To Catch a Thief: Students, Faculty, and Academic Integrity

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What do our students consider to be cheating, and what do they consider not to be cheating? What do we think constitutes cheating? And what can be done to raise awareness of academic integrity?

These are important questions that are being discussed on campuses all over the country, including Winthrop, as we have for some time. Today the TLC held a panel discussion about academic honesty, and I want to continue that discussion in The Weekly Reader.

I moderated the panel, which included Bethany Marlowe, Dean of Students; Mark Herring, Dean of the Library; and Gloria Jones, Dean of University College. The four of us were members of the Academic Integrity Taskforce, which was chaired by Alice Burmeister and included representatives from across the campus. We met for over two years and discussed many issues, with the most tangible result being a survey of students and faculty about academic honesty. We presented our findings to a group of several hundred students in April 2005.

At today’s session, we looked at a summary of the survey’s findings and discussed some of the implications of the data, as well as our perceptions of developments over the last eight years. The PowerPoint presentation is attached in the email that delivered this newsletter, and is available on the TLC Resources page. We also made a video of the session, which will be posted as soon as it is ready.

When I pulled those results up the other day to review them, my jaw dropped more than once, as I recall it did way back in 2005. For example, under the category of “infractions students consider to be most serious,” 87% included “stole a copy of a test from a professor’s office.” Which means that 13% did not consider these offenses serious! Even more disturbing and astonishing (to me) was the mere 75% who included “turned in a paper written by someone else” and the 62% who included “copied word for word from a book or other print source without quoting the work”—which means, respectively, that 25% of the students did not consider outright stealing serious, and that 38% did not consider plagiarism serious. Yikes!

Equally disturbing were the infractions students found to be LEAST serious: “told a student in a later class with the same instructor what is on the test you have already taken” (9%); “saw someone cheating on a test/exam and did not report it” (11%); “turned in the same paper for assignments in two different classes” (10%).

When we turn to the faculty responses, the
When we turn to the faculty responses, the results are no less jaw-dropping. Only 35% of faculty considered telling what was on the test “serious,” and only 64% rated “collaborated with other students on a take-home test that is meant to be taken individually” that way. So 65% of us don’t think it is a big deal when students tell others what is on our tests, and 36% of us don’t really care if students do not do their own work? I find that as mind-boggling now as I did then.

There are more interesting results in the report, and I will let you choose your own outrages. Perhaps the most important question is, “What should we do now?” The taskforce made several recommendations before it disbanded (those recommendations are also attached). The first step is “to ensure that all parties (faculty, students, and administration) understand the process.” The final step is “remember that individual or collective engagement with issues of academic integrity is a life-long process, not something that can be achieved overnight.” Back in 2005, our group began a campus-wide discussion of academic integrity, but we urged that this discussion be ongoing. Today’s TLC session was a long overdue continuation of that discussion.

Dean Marlowe has some excellent materials about academic integrity that she will share with you. If you have never read the Student Conduct Code, you should—and you can at this link: http://www.winthrop.edu/studentconduct/. Another good link is about teaching academic integrity: http://www.winthrop.edu/academicintegrity/.

Here is one more opportunity to continue this vital discussion. The Go2Knowledge Group will meet Thursday, March 7 at 11:00 am in Owens 201. Follow the directions on page two of the newsletter to log in to the site, look under “Organizational Development” in Training Categories, and watch on your own the presentation “Academic Dishonesty: Policy Development, Training, and Assistance for Faculty.” We will meet to discuss the presentation.

As the Student Conduct Code states, “A fundamental tenet of all institutions of higher learning is academic honesty.” And since I borrowed that quotation, I will document it: it can be found of page 38 of the Student Handbook.
Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and technology. You’ll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at http://wuxxite.ning.com/ or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join:

kosterj@winthrop.edu

The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join:

http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/

Join XXITE 2.0 or Register for a TLC Session At

www.winthrop.edu/tlc

Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology, and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don’t have the time or they can’t just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me at (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

Thought for The Week

"I have always been able to gain my living without doing any work; for the writing of books and magazine matter was always play, not work. I enjoyed it; it was merely billiards to me."

--Mark Twain