



# PREVENTING AND DEALING WITH ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

**L**ast year, I found a test with no name on it. By a process of elimination, I identified it as Roger's (names have been changed for obvious reasons). When I passed the tests back, Roger exclaimed loudly, "This is not my test! I scored much better than this!"

After class, Roger demanded to know what I was going to do about losing his test. He produced homework to prove that the handwriting was indeed different than on the test.

His claim caught me off guard. I spent several hours trying to figure out what had become of his "real test." I had circulated through the classroom and ascertained that everyone had put his or her name on the tests. Roger was one I had had to remind to do so. In desperation, I held up the test with no name on it to the light. Sure enough, the imprint of Roger's name was still very evident on the

page, even though the signature had been erased. Roger had hoped to convince me that I had lost his test so he could pressure me to give him a better grade or a second chance at taking the test. I later discovered that his strategy had worked with another teacher!

Several years previously, I had served on Elaine's doctoral dissertation committee. While reading her two-chapter proposal, I couldn't help but notice that the style changed drastically between the two chapters. Finally, 20 pages into the second chapter, I walked over to the library. Using the subject catalogue, I found a shelf of books on her topic. I pulled out one at random. After skimming through 20 pages or so, I gave up and pulled out a second book. Suddenly, on page 4, I ran into a paragraph that sounded familiar. Sure enough, Elaine had copied verbatim out of this text but had given no credit whatsoever to the source.

Having been surprised by

BY WIL CLARKE

## The electronic age has made many kinds of new cheating techniques available.

Roger's cheating, I went to the Internet and looked up academic cheating. One of the first sites I found was called *How to Cheat*. It appears to have been created by a student who prides himself in dishonesty. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the site.

Both Roger and Elaine denied to the end that they had done anything amiss. On the Webpage, *How to Cheat* ([http://www.rajuabju.com/literature/how\\_to\\_cheat.htm](http://www.rajuabju.com/literature/how_to_cheat.htm)), I read:

- **Deny, Deny, Deny:** Never admit cheating—ever! Invent a plausible story. If you stick to your story, say it enough times with enough conviction and emotion, they'll start to doubt themselves. Once they doubt, their conscience will bother them: after all, what if they're making a mistake when a mistake could ruin someone's life?
- **Badger:** Go to their office to plead your case and don't take no for an answer—don't leave their office until they give in. Most people won't call the police on you, so keep saying you're going to leave but don't leave. Eventually, most profs get frustrated and figure it's not worth the effort.

Both Roger and Elaine followed this advice perfectly, whether or not either had read it. Eventually, Roger failed the class, and Elaine was expelled from school. Elaine sued the school, but without a legal leg to stand on, she lost the case before it even came to court.

Recently, I was asked to evaluate a departmental program at a nearby Christian college. During my visit, I met with a

group of students chosen by the department. After the usual types of questions, I asked them if they had any questions or statements. One student volunteered that a teacher in the department had the reputation of being the easiest teacher to cheat on in the whole school. I asked them to elaborate. It was obvious from their discussion and demeanor that they were very concerned about what was happening. Among other ways, the students would have a pretty coed sit near the front to occupy the teacher's attention. Then they would all sit on the back row and pass papers around that contained answers to the various test questions.

When I chatted with this teacher later, I mentioned what had been said about him. He looked shocked and said that he never thought anyone would cheat in his Christian school.

Cheating is not limited to the West, or to certain levels of education. In an African country, I was asked to help grade highly competitive standardized tests that determined whether students would be allowed to enter secondary school. Sometimes, I discovered that the tests from a particular school all had the same answers on the multiple-choice questions. What made this obvious was that all the tests

had the same *wrong* answers!

I asked some of the indigenous teachers how this was done. They explained the techniques with which they were familiar. A teacher from another school would come to proctor each test. The local teacher would come in and ask to be allowed to see the test. The proctoring teacher would show him the test. Then the local teacher would use pre-arranged hand signals to convey to the students which answers to put for each question.

After these and other experiences, I was delighted to be able to attend a workshop about cheating being offered by Bob Bramucci at Riverside Community College in Riverside, California, with about 15 other seasoned teachers. Bramucci arranged a demonstration with five "students" who demonstrated how to cheat on a test.

Attendees at the workshop walked around and observed the students closely for five minutes. We were quite proud of ourselves for discovering 13 ways the students were cheating. Imagine our chagrin when we learned they had been cheating in 26 different ways! That meant that by walking around and closely observing the students, we still missed 13 ways they had managed to cheat!

### Dishonesty: Definition and Prevalence

Academic dishonesty is normally defined as including but not limited to any academic submission that passes off work done by someone else as one's own. It includes attempts to obtain a better grade than one has earned and aiding another student to do the same. Below are some examples of how students do this.

According to Bramucci, "From elementary school to college, nearly all students have seen someone cheat, about two-thirds say they've cheated at least once, and about a third cheat regularly."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to cite statistics showing that about two-thirds of all elementary and middle schools have a serious problem with cheating. Some 97 percent of California high school students claim to have witnessed cheating in their classrooms, and 90 percent of college students admit to having cheated at least once in college. (See Bramucci's Website for many more such statistics.)

### How Students Cheat

#### Cheating on Tests

As might be expected, all the old cheating standbys are still in vogue. For example, students often sit so they can see another student's paper or pass notes when they think the teacher isn't looking. Another ploy is to get an attractive student to sit in a provocative way to distract the teacher's



attention from what the other students are doing. Students hide notes in their caps, pockets, and shoes, and write notes on the inside of bandages they stick to their bodies. If possible, they steal tests from a teacher's office ahead of time or hack into the school's computer.

Recently, many students have shown great ingenuity in creating new ways to cheat. Notes are written on the inside of drinking bottle labels. They are written on clear tape and the clear tape stuck on the inside of dark, loose clothing. The notes are invisible until the tape is peeled back and viewed against a light background.

At the *How to Cheat Website*, girls are advised to write notes on their thighs and then cover them with opaque tights and a miniskirt. Then they merely have to roll down the tights and read their thighs. If a teacher shows any interest, he is immediately threatened with a lawsuit for sexual harassment!

Some students feel intense pressure to achieve and see cheating as a harmless way to "get ahead." Most students respond to being caught cheating with a show of remorse and repentance. But some get angry and may actually threaten the teacher with physical harm. If you suspect this might happen, ask for police protection or advice.

Other cheaters will do their best to discredit you. You may be accused of sexual harassment or gender, ethnic, or racial bias. Keep careful records of every conversation with a student. It is wise to have a disinterested third party present when you

discuss sensitive issues. That way, you have a witness to what happened between the student and you.

The electronic age has made many kinds of new cheating techniques available. For instance, a student will claim that he can concentrate only while listening to music. So he uses his Walkman or iPod. Instead of music, however, he has notes recorded. A cell phone can store notes and pictures of notes, and allow voice or text messaging with others inside or outside the classroom. A student may insist she needs her phone as a calculator, since she forgot her calculator. Of course, sophisticated graphing calculators can also store all kinds of notes and do almost any kind of mathematics commonly tested in algebra or calculus at the push of a button. Pagers and two-way radios also facilitate communication and can be used to get outside help.

Students also cheat by bringing notes to class that they can slip between the pages of the test, making them appear to be part of the test. If a teacher uses colored paper, they will copy their notes onto many of the common colors and use the appropriate color notes in that particular test. They may paste notes on the backs of chairs or parts of the classroom wall hidden from the teacher's desk. Therefore, the teacher needs to walk around the classroom freely and look

in many directions. If there are empty chairs, it is a good idea to sit in various parts of the classroom and see things from the students' perspective.

If students exercised the same level of creativity and ingenuity in learning their course material as they do in cheating, we would have a much better educated student body today!

### ***Cheating on Assignments and Papers***

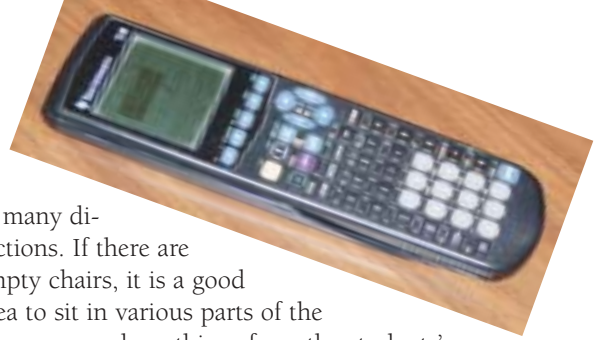
Cheating on papers and assignments, or even downloading whole essays, has become exceptionally easy in this day of the Internet. When I was discussing this article with the editor of the *JOURNAL*, she shared an article from the *Washington Post* dated January 15, 2006.<sup>2</sup> On the front page of the editorial section was a long article written by a young woman who has been writing articles designed as "inspiration" for college application forms and assignments. Students have downloaded and submitted these verbatim as their own work.

Of course, the teacher has no idea who is doing work created outside of class. It may be a friend or relative. It may be downloaded from the Internet. It may be done in collaboration with other students. If a teacher makes the same assignments year in and year out, successful papers may be "recycled" by new students in subsequent years. To illustrate an extreme case, I have literally had students cross out another student's name or tear off the name and turn in the same assignment.

### **Higher Standard**

Most Western educational institutions hand out grades that, in the main, are intended to represent an evaluation of individual work done by a student. Evaluations of collaborative work may require extra care to ensure accurate assessments of each participant's work and to prevent cheating.

As Christians and Adventists, we profess to hold a higher standard of integrity than "the world" does. Our intention is to uphold the Ten Commandments and the principles of Scripture. This includes adhering to such injunctions as "thou shalt not bear false witness" and "thou shalt not steal." In an attempt to counteract the dishonesty inherent in cheating, we can point out to our students that submitting work that is not theirs is indeed bearing false witness. Furthermore, if someone submits another's work as her own, she is stealing from this other person. We as Christian and Adventist educators are disappointed and even distressed when students with whom we have labored



and prayed seem to turn their backs on the high moral ideals we have tried to instill in them.

Recently, a student who had a record of cheating on his personal file applied to a professional school. When his case came before the school's recommendations committee, a long discussion ensued. In the end, the committee felt it couldn't recommend him because the members were afraid that his dishonesty would then extend into his professional practice and could jeopardize the health, safety, and even life of his future patients.



### Policies to Deter Cheating

Merely reminding students of their moral or ethical obligation may not prevent cheating. Other deterrents may need to be employed.

At La Sierra University, the faculty handbook devotes six pages to Academic Honesty, categorizing three levels of dishonesty. First-degree dishonesty (major cheating on exams or theses) results in dismissal. Other levels of dishonesty usually result in a failing grade for the course and the potential for further action if the student continues this type of behavior. Naturally, without the cooperation of both the administration and teachers, any kind of policy is fruitless.

At my present school, I have found that the administration strongly supports the teacher when there are allegations of academic dishonesty. When such policies include severe penalties and are consistently enforced, students may think twice before they cheat. However, in serious cases, the school will need competent legal support. Courts tend to support the school as long as good records have been kept.

### Possible Deterrents

There is no foolproof way to prevent or catch cheating. However, teachers and administrators can do their best to make cheating difficult.

Since any work that is done outside of the classroom has a greater chance of being forged, teachers should minimize its effect on the student's grade. In my classes, homework never represents more than 12 percent of the total grade.

Some teachers use an Internet program that checks for similarities between a document and other manuscripts in the program's database. I have used TurnItIn and found it quite effective. (If you're interested, go to <http://www.turnitin.com> and check it out.) It does cost money, of course. Even there, students find that by making frequent changes in a plagiarized document, they can defeat the program. So it is not foolproof.

During tests, one way to discourage cheating is to limit items brought into the classroom, such as cell phones. In addition, use several versions of a test, especially those with multiple choice or true/false questions. Some textbooks come with test generators that allow a teacher to make multiple versions of tests. If your class is not too large, try to

avoid multiple-choice questions. Finally, if possible, have two proctors for each test, and walk around the room while the test is in progress.

As graduate teaching assistants, we were instructed to keep students' daily work and tests for three years in case there was a lawsuit. I have followed that policy ever since.

Schools at all levels need to have policies in place that define what constitutes cheating and that provide carefully defined penalties *before* such dishonesty occurs. Teachers are put in a difficult position if required to define cheating and concoct appropriate penalties. Administrators must support teachers and not be swayed by denials or threats made by students accused of cheating or by their parents or "friends in high places." When creating or revising such policies, administrators should confer with a lawyer skilled in this area and consult the policies of other schools.

Teachers should report all occurrences of academic dishonesty to the administration. This way, a pattern of behavior can be observed in some students, and actions can be taken that will hopefully help the student take responsibility for his or her actions. After all, one of our goals as Christian institutions is redemption. ✍

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### Some interesting sources:

<http://teachopolis.org/justice/justice.htm>. Dr. Robert S. Bramucci, District Dean of the Open Campus of the Riverside Community College District in Riverside, California, has put together this extremely helpful Website to present ways of cheating as well as ways to meet the some of the challenges of academic dishonesty.

[http://www.rajuabju.com/literature/how\\_to\\_cheat.htm](http://www.rajuabju.com/literature/how_to_cheat.htm). A Website apparently written by students to give other students ideas on how to cheat and get away with it. This is one way we pay for the privilege of free speech.

<http://www.turnitin.com>. This is a subscription program that allows students to submit their work through a filter that checks it against known sources. It will give a percentage of resemblance to other sources. It is widely used from at least the 7th grade through university.



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### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See <http://teachopolis.org/justice/justice.htm>.
2. Bess Kargman, "Writing Wrongs," *Washington Post* (January 15, 2006), p. 8.