

## **International educational ethics: Asia, South Pacific, Europe, Canada and Latin America**

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### **ABSTRACT**

While there has been significant academic research focused on academic integrity and cheating, prior research on AACSB universities that maintain codes of conduct neglects global comparisons. To our knowledge no research has been conducted that examines university codes of conduct in an international context. This paper, in its exploratory nature, sets out to understand the similarities and differences of codes of conduct among universities in five regions: Asia, South Pacific, Europe, Canada, and Latin America. This research seeks to uncover what policies are in place to assist universities in developing a comprehensive and enforceable code of conduct as unethical behavior in the education setting is on the rise.

Keywords: International ethics, codes of conduct, cheating, plagiarism, higher education

## INTRODUCTION

The topics of cheating and academic dishonesty in universities and society has long been a focus of academic research including measuring views on cheating (Bernardi et. al, 2004), implications of technology on the way individuals cheat (Papp &Wertz, 2009), the impact of age (Smyth & Davis, 2004; Nonis & Swift, 2001, Crown & Spiller, 1998), demographic influence (Hetherington & Feldman, 1964), and situational influence (Kisamore et.al, 2007) on cheating. This study explores an area of ethics and academic integrity that has not been thoroughly researched in an international context (Bernardi et. al, 2004): university's plagiarism and codes of conduct to prevent unethical behavior. Furthermore, research conducted by Rezaee et. al (2001, p. 30) shows there is a need for further research into codes of conduct as they "tend to follow a "low-road approach...suggesting a needed improvements in college and university codes of conduct in greater emphasis on preventing financial, scientific, and academic fraud, more inclusion of faculty in the process, and establishment of a proper process for implementation of the code." This exploratory study seeks to better understand the similarities and differences among international university policies to understand the guidelines, punishments and procedures in place to deter unethical behavior in context with policies in place in the United States. As the number of students who study internationally continues to grow (Chapman & Lupton, 2004), the importance of culture and home-grown ethics becomes even more essential. The study seeks to gain an understanding of ethical behaviors that transcend borders. This research will serve as a guide to understanding the international cultural and policy differences that currently exist.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Codes of Conduct

Codes of conduct in business organizations are a common feature today. Of the 200 largest business organizations in the world, approximately 52.5 percent have a business code of conduct (Kaptein and Schwartz 2008). Those companies that do not have a formal code of conduct are being pressured by stakeholders to implement codes. In the United States, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act requires publicly held companies to implement compliance systems to guide employee and corporate behaviors. These compliance systems include written standards or codes of conduct.

There are several reasons for codes of conduct: (1) it is simply the right thing to do (L'Etang 1992), (2) a code demonstrates an organization's moral responsibility to benefit society (Logsdon and Wood 2005), (3) such conduct codes benefit the company itself through improving the company's public reputation, and (4) enhance the overall attitude of the work environment (Manley 1991).

If codes of conduct are prevalent in business organizations, it follows that conduct codes should be a valuable tool in guiding the behavior of students in educational institutions. As a result, such codes of conduct are also becoming commonplace in universities today. In an effort to manage the college environment, educational institutions have implemented codes of conduct to provide a standard for student behaviors. These codes in educational institutions have been designed to encourage positive and academically correct behaviors among students. Most of these codes, however, are in the form of legalistic codes and are used to punish inappropriate

behaviors of students rather than to encourage positive and ethical behaviors (Lake 2009). Unfortunately, these codes do not seem to be stemming the tide of academic misconduct behaviors among students.

### **Academic Codes of Conduct**

Academic misconduct has been defined as “a construct that encompasses multiple forms of academic deviance including but not limited to test cheating, plagiarism and inappropriate collaboration” (Kisamore et. al, 2007, p. 382). Students have long admitted to committing these violations despite knowing and understanding it is wrong (Davis et. al, 1992). Cheating has been linked to the perceived costs and benefits of the action (Bunn et. al, 1992, Kerkvliet 1994). Of the student population, business students are more likely to behave unethically (Symth & Davis, 2004). Cheating is not a just a problem in the US; studies from international schools suggest that academic dishonesty is a widespread, insidious, and global problem (Chapman & Lupton, 2004, Lambert et. al, 2003). Additionally, given the high percentage of international students enrolled in American universities today, it could be that students coming from diverse cultures representing various ideas related to ethical and unethical behaviors could be a foundation for the rise in academic misconduct (West et.al. 2007).

Past research has found that ethical cultures and initiatives in academic institutions garners limited attention (Weber, 2006). Weber (2006) found this absence and lack of attention is likely attributed to an absence of any serious external regulatory incentives and no major ethics scandals in the academic setting. Guelcher and Cahalane (1999) noted that the “academic culture also creates challenges in creating an ethical environment due to its unique, complex internal environment and decentralized power structure” (Weber, 2006, p. 24) However, maintaining accreditation from a major international accreditation agency, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) does require its members to have an “ethical preparation component within their curriculum” (Grimes, 2004, p. 273). In fact the guidelines of AACSB require the curriculum to “provide an understanding of business perspectives that must include related to ethics, globalization, the business environment, and demographic diversity” (Premeaux, 2005, p. 409).

Despite the complex and challenging environment, establishing a code of conduct does act as a deterrent of cheating. Honors codes have been implemented as a way to respond to cheating and also protect a university’s image (Melgoza & Smith, 2008). McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield (1999) found that honor codes enable a better framing of ethical reasoning by students making them less prone to cheating with codes in place. Codes’ ability to create an ethical environment has also been found to create peer pressure that discourages cheating (McCabe & Trevino, 1993). However, “honor codes, in and of themselves, are not the only means to mitigate cheating...the success of honors codes appears to be rooted in a campus tradition of mutual trust and respect among students and between faculty members and students. Of course, such cultures usually take significant time and effort to develop and maintain, and many intuitions simply aren’t ready for honor-code systems” (McCabe and Drinan, 1999, p. B7).

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study set out to gain an understanding of the ethical and code of conduct practices used by universities internationally. This research was conducted through the use of the AACSB-

accredited university website, because of its emphasis on ethics when accrediting schools. The initial sample examined 49 international schools, excluding the United States, that were both AACSB certified and offered Masters and/or PhD-level degree programs. The analysis was coupled with an understanding of the United States ethics and code of conducts that exist across universities as a foundation of comparison. Upon further exploration the sample size was reduced to 23 universities in Asia, the South Pacific region, Europe, Canada, and Latin America, as these were the only schools with codes of conduct and ethics practices posted on their respective websites. This lack of posted codes is not surprising as past research conducted by McCabe and Makowski found “one in four institutions do not have a clear, written academic integrity statement, policies or procedures. In addition, many institutions that do have policies in place don’t make them readily accessible to faculty members, students, or others” (McCabe and Drinan, 1999, B7). The search for ethical practices and codes was conducted using a combination of the following search terms: academic policy, integrity, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, cheating, ethics, code of conduct, code of ethics, and citation rules.

**RESULTS**

In order to maintain the anonymity of the universities and colleges, the names of the schools are not specifically identified. Each school is referenced by a letter in the alphabet (A-W) in place of its proper name (see Exhibit 1 for the list of schools by region).

**Exhibit 1: AACSB Universities Sample**

| Asia   | South Pacific                       | Europe                    | Canada                         | Latin America            |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| The University of Hong Kong                        | Queensland University of Technology | University of Strathclyde | Dalhousie University           | Adolfo Ibanez University |
| Hong Kong Baptist University                       | Griffith University                 | Durham University         | Concordia University           |                          |
| The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology | University of Otago                 | Lancaster University      | McMaster University            |                          |
| The Chinese University of Hong Kong                | The University of Queensland        | University of Warwick     | University of Toronto          |                          |
| Nanyang Technological University                   | University of Technology Sydney     | Aston University          | York University                |                          |
|  |                                     |                           | University of British Columbia |                          |
|  |                                     |                           | Simon Fraser University        |                          |

**Asia**

The exploration of Asian schools was reduced to five schools, after conducting the initial search and identifying those having available codes of conduct. Cheating in China has been regarded as “the worst since the communist government resumed university exams in 1997” (Pomfret, 2000, p. A17). The five schools will be referred to as University A, B, C, D, and E.

Across all Asian schools, their respective codes of conduct addressed plagiarism, honesty and academic integrity and defined them in the same manner as the United States. The schools provided consistent definitions of these terms, such as plagiarism including intentionally or unintentionally not giving credit for work to its authors, and examples of each to provide subject clarity. The codes also addressed methods to avoid these acts, pressures that lead to cheating and proper citation methods. All Asian schools in the sample recognized that the intent of the individual did not matter; the actions are not tolerated whether intentional or unintentional. The universities also referenced the use of committees for reporting the claims of plagiarism and had procedures in place to be followed with an escalation policy if necessary. While the detail and list of punishments varied across the different universities, each university included the following four as punishment options: a zero grade, written warning to the student, resubmission of the assignment, and expulsion from the university. Appeals were allowed at all five universities and the decisions reached were final; however the length of time to appeal varied.

The above similarities in policies throughout Asia were accompanied by several differences. University A retained the right to action against students after graduation if a violation of the policy was found. University B excludes students who have been accused and found guilty of cheating from teacher evaluations. University C's punishment list was more extensive than the other programs and included university community service, withdrawal of student scholarships, ineligibility to receive honors at graduation, cancellation of credits, withholding/rescinding a degree, and an X placed in the course prefix on transcripts. The X is removed if the action is only committed once, upon graduation. University D gives those found guilty of plagiarism demerits along with a zero grade. Both University D and E have a document that students must sign and turn with each assignment that states that the work is in fact their own. This document is referred to as a Declaration of Originality and a Submission Declaration. The use of a declaration statement or a signed statement was implemented in Duquesne University (Pittsburgh Pennsylvania), ethics initiatives (Weber, 2006). While not implemented in all five schools, some did use cheating software as a method of detection. University E took punishment to a financial level, fining students for their actions in increasing denominations as the severity increased. University E was the only school to include a reference to those who claim a mental disorder and explained investigation procedures.

## **South Pacific**

The South Pacific region was composed of five schools (Universities F-J), four in Australia and one in New Zealand. Like Asia, the codes of conduct in the South Pacific also addressed plagiarism, honesty, academic integrity and cheating in the same terms as the United States. Each school provided a detailed definition and examples of each action. The universities examined in the South Pacific all considered how far along a student was in school when evaluating their case. The universities also emphasized that faculty and staff should educate their students about the policies. All of the schools included that the violations are recorded, documented, and filed for reference in the future. Appeals are allowed by students in all schools. The penalties, while they do vary among schools were the same in terms of delivering one or a multiple of the following: issuing a warning, providing an alternative assignment, rewriting the assignment, zero grade for the class, suspension, and expulsion.

Universities G and H both have two-tier decision policies based on the perceived severity of the offense. University G also emphasizes confidentiality and procedural fairness. University

H is allowed to cancel any passes from any or other student's course in the same semester. University I describes detailed best practice guidelines for faculty and looks at the work assigned by the faculty members when evaluating the penalties to ensure that it was fair to the student. University J has a unique penalty that places conditions on enrollment and participation in subjects for certain periods of time.

## **Europe**

While many schools in Europe were examined, only five (Universities K-O) were found to have a code of conduct that addressed plagiarism. All European schools defined plagiarism in generally the same context as the United States including honesty, academic integrity and cheating. A document outlining the guidelines on avoiding plagiarism was also commonplace among the five schools. Plagiarism is considered a breach of university policy at each school and penalties exist accordingly. Not all schools defined the penalties of a plagiarism offense in detail; however, there is consistency among schools regarding a tiered approach in defining the severity of the offense. Some schools may consider the offense as either accidental or deliberate; however, other schools may use the number of offenses or academic year to define the severity. Although the penalties among the schools vary, all schools offer an appeal process for students. Additionally, it is commonplace to record, document and file all offenses.

University K and L did not specify penalty details for plagiarism offenses, but did state their existence. University M prefaces their plagiarism policy by stating they are aware that many students from different cultures and educational systems find their academic referencing systems and conventions awkward; however, does not tolerate ignorance of the subject and therefore penalties exist. University M assigns penalties for first-time offenders based on academic year. First-year students are granted resubmission of work and a warning letter, while students in their second year or higher are granted a grade of zero with no right of reassessment of work. The penalties for second, third and fourth-time offenders are the same for all students and may include any of the following consequences: permanent exclusion from the university, resubmission of work with a minimum passing grade, an award of zero for the work in question or for the entire course, and withholding of a degree. University N assigns penalties based on number of offenses. First-time offenders are granted resubmission of work or a grade of zero, the offense is documented and the student may either accept or appeal the offense and consequence. Second-time offenders are referred to an investigating committee where the penalties vary accordingly. University O categorizes offenses as either accidental or deliberate. Accidental penalties include the following consequences: a grade reduction, policy review, and/or an informal warning. Deliberate consequences are not outlined in the code of conduct; however, if a student is suspect of committing a deliberate offense then there is no warning given and the matter is forwarded to an investigating officer who contacts the student directly. While not implemented in all five schools, University N utilizes cheating software as a method of detection.

## **Canada**

In North America, specifically Canada had the most schools out of any region to provide a code of conduct on a university website. An article by Gulli (2007) discusses Canadian universities remaining silent as academic fraud continues to increase on its campus. The article highlights quotes from university officials including, cheating is "a university's reality" and



“universities are not doing enough” (Gulli, 2007). Seven schools (Universities P-V) were found to have a code of conduct that defined plagiarism in association to academic dishonesty. All seven schools made some reference to penalties for plagiarism offenses, incident reports for documenting, recording, and filing and review committees, but not all schools specified an appeal process.

University P’s code of conduct is dedicated to academic integrity and has an extensive record-keeping system of all plagiarism offenses. Offense records are kept on file for one to five years and penalties are administered on an individual basis. University Q distributes pamphlets on plagiarism in four different languages and offers a hearing process upon student request. University Q’s penalties include permanent notations on student records and additional credit hours required to graduate. University R’s academic dishonesty policy points out that graduate students should be more competent and held to a higher ethical standard than undergraduates, therefore plagiarism penalties are more severe for graduate students. University R administers penalties based on the number of offenses and can include any of the following consequences: grade reduction, grade of zero, denial to utilize university facilities, denial to register, cancellation of registration, suspension, expulsion, recommendation to rescind student degrees, record on academic file, and transcript notations. University S provides guidelines on avoiding plagiarism and says penalties are administered on an individual basis, but does not outline clear penalties and does not refer to an appeal process. University T’s penalties include suspension not to exceed five years with a transcript notation and students who are eligible to graduate cannot do so until the suspension is lifted or has expired. University U was the least detailed in definition of penalties but did state revocation of degree for severe plagiarism offenses. Last, University V places responsibility on faculty to notify and monitor students on plagiarism polices and will assign a grade of “failed academic dishonesty” for plagiarism offenses.

### **Latin America**

Two schools in Latin America were found to have had a code of conduct, however only one school’s code of conduct could be translated to English (University W). University W is located in Chile and maintains a “Code of Honor” on the school website. University W’s code of honor specifies intolerance for improper citation, but does not utilize the word plagiarism specifically. University W defines improper citation as improper use of authors, texts, articles, papers, class notes and other works. University W’s code of honor does not discuss penalties for improper citation offenses; however, University W does discuss respect for intellectual property rights.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

An examination of the universities where a code of conduct existed found that the most commonplace practice was defining the word “plagiarism”. Four out of five regions defined plagiarism with an emphasis on honesty and integrity. However, only two out of five regions provided guidelines for citation. While it is apparent that plagiarism is indeed a breach of university policy for all locations included in this research, only some of the universities outlined punishable actions associated with the subject. Additionally, four out of the five regions examined allude to having a review committee in place to assess alleged offenses and accept student appeals.

This research found distinct differences among all five regions with varying levels of detail. The most detailed penalties existed in Asia, where students face punishments such as university community service, withdrawal of scholarships, ineligibility for honors at graduation, cancellation of credits, withholding of degrees, an X in a course prefix, demerits with zero grades, monetary fines, and psychiatric investigations. In the South Pacific, the major differences were presented by two universities that have a tiered decision policy based on the severity of the offense and one university that places conditions on enrollment and participation in subjects for a certain period of time. In Europe, differences among universities included penalties based on academic year, number of offenses, and severity of offenses. Canada also had schools that assign penalties based on number of offenses and academic year. Distribution of information regarding plagiarism was prominent in Canada and is seen as a more proactive approach to plagiarism prevention. Some unique penalties in Canada are worth mentioning: permanent notations on student records, additional credit hours required to graduate, and a heavier responsibility on faculty. Last, the university in Latin America mentions intolerance for improper citation, but does not discuss penalties for offenses.

This research shows that through communication across countries, a more comprehensive approach can be taken by universities to not only eliminate loopholes but create a code of conduct and culture of academic integrity that spans globally; creating more ethical students, while reducing temptation to cheat. Having a code of conduct and living a culture of academic integrity is important for any institution; “institutions of higher education that live the ethics and values contained in their mission statements produce graduates who are highly valued and sought by ethical organizations” (Procario-Foley & Bean, 2002, p. 101).

### **Limitations**

There were a few limitations faced, including language barriers, which resulted in challenges translating websites that were not in English. The inability to translate university websites led to their exclusion from this study. The study was also limited by its US-based search terminology for uncovering policies and punishments. There is a chance that schools excluded from the study used different terms to identify these same principles. The researchers' search was confined by the school's website; thus schools without codes posted online were excluded. The search focus was narrowed down to only AACSB accredited schools with a masters or higher education program. The study was also faced geographic limitations as AACSB accreditation is not currently present in all countries, such as India.

### **Future Research**

Future research will focus on the expansion of the schools and regions not covered, as this study was a primarily exploration into the potential culture and code of conduct differences internationally. Future research will include schools that are not AACSB accredited and have those who do not have masters or higher education programs. The reach expansion beyond AACSB schools will allow for a more complete picture of the academic environment for ethics and codes of conduct across the world. The depth of the study will also be expanded to analyze the orientation and student procedures of the respective universities to gain a better understanding of the student's education and awareness of the policies. Also the schools can be further classified, analyzing and comparing the similarities and differences between public and



private universities, the number of years in operation, and the size of the university. This research will be supplemented with a survey of the student bodies to gauge their knowledge of the codes of conduct and ethical behavior.

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