Continuing "Teaching Titbits" from the NYLS Initiative for Excellence in Law Teaching (IELT)!

Good news – better learning environments may also reduce cheating

Students who are motivated by the material are less likely to cheat. In the college environment, James M. Lang's new book Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty finds that violations of academic integrity are more common when students are not learning effectively or are motivated by extrinsic performance metrics more than intrinsic desires. These results may seem fairly predictable, but they also provide us with a great deal of guidance about how to achieve two goals simultaneously: improving learning while reducing the likelihood of academic violations.

In an interview on *Inside Higher Ed* (available at http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/09/11/author-new-book-discusses-ways-reduce-cheating-and-improve-student-learning, with thanks to Vicki Eastus for passing the article along!) Lang explains that drawing students into material by posing challenging questions about it or applying it to fascinating problems tends both to engage students and encourage academic integrity. Moreover, he connects his findings to research that strongly connects student "mastery goals" (that is, an aim to learn the material) with higher performance, as opposed to "performance goals" (*i.e.*, aiming to achieve a certain grade.) Lang's work finds that mastery orientation reduces incidences of cheating. More importantly, Lang suggests, mastery or performance orientation is not fixed – it changes for different students in different classes. In practice, this means that classes that inspire students to want to learn the material itself, rather than focusing on extrinsic measures of success such as grades, serve to improve both learning *and* academic honesty.

Formative assessments can help prevent cheating. Lang also suggests that students sometimes cheat when they have poor sense of how well they are actually learning the material. If they are overconfident and overestimate their understanding of what they are learning they may underprepare, which tends to correlate to more instances of cheating or plagiarism when at the last minute they get a sense of their deficits. To help combat this problem, Lang urges educators to incorporate mini-assessments that give students a sense of how they are doing as a course progresses.

The question for us is whether the same effects occur with graduate and professional students. There is little research on this point, but of course there is always the possibility that

the added maturity and personal stake in law school learning could lessen these effects. Conversely, the strong emphasis on grades in legal education may exaggerate the "performance orientation" that Lang finds related to dishonesty, and that many researchers have found connects to poorer learning.

A culture of academic integrity and clear institutional expectations can help reduce cheating. To combat academic dishonesty at our own institution, some faculty members have suggested that we take proactive steps like adopting an honor code. Somewhat older empirical research on undergraduates suggests that honor codes may have some positive correlation with academic integrity, but do not, by themselves, automatically reduce cheating. What *has* been shown to reduce dishonesty is promoting an overall culture of academic integrity, in which institutional expectations are clear and the students reasonably expect that their peers are actually following them. This can be done with or without an honor code. Donald L. McCabe & Linda Klebe Trevino, *Academic Dishonesty: Honor Codes and Other Contextual Influences*, 64 JOURNAL OF HIGHER ED. 522 (1993)(available at http://library.uvm.edu/~pmardeus/honors/honorcode.pdf).

So how can we use these insights both to improve student learning and to decrease dishonesty?

With appreciation for everything you do for our students,
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