

# Honesty is a forgotten policy

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**BEE STAFF WRITER**

Gone are the days of passing notes in class and writing equations on the back of your hand.

Today, students use cell phones with "text messaging" functions and handheld computers to hoodwink the system. And the Internet makes it easy to plagiarize.

The gadgets are convenient, but faculty and staff at California State University, Stanislaus, say cheaters are encouraged by a sense of entitlement.

Educators don't have data to point to, but they believe some students view college as little more than a transaction.

"You paid your reg fees, so therefore, you should get a good grade," said Brian Duggan, an instructional technology consultant on the Turlock campus.

Students these days feel they deserve a lot of things, like free music downloaded off the Internet, good grades and a diploma, they say.

When a student feels entitled to a degree, he or she will simply do the bare minimum to get by, and that includes plagiarism and cheating, said Amy Andres, a librarian at California State University, Stanislaus.

"It is increasingly rare to find a student who commits completely to the process and practice of earning a college degree," Andres wrote in an e-mail to The Bee. "Students now view their college education as a very long 'to do' list. They simply check off courses, exams and papers as they make their way to graduation."

With college costs rising, students look for ways to get the best deal for their money, said Chris Nagel, a philosophy lecturer at Stanislaus. "Cheating on a paper is maximizing your profit, as long as you don't get caught," he said.

## **Rise in reports of dishonesty**

Patty Perez, a 20-year-old student from Atwater, admits she sometimes takes shortcuts to save time. At times, she said, she's in a hurry or forgets to cite sources.

"I don't really think it's a big deal," she said. "But once again, there're people who put a

lot of effort into it and want to get credit for it."

Reports of academic dishonesty are up, though officials say that's because more faculty are aware of the prevalence of Internet plagiarism and choose to report it. Some examples:

Reports of academic dishonesty are up at Stanislaus, from one report in 2001-02 to 15 last year.

Reports of cheating or plagiarism jumped at Modesto Junior College from nine in 2001-02 to 20 last year, said Wilma McLeod, vice president of student services. The majority of reports come from faculty in literature and language arts, who caught students at cut-and-paste Internet plagiarism, she said.

In a survey of 14,000 undergraduates conducted last year, of those who responded, 22 percent acknowledged they cheated in a serious way on a test in the past year, and 51 percent admitted to some level of plagiarism -- be it significant plagiarism, cutting and pasting a sentence or two, or not citing sources. Donald McCabe, professor of management and global business at Rutgers University, conducted the survey.

Student claims last semester of falsified juror survey data at Stanislaus State prompted a discussion of cheating and plagiarism on the Turlock campus.

Faculty members agree the majority of students earn their degrees legitimately.

Even so, Jennifer Humphrey, coordinator of student discipline at Stan State, thinks reports of academic dishonesty are increasing throughout the California State University system.

CSU spokeswoman Clara Potes-Fellow said there is no data to back this claim, though there is a general perception that, as a result of the abundance of information on the Internet, students more often use data incorrectly and plagiarize.

### **More publicity, more reports**

Several campuses, including Stanislaus, have created Web sites that contain tools on how to properly cite information.

Andres said students consider information on the Web to be "free" or exempt from citation, and many accept what they find at face value.

"Many students have no grasp of the nature of scholarship or its value," she said.

One student, who admitted to falsifying data on the Scott Peterson juror survey and wishes to remain anonymous, said in an e-mail: "i just wanted to make one thing clear ...

there was no cheating ... the information was falsified ... there's a difference."

Academic dishonesty comes in a variety of forms, Stacey Morgan-Foster, vice president of student affairs, said in response. "They're all wrong," she said, no matter how people try to rationalize them.

Morgan-Foster said she does not believe more students are cheating or plagiarizing, despite rising reports.

She said increased publicity about the reporting process has led more faculty to file reports. Also, she said, large numbers of students don't know proper citation methods.

"I'm not sure people are getting those lessons in high school," Morgan-Foster said.

Faculty often go easy on students who don't understand how to cite sources, telling them to be more careful the next time.

Last fall, 20-year-old Alicia Valdez of Riverbank worked on a class project on cheating in college.

Valdez said she's never cheated and was surprised to learn that students can buy term papers off the Internet. "It's just crazy how easy it could be."

She said she thinks people are driven to cheat by pressures that start with strict requirements needed to get into college. Once there, students feel pressure to get good grades to qualify for financial aid, she said. Still, Valdez said, there's no excuse.

Edgar Ramirez, a 19-year-old freshman at Stanislaus, said cheating is just plain wrong.

"Because mostly it's hurting you," he said. "You're actually not learning anything."

McCabe, who has surveyed students about cheating for 14 years, said he's not surprised that reports of academic dishonesty are on the rise. "Many more schools are beginning to pay more attention to the issue," he said.

At the same time, he said, it seems the problem is getting worse. McCabe bases his observation on the numbers and on student attitudes.

He says students say, 'It's not a class that counts toward my major.' Or, 'I don't like the professor.'

Meanwhile, at Stanislaus, faculty members are doing their part to stop cheating and plagiarism.

Like many of her peers, Elaine Peterson, associate professor of economics, explains to

students at the start of the semester why it's undesirable.

"But almost every year there are one or two that I know of who do it," out of more than 100 students, she said.

Some faculty use licensed software programs, such as Turnitin, to detect plagiarism. Others type in suspect sentences and conduct Google searches.

### **Healthy sense of suspicion**

Students who are caught typically either flunk the paper or test, or the course. Consequences are up to individual instructors, and faculty members can choose to report incidents to

Judicial Affairs -- for tracking purposes or for an investigation.

"I usually make it flunking the course, unless it was clearly accidental plagiarism," Peterson said.

"What I see, ironically, in my professional ethics classes," added Nagel, "are students taking whole papers from Web sites."

To help prevent blatant cheating, faculty members need to have a "fairly healthy sense of suspicion," including prohibiting access to cell phones and other such devices during tests, said Duggan of Stanislaus State.

Students can use phones to take pictures of questions and send them to someone who sends the answer back, he said. Word processing documents and Excel spread sheets can be stored on Palm Pilots, he added.

"You could program in key words, dates, equations," he said. "It's very ingenious."

Six University of Maryland students admitted cheating in January on an accounting exam by using their cell phones to receive text messages with the answers. Another six students were implicated in the case. Rumor has it, Duggan said, that the same thing happens at Stanislaus.

In the future, faculty may have an even tougher time cracking down on high-tech cheating, what with Massachusetts Institute of Technology developing wearable computers that look like vests and fanny packs, Duggan said.

Some people at Stanislaus favor a universitywide system of dealing with cheating, such as requiring all faculty members to report incidents to Judicial Affairs to try to catch repeat offenders.

"The problem of academic dishonesty cannot be repaired with a patch kit," Andres said.

"We need a systematic approach in order to stop this moving train of information misuse."

McCabe favors getting students to understand that there are certain rights and responsibilities that go along with being a member of a community.

"I'm a great believer that the best answer in the long run is promoting academic integrity rather than trying to detect and punish academic dishonesty," he said.

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