic Dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is another area to discuss when looking at factors associated with academic competitiveness. Dishonest behaviors from students have been associated with high achievers and a desire to get better grades (Aggarwal, Bates, Graham, & Khan, 2002). Academic dishonesty has many factors associated with it. Some of the most common behaviors blanketed by the term academic dishonesty are: cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating, and facilitating academic dishonesty.

Researchers have devoted much time to examining the notion of cheating at the collegiate level. They describe cheating as “a problem of tremendous magnitude on U.S. campuses” (Brown & Emmett, 2001, p. 247). The estimated percentages of students who have cheated vary from study to study. In 1993, Brown and Emmett conducted a study that proposed that approximately 70% of the student body from nine medium to large universities had cheated on their academics (Brown & Emmett, 2001). A year earlier a study was conducted in 2000 examining the percentage of students who have cheated while in college. Their research estimated that approximately 80%-90% of the students surveyed have cheated in their classes (Pullen, Ortloff, Casey, & Payne, 2000). Other research has reported that approximately two in three students have cheated at the college

level (Gerdeman, 2000).

Cheating is not exclusive to the undergraduate level. Aggarwal et al., have reported that in medical school, approximately 56% of the students have cheated (Aggarwal, Bates, Graham, & Khan, 2002). Doctors who have been surveyed reported that approximately 58% admitted to cheating while in medical school (Glick, Letters, Rennie, & Crosby, 2001).

Different variables associated with cheating have been researched. One area is how social groups impact the likelihood of cheating (Storch & Storch, 2002). It has been reported that factors such as being a member of a sorority or fraternity increases the likelihood that a student will cheat. Other variables that researchers reported as increasing the probability that a student will cheat is if they are members of many clubs, participate in a large number of activities, or are part of an athletic team (Storch & Storch, 2002). There are also reports that the number of students who cheat increases as they progress through each year of college until their senior year. The number of students cheating then decreases (Tang & Zuo, 1997). No further explanations were provided by the authors why this tendency occurs during their senior year. The literature also discussed the impact that students who cheat have on those who do not cheat. They have found that cheating has a negative impact on those who do not cheat because it raises the level of the grading scale that most professors use (Gerdeman, 2000). Many professors use a grading curve for their classes. The grading curve allows a certain percentage of students to receive "A's," "B's," down to "F's." When students receive higher grades because of cheating, it sometimes moves the students who did not cheat down on the percentage scale.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of cheating that is becoming more prevalent in colleges and universities. Plagiarism is defined as intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as your own in any academic exercise (Academic Dishonesty, n.d.). In a poll taken in March of 2001, nearly half of all students admitted to plagiarism at some time in their lives (Cowen, 2001). Nearly 100 cases involving plagiarism are reviewed by the disciplinary committee at UC-Davis each year (Cowen, 2001).

Plagiarism is discussed by researchers as being one of the fastest growing and most prevalent forms of cheating (Athanasou, 2001). Its rapid growth has been associated with the use of computers. The Internet provides students with a magnitude of resources that are easy to access. The Internet also provides websites that allow for students to download and purchase material from someone else (Cowen, 2001). In addition, plagiarism is reported to occur more frequently in larger universities than in smaller colleges (Thorpe, Pittenger, & Reed, 1999). These authors attributed this trend to the notion that smaller colleges are more likely to use essay exams, rather than multiple choice exams. They also attributed this trend to the notion that smaller class sizes do not allow the same opportunities to cheat (Thorpe et al., 1999). They have estimated that approximately 16% of cheating occurs in the form of plagiarism (Athanasou, 2001).

Fabrication. Fabricating work is another form of academic dishonesty that occurs in schools. Fabricating is the intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise (Academic Dishonesty, n.d.). There is little research available about fabrication. The literature does discuss some of the ways that students fabricate. Two of the most used methods of fabricating are copying from

peers and making up false information. (Athanasou, 2001; Glick et al., 2001; Thorpe, et al., 1999). Students who do not work collaboratively with their peers, but use their work in order to get credit on assignments that they would not have completed is one example of fabrication. The literature suggests that approximately 68% of students in high school and college have reported fabricating an assignment (Athanasou, 2001). Athanasou's research was inspired by a study done by Who's Who Among American High School Students (1994) which identified that approximately 63% of females and 72% of males have copied someone else's homework. Athanasou's data also revealed that students who have fabricated assignments in high school are likely to continue their actions throughout college (Athanasou, 2001).

When examining this issue at the collegiate level, an example of the level that students will go to get ahead of their peers using fabrication is evident in the case of Shank v. University of Toronto (2002). In December of 2000, Roxanne Shank had just completed her first term at the University of Toronto's School of Law. While she was seeking employment for the summer, she submitted her December course results to prospective employers. The issue with this case was that she had changed some of the grades she had received in her courses by modifying her transcripts. This misconduct was discovered when a potential employer had contacted the university to confirm her marks in these courses. The university's disciplinary committee took action against Shank for her actions, but had to make an amendment to their disciplinary statutes because they did not have current rules established to handle such an incident.

Facilitation of cheating. The facilitation of cheating is another area that falls under academic misconduct. The term "facilitation" means that someone intentionally or

knowingly helped or attempted to help another person commit an act of academic dishonesty (Academic Dishonesty, n.d.). This includes helping a student to get ahead or preventing other students from being successful. One study estimates approximately 67% of students have participated in one method of academic facilitation (Athanasou, 2001).

Examples of ways people facilitate cheating that are aimed at students' success are teachers feeding answers to students in academic competitions and students impersonating judges in competitions (Harp, 1995). These examples are noted from a study investigating academic decathlons. In this study, the members of a high school academic decathlon team were facilitated by their teacher in order to help them win. The teacher had first gained copies of the examination for the competition. He then reviewed all the answers with his students who were participating in the competition. During an additional portion of the competition, the team's coach provided the students answers to one portion of the test. This team then had a peer steal the nametag of a judge for the competition and pose as the judge. The imposter then gave higher scores to his school's team and lower marks to the other teams competing in order to help improve their chances of winning (Harp, 1995).

Facilitating can also be used to hinder another student's success or ability to complete a task. Methods that are discussed in this area are, deliberately misplacing items, such as books or journals, so that other students cannot have access to them, tearing out important information from books and journals, and destroying other students' work (Athanasou, 2001). It is suggested that students perform such acts in order to give them an advantage over their peers by limiting their ability to succeed.

Because of the increased incidents and expanding methods by which students are engaging in academic dishonesty, schools are called upon to develop counteractive measures. One of these countermeasures is the implementation of honor codes.

Honor Codes. Honor codes are contracts drawn up by instructors stating that the student agrees to not participate in academic dishonesty in their class. Honor codes also remind students of what the consequences are if they choose to participate in academic dishonesty. McCabe and Bowers looked at the effectiveness of honor codes in schools. They reported that schools which utilize honor codes had an increase in cheating on tests and collaboration, while other forms of academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism, decreased (McCabe & Bowers, cited in Brown & Emmett, 2001). These findings were consistent with the findings of Glick et al. (2001). This group of researchers looked at academic dishonesty in medical school. The students at these medical schools had all signed written declarations about academic dishonesty. Glick and colleagues found that this sample of medical students were much more likely to cheat on exams than participate in other forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and fabricating materials. (Glick et al, 2001).

Applying consequences. A different countermeasure being used is more severe consequences for academic dishonesty. University administrators believe that students will be deterred from participating in academic misconduct if there are strict consequences associated with it. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be having enough of an impact on students. The numbers of students who participate in academic dishonesty are still increasing (Brown & Emmett, 2001).

Another means of safeguarding from academic dishonesty is using technological

services that specialize in checking student papers for plagiarism. These sites are able to search for specific words or phrases in other papers linked to the site. An example of this type of site is turnitin.com (turnitin.com, n.d.). Universities may find these services very useful in counteracting academic dishonesty. The problems with these services are that they are often cost and time prohibitive. Universities must pay for the use of these services and educators may also find it difficult to review every document turned into them.

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the individuals who participated in this study, how they were selected, the instrument used, and the methodology used for this study, including data analysis.

Participants

The participants in this study were recruited from graduate programs throughout the University of Wisconsin System. The 13 universities which have graduate programs were contacted via electronic mail. The researcher requested a list of students enrolled in any of their graduate programs to be sent to him, including their electronic mail address. Of the 2011 students contacted through electronic mail and asked to complete the survey, 122 were completed, for a return rate of 16.5%.

The demographic information reported indicated 45% of respondents were in their 1st year of graduate study, 46% were in their 2nd year, and 9% were in their 3rd year of their graduate program. No participants reported being in their 4th year through 7th year or more. Information about the participant's gender indicates 27% of the respondents were male and 63% of the respondents were female. Respondents also indicated 43% were studying education, 28% in health sciences, 16% in social sciences, 8% in business, 3% in engineering, and 1% were in humanities and the arts. The majority of individuals in the sample reported maintaining a grade point average between 3.8 and 4.0 (66%) and 3.5 and 3.7 (23%).

Survey Instrument

The academic competitiveness among graduate students was measured using a survey that was developed by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The instrument

was constructed on a design format used by Donald McCabe, a professor at Rutgers University, and reviewed by a group of graduate professors from both the School Psychology and Education programs at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. As shown in Appendix, the survey consisted of 79 items. A 5-point Likert scale was used, with varying terms, in order to place a value to 74 of the 79 questions on the survey. One item on the survey asked the respondents to select either “yes” or “no” to the question asked and four items collected demographic information, including their year in their program, gender, field of study, and grade point average.

The next 27 items addressed the participants’ perceptions of and behaviors relating to their academic environments. These 27 items focused on describing the students’ academic environments regarding academic dishonesty. Of the 27 items, the first eight asked respondents to rate various types of items regarding perceptions of competitiveness between students, pressures placed on graduate students, and student knowledge of academic dishonesty policies at their universities. The next five questions asked respondents to report how often in the past year their instructors discussed various school policies. The next five items asked how often, on average, the participants engaged in various academically dishonest behaviors. The next seven items asked them to rate how frequently they thought various academically dishonest behaviors occurred in their program. The final item of this section required respondents to report whether or not they have ever reported another student for cheating.

The next 48 items examined specific behaviors of students while at graduate school. The first 15 items asked students to report how often, if ever, in the past year they have engaged in particular academically dishonest behaviors. The next 15 items

asked the same questions as the first 15 in this section, but asked the respondents to evaluate how serious they thought each of the behaviors they have engaged in were. The proceeding six items concerned how likely the respondents felt a graduate student would engage in certain behaviors. The final 12 items focused on how strongly the respondents agreed or disagreed with a list of statements, regarding academic dishonesty, academic pressures, and the competitiveness in graduate school.

Procedures

A letter was sent via electronic mail in October, 2004 to 2011 graduate students enrolled in a graduate program within the University of Wisconsin System. The letter contained information about the purpose of the study and an independent website address to contact if they were willing to participate in the study. The letter also included information explaining to the potential participants that their participation was voluntary and they could refuse to participate at any time. It was also explained that their participation in the study was completely confidential. A follow up e-mail letter was sent to all 2011 potential participants six weeks after the first mailing. The purpose of this second contact was to attempt to maximize the number of respondents.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed with respect to the research purposes stated in Chapter I. The research purposes and the method of analysis are two fold. The first research purpose is to complete a comprehensive review of the literature discussing the prevalence and impact of academic competitiveness and dishonesty at the graduate school level. This information will be used to (1.) explain the premise of academic competitiveness, (2.) discuss different perspectives of academic competition, and (3.) discuss the pressures

involved to succeed. The second research purpose is to (4.) assess the impacts of academic competition on graduate students through survey administration, and (5.) examine examples of the extreme lengths students go to in order to succeed through survey administration.

The survey was created with the intention of being descriptive in nature. The data was analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. No further statistical analyses beyond descriptive data were used.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study is to cover two objectives. The first objective was to complete a review of literature discussing the prevalence and impact of academic competitiveness and dishonesty at the graduate school level. This information was used to explain the premise of academic competitiveness, to discuss different perspectives of academic competition, and to discuss the pressures involved to succeed. The second objective was to assess the impact of academic competition and examine examples of the extreme lengths students go in order to succeed through survey administration. This included examining motivations behind why students compete for grades and evaluating what were the most prevalent forms used by students to enhance their academic edge. Directions on how to access the survey were sent to 2011 graduate students throughout the University of Wisconsin System. A letter was sent via electronic mail, containing information about the purpose of the study and an independent website address to contact if they were willing to participate in the study. The letter also included information that explained to the potential participants that their participation was voluntary and they could refuse to participate at any time. The letter went onto explain to the potential participants that their participation in the study is completely confidential. A follow up electronic mail letter was sent to all 2011 potential participants six weeks after the first mailing. The purpose of this second contact was to attempt to maximize the number of respondents who participated in the study. Because the participants contacted an independent website to complete the survey which coded their names, there was no way of determining which graduate students responded to the first letter. Descriptive data, response frequencies, and percentiles were used to describe the survey results.

Academic Environment

Tables 1 through 6 display perceptions graduate students have about their academic environments. Respondents were asked to rate various types of items regarding perceptions of competitiveness between students, pressures placed on graduate students, and student knowledge of academic dishonesty policies at their universities. The data in Table 1 indicated respondents felt the severity of penalties for cheating at their universities was average (59%) or better (37.6%) and that there were some questions about the average graduate student's understanding of these policies. Approximately 28% of the sample reported students have a below average or worse understanding, whereas the remaining 72% felt students have an average or better understanding of the campus policies. The majority also reported believing their university's policies around academic dishonesty were effective (82.4%) in deterring academic dishonesty.

When asked to evaluate the amount of pressure they felt in their academic environments, respondents reported professors placed mostly average (39.2%) to above average (41.7%) amounts of pressure on them to excel, 85% of the students placed more than the average amount of pressure on themselves to excel academically, and 59.8% felt their families placed average amounts of pressure on them to excel in their studies.

When respondents were asked to report their perceptions of the level of competitiveness in their school environment, 23.3% felt the competitiveness amongst students in their program was below average, 30.8% believed the competition was average, and 25% thought it was above average. On the other hand, 38.3% reported their drive to excel in their program to be above average and 44.2% felt their drive to be excellent.

Table 1

Graduate Students' Perceptions of their Academic Environment

Item	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
Severity of penalties for cheating	.8%	2.6%	59%	21.4%	16.2%
Average graduate student's understanding of campus policies concerning student cheating	6%	22.4%	43.1%	17.2%	11.2%
Effectiveness of these policies	1.8%	15.8%	60.5%	14%	7.9%
Amount of pressure professors place on students to excel academically	3.3%	3.3%	39.2%	41.7%	12.5%
Amount of pressure graduate students place on themselves	2.5%	1.7%	10.8%	48.3%	36.7%
Amount of pressure graduate student's families place on them	1.7%	9.4%	59.8%	26.5%	2.6%
Competitiveness between students in your program	4.2%	23.3%	30.8%	25%	16.7%
Your drive to excel in your program	1.7%	.8%	15%	38.3%	44.2%

Note: The data has a 1% error band.

When looking further at graduate students' academic environments, a series of questions were asked that looked into how often instructors discussed policies concerning academic dishonesty. Table 2 represents the findings of these items. Just under half of the respondents (40.8%) reported academic dishonesty was discussed with them a few times within the past year and approximately 39% said plagiarism had also been discussed with them a few times. When asked if professors had discussed students inappropriately sharing work, 37.8% said never and 38.7% said a few times. Half of the

participants reported instructors had never spoken to them about cheating on tests or about falsifying or fabricating data (42.9%).

Table 2

Number of Times in the Past Year Instructors Discussed School Policies

Item	Never	Once	A Few	Several	Many
Academic Dishonesty	13.3%	28.3%	40.8%	15%	2.5%
Plagiarism	25.8%	22.5%	39.2%	9.2%	3.3%
Students inappropriately sharing work	37.8%	16.8%	38.7%	4.2%	2.5%
Cheating on tests or exams	50%	21.7%	22.5%	3.3%	2.5%
Falsifying or fabricating data	42.9%	22.7%	26.1%	5%	3.4%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

Students were also asked to provide information about how often they participated in particular academically dishonest behaviors. Table 3 outlines their responses to these questions. The majority of individuals selected never for academic dishonesty (78%), plagiarism (93.3%), inappropriately sharing work (80.8%), and cheating during tests or exams (90%). When asked if they had falsified or fabricated data, 57.1% said they had performed this behavior a few times.

Table 3

Percent of Graduate Students Who Engaged in Academically Dishonest Behaviors

Item	Never	Once	A Few	Several	Many
Other forms of Academic Dishonesty not specifically listed	78%	12.7%	9.3%	0%	0%
Plagiarism	93.3%	2.5%	3.3%	0%	.8%
Inappropriately sharing work	80.8%	13.3%	4.2%	.8%	.8%
Cheating during tests or exams	90%	7.5%	2.5%	0%	0%
Falsifying or fabricating data	12.6%	16.8%	57.1%	9.2%	4.2%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

The next portion of the survey asked the participants a series of questions that evaluated how frequently they believed particular behaviors happened in their graduate programs. Half of the respondents reported other forms of academic dishonesty not specifically listed and cheating during tests or exams occurred a few times in their program. Just under half of the respondents (44.9%) felt students never inappropriately shared work and the majority never falsified or fabricated data (81.9%) (See Table 4).

Perceptions of how often graduate students undermined one another was equally divided between never (40.5%) and a few times (40.5%) (See Table 4). A similar occurrence happened when participants were asked how frequently graduate students kept reserved materials for an extended amount of time. Just over 40% reported this behavior never occurred, but almost 37% reported the same behavior occurred a few times. The last item for this section examined perceptions of how often graduate students needed to receive medication and/or counseling to help cope with the pressures of graduate school. They selected a few times 45.3% of the time.

Table 4

Frequency Graduate Students Believe these Behaviors Occur

Item	Never	Once	A Few	Several	Many
Other forms of Academic Dishonesty not specifically listed	17.6%	16%	48.7%	10.9%	6.7%
Inappropriately sharing work	44.9%	14.4%	34.7%	4.2%	1.7%
Cheating during tests or exams	26.1%	14.3%	47.9%	10.1%	1.7%
Falsifying or fabricating data	81.9%	6.9%	10.3%	.9%	0%
Graduate students undermining one another	40.5%	11.2%	40.5%	3.4%	4.3%
Graduate students using/keeping reserved materials for extended periods of time	40.4%	14.9%	36.8%	5.3%	2.6%

Table 4 (continued).

Item	Never	Once	A Few	Several	Many
Graduate students receiving medication / counseling to help cope with the pressures of graduate school	18.8%	19.7%	45.3%	13.7%	2.6%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

Participants were also asked to report if they have ever witnessed another graduate student engage in an academically dishonest behavior (See Table 5). Never was the most frequent selection by the sample (68.3%). Approximately 32% reported they have witnessed a graduate student engage in academic dishonesty. Participants were also asked if they had ever reported another student for cheating. Ninety-six percent responded they have not reported a peer (See Table 6).

Table 5

Number of Times Graduate Students Witnessed Academic Dishonesty

Item	Never	Once	A Few	Several	Many
Seen another graduate student engage in academic dishonesty	68.3%	15.8%	13.3%	.8%	1.7%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

Table 6

Number of Times Graduate Students Reported a Student for Cheating

Item	Yes	No
Reported another student for cheating	4.2%	95.8%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

Specific Behaviors

Tables 7 through 10 display information regarding specific behaviors that some people might consider academically dishonest behaviors. Table 7 outlines the number of times in the past year the individuals in the sample engaged in any type of academically

dishonest behaviors. The vast majority of individuals reported they have never fabricated or falsified information in a bibliography (93.3%), never worked on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for them to do the work individually (73.3%), never received questions or answers from someone who had already taken the test (77.5%), never copied from another student during a test (95.8%) or without their knowledge (93.3%), and never helped someone else cheat on a test (91.6%). The respondents also continued this trend by reporting they never fabricated or falsified research (87.5%), paraphrased or copied written material from a source without referencing it (70.8%), and never turned in a paper obtained from a paper “mill” or website (98.3%) (See Table 7).

The last six questions asked in this section of the survey displayed the same findings. These items asked if the participants had ever used crib notes during a test, copied material from a written source and turned it in as their own work, turned in a paper copied from another student’s paper, used a false or forged excuse to obtain a time extension, turned in work done by someone else, and if they had ever cheated on a test in any other way. The findings identify that 93.3% of the participants selected never for all questions (See Table 7).

Table 7

Graduate Students Reported Participation in Academically Dishonest Behaviors

Item	Never	Once	A Few	Several	Many
Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography	93.3%	5%	.8%	.8%	0%
Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work	73.3%	15.8%	9.2%	.8%	.8%
Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test	77.5%	13.3%	5.8%	2.5%	.8%

Table 7 (continued).

Item	Never	Once	A Few	Several	Many
Copying from another student during a test with his or her knowledge	95.8%	3.4%	0%	0%	.8%
Copying from another student during a test without his or her knowledge	93.3%	4.2%	1.7%	.8%	0%
Helping someone else cheat on a test	91.6%	7.6%	0%	.8%	0%
Fabricating or falsifying research data	87.5%	8.3%	3.3%	.8%	0%
Paraphrasing or copying material from a written source without referencing it	70.8%	8.3%	17.5%	3.3%	0%
Turning in a paper obtained from a paper "mill" or website	98.3%	.8%	0%	.8%	0%
Using crib notes during a test	93.3%	5%	.8%	.8%	0%
Copying material, almost word for word, from a written source and turning it in as your own	93.3%	5%	.8%	.8%	0%
Turning in a paper copied from another student's paper	93.3%	5%	.8%	.8%	0%
Using a false or forged excuse to obtain a time extension	93.3%	5%	.8%	.8%	0%
Turning in work done by someone else	93.3%	5%	.8%	.8%	0%
Cheating on a test in any other way	93.3%	5%	.8%	.8%	0%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

The next section of the survey asked participants to evaluate how serious they thought it was to participate in each of the specific behaviors from Table 7. Three quarters of the participants felt fabricating or falsifying a bibliography was a serious to very serious behavior (See Table 8). When asked their perception of the seriousness of working on an assignment with others after the instructor had asked them to work individually, there was not a dominant response. The most frequent choices were

somewhat serious (28.3%), moderately serious (27.5%), and not serious (23.3%).

Approximately 21% felt this behavior was a serious or very serious act. The participants felt getting answers from someone who had already taken the test was a more serious behavior. Twenty-nine percent responded with moderately serious, 24% selected serious as their response, and 22% decided it was a very serious behavior.

The next two items looked at students who copy from other students, both with and without their knowledge of the act. When the peer had knowledge of the act, half of the individuals felt this was a very serious behavior. When the peer did not know the behavior was occurring, 63.9% of the respondents deemed it a very serious act (See Table 8).

From there the questions asked how serious it was to help someone cheat on a test and how serious it was to fabricate or falsify research data. Again half of the participants indicated helping someone cheat was a very serious behavior and 58% indicated fabricating research data was also a very serious behavior to engage in (See Table 8). The next question looked at copying a few sentences of material from a written source without referencing it. The largest percentage thought it was a serious behavior (34.5%), but 26.9% selected moderately serious, 16.8% picked very serious, and 13.4% thought it was somewhat serious.

Of the remaining items, very serious was selected 69.7% of the time to describe turning in a paper obtained from a website, 47.5% of the time for using crib notes during a test, 53.8% of the time for copying materials from a written source and turning it in as your own, and 41.7% of the time for both turning in a paper copied from another student's paper and using a false or forged excuse to receive extended time. Also, just

under half (47.5%) considered it very serious to cheat on a test in any other way (See Table 8).

Table 8

Graduate Students Perceptions of Seriousness of Each Behavior

Behaviors	Not Serious	Somewhat Serious	Moderately Serious	Serious	Very Serious
Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography	2.5%	4.2%	15%	30.8%	47.5%
Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work	23.3%	28.3%	27.5%	14.2%	6.7%
Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test	12.6%	11.8%	29.4%	24.4%	21.8%
Copying from another student during a test with his or her knowledge	1.7%	6.7%	12.5%	28.3%	50.8%
Copying from another student during a test without his or her knowledge	1.7%	3.4%	8.4%	22.7%	63.9%
Helping someone else cheat on a test	1.7%	5%	10.9%	31.9%	50.4%
Fabricating or falsifying research	.8%	9.2%	7.6%	24.4%	58%
Paraphrasing or copying material from a written source without referencing it	8.4%	13.4%	26.9%	34.5%	16.8%
Turning in a paper obtained from a paper "mill" or website	0%	5%	4.2%	21%	69.7%
Using unpermitted crib notes during a test	2.5%	5%	14.2%	30.8%	47.5%

Table 8 (continued).

Behaviors	Not Serious	Somewhat Serious	Moderately Serious	Serious	Very Serious
Copying material, almost word for word, from a written source and turning it in as your own	2.6%	4.3%	12%	25.6%	53.8%
Turning in a paper copied from another student's paper	2.5%	4.2%	15%	30.8%	47.5%
Using a false or forged excuse to obtain a time extension	2.5%	5%	14.2%	30.8%	41.7%
Turning in work done by someone else	2.5%	4.2%	15%	36.7%	41.7%
Cheating on a test in any other way	2.5%	5%	14.2%	30.8%	47.5%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

Table 9 displays the information from when the participants were again asked how likely they felt it was that a graduate student would engage in particular behaviors. Approximately 45% indicated it is somewhat likely that they would report an incident of academic dishonesty and 72.3% said it was not likely they would report a close friend for academic dishonesty. When questioned about talking poorly about a peer's abilities to another professional, just over a fifth said it was not likely to occur, but almost a quarter responded it was moderately likely to occur, and 37.3% felt it was somewhat unlikely to happen. A large portion (47%) of participants did feel it was somewhat likely their peers would keep valuable information from them and that peers would break rules and policies to be at the top of their class (42.9%). When asked about graduate students actively competing against classmates for honors and/or awards, 32.8% responded it was highly

likely to occur, 27.7% thought it was moderately likely, and 19.3% reported it was likely to occur (See Table 9).

Table 9

Perceived Likelihood of a Graduate Student's Behavior

Behavior	Not Likely	Somewhat Likely	Likely	Moderately Likely	Highly Likely
Report an incident of academic dishonesty	22.7%	44.5%	12.6%	16%	4.2%
Report a close friend for academic dishonesty	72.3%	15.1%	5%	6.7%	.8%
Talk poorly about a peer's abilities to another professional	20.3%	37.3%	11%	24.6%	6.8%
Keep valuable information from peers	24.8%	47%	8.5%	17.1%	2.6%
Break rules and policies to be at the top of their class	26.9%	42.9%	9.2%	14.3%	6.7%
Actively compete against classmates for honors/awards	6.7%	13.4%	19.3%	27.7%	32.8%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

The last portion of the survey wanted respondents to evaluate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements. Table 10 displays the findings of these items. The majority of students agreed that cheating is a serious problem at their university (40%) and almost 40% selected indifferent to describe if faculty members were vigilant in discovering and reporting suspected cases of academic dishonesty. Just over 54% of respondents agreed the amount of coursework they were asked to complete was reasonable and the degree of difficulty of their exams and assignments was appropriate (60.2%).

The next series of questions asked if graduate students felt strong pressures to excel in their programs, if graduate students would do most anything to be at the top of their class, and if graduate students were very competitive when it came to academics. Almost 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they do feel strong pressures to excel. A fairly equal number of participants disagreed (33.6%), were indifferent (32.8%), or agreed (22.7%) that graduate students would do most anything to be at the top of their class, and almost 43% agreed graduate students were very competitive when it came to academics (See Table 10). Over half (53.8%) also reported feeling society taught graduate students they needed to be the best at what they did. The participants also agreed 43% of the time that their peers in their graduate program were competitive individuals.

The last three questions on the survey asked the respondents to look at disappointing their family, disappointing their friends, and disappointing themselves if they were not at the top of their class. The majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (59.7) that their families would be disappointed, their friends would be disappointed (60.5%), and they would be disappointed (61.3%) if they were not at the top of their class (See Table 10).

Table 10

How Strongly Graduate Students Agree or Disagree

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Strongly Agree
Cheating is a serious problem at your university	12.6%	12.6%	13.4%	40%	24.4%

Table 10 (continued).

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Strongly Agree
Faculty members are vigilant in discovering & reporting suspected cases of academic dishonesty	3.4%	28.2%	39.3%	25.6%	3.4%
Amount of coursework expected to be completed is reasonable	4.2%	16.8%	5.9%	54.6%	18.5%
Degree of difficulty in my exams & assignments is appropriate	3.4%	15.3%	11.9%	60.2%	13.6%
Graduate students feel strong pressures to excel in their programs	1.7%	5%	11.8%	40.3%	41.2%
Graduate students will do most anything to be at the top of their class	8.4%	33.6%	32.8%	22.7%	2.5%
Graduate students are very competitive when it comes to academics	1.7%	14.3%	18.5%	42.9%	22.7%
Society teaches us that we need to be the best at what we do	2.5%	8.4%	12.6%	53.8%	22.7%
My peers in my program are competitive.	2.5%	17.6%	19.3%	42.9%	17.6%
My family will be disappointed if I am not at the top of my class	14.3%	12.6%	13.4%	37%	22.7%
My friends will be disappointed if I am not at the top of my class	14.3%	11.8%	13.4%	37%	23.5%
I will be disappointed if I am not at the top of my class	13.4%	12.6%	12.6%	37.8%	23.5%

Note: The data has a 1% error band

Summary

The results of this chapter will now be summarized in terms of the research purposes four and five outlined in Chapter One, including examining motivations behind why students compete for grades and evaluating what are the most prevalent forms used by graduate students to enhance their academic edge.

4. To assess the impact of academic competition.

When examining the motivations behind why students compete for grades, 76.5% of the participants reported that society taught them they needed to be the best and 79.8% believed they were actively competing against peers for honors and/or awards. When participants were asked about their perceptions about the academic pressures of graduate school, more than 80% thought that graduate students felt strong pressures to excel in their programs, but the majority disagreed with the notion that graduate students would do most anything to be at the top of their class. The majority of the respondents also reported that the amount of pressure professors place on them, the amount graduate students place on themselves, and their drive to excel was above what they would consider average, but the amount of pressure their families placed on them was considered average.

Overall, approximately 65% of the respondents believe that graduate students were very competitive when it came to their academics and over 41% believed competitiveness between students was higher than average. They were somewhat split on whether graduate students undermining one another and students using/keeping reserved materials for extended periods of time was a serious problem in their programs, but did believe they occurred fairly frequently. The data also indicated 81.3% of the

participants believed that graduate students received medication and/or counseling to them cope with the pressures of graduate school.

Respondents also carry the overall perception that cheating was a serious problem at their universities. Their perception was that academic dishonesty, students inappropriately sharing work, and cheating on tests or exams occurred more times than not at their universities. The majority of individuals also reported that they have never personally engaged in these behaviors. The most prevalent behaviors reported on that they participated in were paraphrasing or copying material from a written source without referencing it (29.1%), working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work (26.6%), and getting questions or answers from someone who had already taken a test (22.4%).

5. To examine examples of the extreme lengths students go in order to succeed.

Overall, the data suggests less than 25% of the sample reported engaging in any specific academically dishonest behaviors. Of those who reported, acting on it once was their most frequent response. Their perceptions of how likely it was that graduate students would break rules and policies to be at the top of their class occurred 73.1% of the time, suggesting respondents believed it occurs more frequently than it was reported to happen. The most prevalent forms of academic dishonesty reported that were believed to enhance a student's edge were fabricating/falsifying data (87.3%), other forms of academic dishonesty not specifically listed (22%), sharing work (19.1%), cheating on tests/exams (10%), and plagiarism (6.6%).

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter provides a brief review of the purpose of the study, the methodological procedures, and the study's findings. The results of the study are then discussed, comparing them to the previous research discussed in Chapter 2. The last sections of this chapter provide a detailed examination of the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research, recommendations, and conclusions drawn from the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was two fold. The first purpose was to complete a review of literature discussing the prevalence and impact of academic competitiveness and dishonesty at the graduate school level. This information was then used to explain the premise of academic competitiveness, to discuss different perspectives of academic competition, and to discuss the pressures involved to succeed. The second purpose was to assess the impact of academic competition and examine examples of the extreme lengths students go in order to succeed through survey administration. This included examining motivations behind why students compete for grades and evaluating what the most prevalent forms used by students to enhance their academic edge.

Methodological Procedures

Data for this investigation was collected through an independent survey, which was sent to 2011 graduate students throughout the University of Wisconsin System. A letter was sent via electronic mail, containing information about the purpose of the study and an independent website address to contact if they were willing to participate in the study. The letter also included information explaining to the potential participants that

their participation was voluntary and they could refuse to participate at any time. The letter further explained to the potential participants that their participation in the study was completely confidential. A follow up electronic mail letter was sent to all 2011 potential participants six weeks after the first mailing attempt. The purpose of this second contact was to attempt to maximize the number of respondents who participated in the study. Because the participants contacted an independent website to complete the survey which coded their names, there was no way of determining which students responded to the first letter. Data was collected through the independent website over the course of four months. Descriptive data, response frequencies, and percentiles were used to describe the survey results.

Major Findings

The survey asked the students to assess the level of academic dishonesty present in their institutions. The survey also asked them to assess how frequently they believed particular academically dishonest behavior occurred in their program. The results of the survey indicated that students believe other forms of academic dishonesty not specifically listed on the survey were the most common behaviors, followed by cheating during exams or tests, students keeping reserved materials for extended periods of time, students undermining one another, inappropriately sharing work when the instructor asked for independent work, and falsifying or fabricating data. The survey also asked the respondents to identify the number of times within the last year that they engaged in general academically dishonest behaviors. Falsifying or fabricating data had the highest rate of occurrence by a large margin, followed by other forms of academic dishonesty not specifically listed, inappropriately sharing work when the instructor asked for

independent work, cheating during tests or exams, and plagiarism. When asked about more specific academically dishonest behaviors, the students reported that paraphrasing or copying material from a written resource without referencing had the highest rate of occurrence. Similar reported rates of occurrence were identified for working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work, and getting questions or answers from someone who had already taken the test. Based on these findings, it appears that students are not aware of which academically dishonest behaviors are most prevalent in their programs. In general, they believe that falsifying or fabricating data occurred the least, when it was actually stated as the most commonly reported behavior. Similar misconceptions appear about cheating on tests or exams. Respondents identified this behavior as one of the most frequent, when it actually reported as the least frequent behavior. The data also indicates that this sample of students believe academically dishonest behaviors occur more frequently than the behavior actually does. Factors that may have contributed to these findings include personality aspects, the student's field of study, level of education, and under reporting of the number of times students engaged in specific behaviors.

While more than half of the students surveyed reported that academic dishonesty was a significant problem, the likelihood that students would take an active role in preventing this behavior is not promising. Students were first asked how likely it would be that they would report an incident of academic dishonesty. Over half indicated they were less than likely to report someone for being dishonest. They were also questioned on how likely it would be that they would report a close friend for academic dishonesty. Almost three quarters of the participants reported they were not likely to report a close

friend for being dishonest. When asked about their history of reporting, approximately one-third of the participants reported witnessing another student engaging in academic dishonesty but less than five percent had ever reported another student. These findings led the researcher to conclude that students are aware of the significance of the problem, but the elimination of academic dishonesty will have to be led by others.

The survey also asked the students about the impact of academic competition. Seven out of ten students believed that society teaches people to be the best at what we do. The majority did not believe students will do most anything, including breaking rules and policies to be at the top of their class, but did believe that their peers in their program are very competitive. Their responses indicated that almost half believe of the students believe that the level of competitiveness between students in their programs is higher than average. They also believed that more than 80% of their peers receive medication and/or counseling to help them cope with the pressures of graduate school.

The study revealed over 80% of students feel strong pressures to excel in their programs. It also revealed that more than half of the students are most likely actively competing against their classmates for honors and awards. When asked about their perceptions of their academic environments, the students indicated that most perceive the highest pressure is coming from themselves, then from their instructors, and finally from their families. While students reported that they believed that their friends and families would be disappointed if they, the students, were not at the top of their class, more students reported being disappointed in themselves if they were not in the top of their class. That may help explain why approximately eight out of ten students rated their drive to excel in their program above average or higher. Based on these findings, the

researcher is led to believe that both internal and external components play a large role in both motivating students to compete for grades and creating an overly competitive academic environment.

Critical Analysis

Findings from past studies that examined the impact of academic competition suggest that most of the academic pressures students feel are self-induced (Raffini, 1986). In the current study, the researcher expanded past research to include the graduate school level and assessed how much pressure students place on themselves. The current study showed that students often perceive that they are competing with peers in their program, that they are actively competing against peers for honors and awards, that they feel strong pressures to excel in their programs, and that their peers are highly competitive. Past research (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998) also indicated that the pressures students place on themselves to perform well in school has been linked to causing emotional difficulties. The current study's findings suggest approximately 80% of students believe their peers receive medication and/or counseling to help them cope with the pressures of graduate school. The current study's data also identified that most students feel external pressures from their parents, instructors, and their friends to excel in their studies.

A past researcher (Hancock, 2001) also studied motivation and the role it plays in academic competition. Hancock reported in his finds that the degree to which a student is motivated to do well on a task has an impact on how well they perform. A colleague (Albaili, 1997) also conducted a similar study and found that motivation was the most powerful factor separating low-achieving students from high-achieving students. In the current study, the students reported having a strong drive to excel in their programs and

most would be disappointed if they were not at the top of their class. On the other hand, the majority indicated they would not go as far as doing most anything to be at the top of their class nor would they break rules or policies to be at the top of their class. The current study also found that the majority of students were high-achieving students, ranging in grade point average from 3.8-4.0 (66%) to 3.5-3.7 (23%).

This study also examined the lengths to which students will go in order to be successful in their programs. This included an in-depth look at different forms of academically dishonest behaviors. Past researchers (Aggarwal, Bates, Graham, & Khan, 2002; Brown & Emmett, 2001; Gerdeman, 2000; Pullen, Ortloff, Casey, & Payne, 2000) have also researched academic dishonesty. Their findings link dishonest behaviors to high-achieving students and describe cheating as a problem of tremendous proportion on campuses throughout the United States. The information reported in these studies displays an extremely high rate of occurrence for cheating, both in undergraduate schools and medical schools. The current study found much lower occurrence rates in the University of Wisconsin System. Reports of the number of times within the last year that students participated in academic dishonesty reveals that it happens in 22% of the population, and cheating on a test or exam occurs in 10% of the sample. The most commonly reported methods of cheating were copying from another student without their knowledge, using crib notes, cheating on a test in a way not listed, and copying from a peer with their knowledge.

Looking more in-depth about types of academic dishonesty, past research suggests plagiarism is the most prevalent form among students at all levels (Athanasou, 2001), and nearly half of all students admit to it (Cowen, 2001). Fabrication is another

form of academic dishonesty which has a high prevalence rate in universities (Athanasou, 2001; Glick et al., 2001; Thorpe et al., 1999). The two most common forms identified are copying from peers and making up false information. Researchers' findings suggest approximately 68% of students in secondary or post-secondary schools have fabricated an assignment. The last type of academic dishonesty reported to have a high rate of occurrence is the facilitation of cheating. Past researchers (Athanasou, 2001; Harp, 1995) identified that approximately 67% of students have participated in a method of academic facilitation; such as giving answers to peers for exams, helping someone cheat on a test, hindering another student's success or ability to complete a task, or working on an assignment with others when they were told to work independently.

The current information obtained from this study regarding plagiarism also contradicts past findings. Approximately seven percent of students indicated they had plagiarized within the last year. The most common forms of plagiarism were paraphrasing or copying material from a written source without referencing it, turning in a paper copied from another student's paper, turning in work done by someone else, and turning in a paper purchased from an online internet source. Overall, the students believed conducting these behaviors was a serious issue, though they did not feel copying material without referencing it was a serious action. When comparing to previous studies on fabrication with the results of the study, the information indicates that it occurs more often in the University of Wisconsin System than previously reported. Almost 90% of students indicated they had fabricated information within the last year, even though they believe it has a low occurrence rate. The most prevalent forms of fabrication were fabricating or falsifying research data, followed by fabricating or falsifying a

bibliography, and using a false excuse to obtain a time extension; even though they believed it was a serious behavior to participate in. Facilitation of cheating was also addressed in this study. Students perceived these behaviors occurred a few times in their programs, but reported that 19% engage in these behaviors. Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for independent work, getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken the test, and helping someone cheat on a test is the order in which the most common behaviors occur. A significant percent of students did not believe these were serious behaviors to engage in. The students also indicated it was not likely peers would keep valuable information from them or talk poorly about a peer's abilities to another professional, but they believed they would keep reserved materials for extended periods of time and undermine one another.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study are identified. One of the largest limitations of this study was the low response rate among potential participants. Factors which could have contributed to the low number of respondents include using an electronic format to contact the potential participants and the sensitivity of the information the respondents were asked to disclose. If a similar research study were conducted, it may be beneficial to contact the potential participants through the postal service instead of using electronic mail. It may also be of benefit to use the postal service to send out the survey to the potential participants instead of providing a website for them to contact. Findings from past studies suggest that contacting individuals via the postal system elicits a higher return rate than when contacted through electronic mail.

A second limitation of this study was the lack of a sample representative of students nation wide. Thirteen universities with graduate programs were contacted in the state of Wisconsin. Of those thirteen contacted, only five provided the requested contact information for potential participants. This limited size of the sample may not provide an accurate representation of the general population of graduate students. If a similar study was conducted in the future, contacting students throughout the nation would provide a more representative sample.

A third limitation of this current study was the research available on the topic. Researchers have not specifically studied this topic so there is not any direct research available to draw from. Because there is no direct research, the information collected and used for this study had to be drawn from many different topics of research.

A forth limitation of this study was the specificity of the sample. The sample for this study consisted of graduate level students in the University of Wisconsin System. Because of shared personality characteristics associated with those individuals who enter graduate programs, generalizing this information throughout the general population of students is cautioned.

Suggestions for Future Research

The information within this study creates many questions to be answered in the future. It may be of benefit to researchers to conduct a similar study using a more nationally representative sample. This would allow the findings to be applied to the entire population of graduate students.

Secondly, researchers could choose to go more in depth and evaluate different variables of this study. One possible variable may be to examine gender differences.

This information would help researchers identify differences between male and female perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors at the graduate school level. Another possibility could consist of evaluating the differences between fields of study. These findings would help identify which fields of study are more likely to exhibit academic competitiveness. Researchers may also consider examining the competitive nature of students by institution in order to identify which universities elicit more competitive behaviors in their students.

A third suggestion for future research would be for researchers to conduct a similar study examining the relationship between students and their advisors in order to evaluate how the dynamics of their relationship impact the student's perceptions of their graduate experience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the researcher recommends the following actions: (1) universities should begin taking a more active approach to reducing the number of students who engage in academically dishonest behaviors; (2) universities should consider if using a scaled grading system, which fuels academic competition, is the best way to evaluate a student's abilities or if using a pass/fail system would be a more appropriate direction; and (3) universities need to begin to find ways to reduce the amount of pressures placed on students in their programs.

Conclusions

The present study addressed the prevalence and impact of academic competitiveness and dishonesty at the graduate school level. It explained the premise of academic competitiveness, discussed different perspectives of academic competition,

discussed the pressures involved to succeed, assessed the impacts of academic competition on graduate students, and examined examples of the extreme lengths students go to in order to succeed.

Results indicated that academic competitiveness is an area of tension for most students. The students reported feeling both external and internal pressures pushing them to excel in their academic studies. The students perceived their instructors heavily urging them to succeed, friends and family members placing significant amounts of pressure on them to do well, and being in a highly competitive environment with their peers. The students' main internal pressures stemmed from self-fulfillment and wanting to do well for themselves. These pressures may have sometimes become too difficult to manage as a large portion of students reported believing peers have had to seek counseling and/or medication to help them deal with the pressures of graduate school.

Academic competitiveness may also play a role in the lengths students are willing to go in order to be successful. The perception of students is that academic dishonesty is a serious problem at their universities, and they believe it occurs more frequently than has been reported. This study revealed that the number of students who engage in academic dishonesty is not as high as the past research indicated, a large proportion of students are engaging in academically dishonest behaviors. The likelihood that they would take an active role in deterring their peers from engaging in these behaviors is very slight so the majority of efforts will have to come from the instructors and university officials. They will have to increase their effort in discussing school policies about academic dishonesty and find ways to improve their techniques in detection.

Most students indicated society taught them to be the best at what they do and reinforced competition in academic settings. More research needs to be conducted about the impact of academic competitiveness on students and their environments. Future research should look for new methods of creating an environment more conducive to learning and place less focus on competition.

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Appendix: Research Instrument

This survey is being conducted as part of a research project which is examining how graduate students manage the pressures associated with graduate school. The survey will also ask you some questions about specific behaviors that some people might consider academically dishonest behaviors. Please remember that this survey is completely anonymous and confidential. There is no way that anyone can connect you with any of your answers and at any time if you feel uncomfortable with any of the items, you do not have to respond. Because the purpose of the survey is to collect data for a research project, please respond honestly to the items you choose to answer. I greatly appreciate your time and assistance in the data collection.

Demographic Information

1. How far along in your graduate program are you?
 - 1st year
 - 2nd year
 - 3rd year
 - 4th year
 - 5th year
 - 6th year
 - 7th year or more
2. What is your sex?
 - Male
 - Female
3. What is your primary field of study?
 - a) humanities
 - b) business
 - c) communications/journalism
 - d) arts
 - e) engineering
 - f) health sciences
 - g) social sciences
 - h) education
4. What is your approximate cumulative grade point average?
 - a. 3.80-4.0
 - b. 3.5-3.7
 - c. 3.2-3.4
 - d. 3.1-3.0
 - e. 2.9-2.7
 - d. 2.6 or lower

Academic Environment

-Poor- -below average- -average- -above average- -excellent-

How would you rate,

1. the severity of penalties for cheating at your university.
2. the average graduate student's understanding of campus policies concerning student cheating.
3. the effectiveness of these policies
4. the amount of pressure professors place on students to excel academically
5. the amount of pressure graduate students place on themselves to excel academically
6. the amount of pressure graduate students families place on them to excel academically
7. the competitiveness between students in your program.
8. your drive to excel in your graduate program.

-Never- -Once- -A few times- -Several times- -Many times-

In the past year, how often, on average, did your instructors discuss policies concerning....

1. academic dishonesty (i.e. plagiarism, fabrication, recycling of previous work, copying, proper citation, etc.)
2. plagiarism
3. inappropriately sharing work in group assignments
4. cheating during tests or exams
5. falsifying or fabricating data

—Never- —Once- —A few times- —Several times- —Many times-

In the past year, how often, on average, did you engage in...

1. academic dishonesty (i.e. plagiarism, fabrication, recycling of previous work, copying, proper citation, etc.)
2. plagiarism
3. inappropriately sharing work in group assignments
4. cheating during tests or exams
5. falsifying or fabricating data

—Never- —Once- —A few times- —Several times- —Many times-

How frequently do you think the following occur in your program...

1. academic dishonesty (i.e. plagiarism, fabrication, recycling of previous work, copying, improper citation, etc.)
2. inappropriately sharing work in group assignments
3. cheating during tests or exams
4. falsifying or fabricating data
5. graduate students undermining one another
6. graduate students using/keeping reserved materials for extended periods of time.
7. graduate students receiving medication/counseling to help cope with the pressures of graduate school.

—Never- —Once- —A few times- —Several times- —Many times-

How often, if ever, have you seen another graduate student engaging in academic dishonesty....

Have you ever reported another student for cheating?

—Yes or No

Specific Behaviors

This section asks you some questions about specific behaviors that some people might consider academically dishonest behaviors. Please remember that this survey is completely anonymous and there is no way that anyone can connect you with any of your answers.

In the FIRST section please mark how often, if ever, in the past year you have engaged in any of the following behaviors. In the SECOND section please mark how serious you think each type of behavior is.

SECTION I:

—Never- —Once- —A few times- —Several times- —

Many times-

1. Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography
2. Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work.
3. Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test
4. Copying from another student during a test **with** his or her knowledge.
5. Copying from another student during a test or examination **without** his or her knowledge
6. Helping someone else cheat on a test
7. Fabricating or falsifying research data
8. Paraphrasing or copying a few sentences of material from a written source without footnoting or referencing it in a paper
9. Turning in a paper obtained in large part from a term paper "mill" or website.
10. Using unpermitted crib notes (or cheat sheets) during a test
11. Copying material, almost word for word, from any written source and turning it in as your own work
12. Turning in a paper copied, at least in part, from another student's paper, whether or not that student is currently taking the same course

13. Using a false or forged excuse to obtain an extension on a due date or delay writing an exam
14. Turning in work done by someone else
15. Cheating on a test in any other way

SECTION 2:

-Not serious- -Somewhat serious- -Moderately Serious- -Serious- -

Very Serious-

16. Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography
17. Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work.
18. Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test
19. Copying from another student during a test with his or her knowledge.
20. Copying from another student during a test or examination without his or her knowledge
21. Helping someone else cheat on a test
22. Fabricating or falsifying research data
23. Paraphrasing or copying a few sentences of material from a written source without footnoting or referencing it in a paper
24. Turning in a paper obtained in large part from a term paper "mill" or website.
25. Using unpermitted crib notes (or cheat sheets) during a test
26. Copying material, almost word for word, from any written source and turning it in as your own work
27. Turning in a paper copied, at least in part, from another student's paper, whether or not that student is currently taking the same course
28. Using a false or forged excuse to obtain an extension on a due date or delay writing an exam
29. Turning in work done by someone else
30. Cheating on a test in any other way

-Not likely- -Somewhat likely- -likely- -moderately likely- -highly likely-

How likely is it that a graduate student would...

1. report an incident of academic dishonesty
2. report a close friend for academic dishonesty
3. talk poorly about a peer's abilities to another professional (professor, prospective employer, etc.)
4. keep valuable information from their peers
5. break rules and policies to be at the top of their class
6. actively compete against their classmates for honors/awards

-Strongly disagree- -Disagree- -Indifferent- -Agree- -Strongly Agree-

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements....

1. Cheating is a serious problem at your university
2. Faculty members are vigilant in discovering and reporting suspected cases of academic dishonesty
3. The amount of course work I'm expected to complete is reasonable for my year level and program
4. The degree of difficulty in my exams and assignments is appropriate for my year level and program
5. Graduate students feel strong pressures to excel in their programs
6. Graduate students will do most anything to be at the top of their class
7. Graduate students are very competitive when it comes to their academics
8. Society teaches us that we need to be the best at what we do.
9. My peers in my graduate program are competitive.
10. My family will be disappointed if I am not at the top of my class
11. My friends will be disappointed if I am not at the top of my class
12. I will be disappointed if I am not at the top of my class