Academic Integrity in Online and Face-to-Face Classes

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This is an abstract of findings which will be submitted as a convention presentation. A more detailed summary will be available by spring.

The majority of faculty (64%) and students (57%) believe it is easier to cheat in online classes (Kennedy, 2000). Yet there is little research comparing academic disintegrity online (OL) to face-to-face (FF) classes. Existing research has found higher levels (Lanier, 2006), lower levels (Hart & Morgan, 2010; Kidwell & Kent, 2008), and levels comparable to other research studies (Grijalwa, 2006).

Grijalwa simply compared her means to other studies. While two other studies found lower levels of cheating, differences in volunteering in FF and OL classes and surveys not designed for OL are plausible explanations for these results.

The purpose of this study was to compare online course cheating to face-to-face course cheating with equivalent sampling and an established survey (Miller, Shoptaugh, & Woolridge, 2011) with items added to accommodate differences in cheating that occur in an online class.

Additionally, we investigated whether there were differences in online and face-to-face student’s perceptions of how severe consequences should be and beliefs about the student’s responsibility to prevent cheating.

Method

Participants were undergraduates from two south midwest universities; given extra credit as determined by their individual instructor. Students received the consent electronically, with a link to the online survey. We received 362 responses. The average age was 23.5. Females represented 70.7% of the participants and these were fairly evenly distributed across college class.

The survey included 21 items each to address OL and FF cheating, 20 items addressing appropriate consequences for violations, five items for measuring Academic Integrity Responsibility (AIR), and the demographic variables.

Results

While 17% disagreed, 55.2% agreed that is easier to cheat in online classes. We analyzed that belief in two ways. Within subject comparisons were made with students having both types of classes. Students reported more cheating in OL classes, M = 8.76 than in FF classes, M = 6.65, t (142) = 5.57, p < .001. There were no differences in number of OL and FF credit hours, t (142) = -.25. Analyses of specific cheating behaviors will be presented.

Secondly, we made between subject comparisons for students having only one type class. We found lower rates of cheating in the OL students, M = 6.85, than in FF students, M= 8.59, t (174.8) = 2.20, p < .05. These findings that appear to contradict the within-subject analyses would most likely be explained by attribute differences between OL and FF students. So we covaried AIR and found that no significant differences remained, F(1, 217) = .24.

OL-only students believed in more severe consequences, F(2, 357) = 10.07, p < .001 and reported higher Academic Integrity Responsibility (AIR), F(2, 357) = 10.07, p < .001.

Discussion
While findings indicate that students taking both types of classes are more likely to cheat in online classes, it appears that the population who take only online classes may take more Academic Integrity Responsibility, be more severe in the consequences they impose, and cheat less. Further discussion of how specific OL cheating differs from FF cheating will be discussed in the paper.