

Most high schoolers cheat -- but don't always see it as cheating

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Most high-school students participating in a new study on academic honesty say they have cheated on tests and homework - and, in some alarming cases, say they don't consider certain types of cheating out of line.

The study by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln gauged both the prevalence and perceptions of cheating among high-school [students](#). It found the practice is widespread and many students carry misperceptions about academic dishonesty, and also identified patterns among students that may help teachers stop it.

"Students generally understand what constitutes cheating, but they do it anyway," said Kenneth Kiewra, professor of [educational psychology](#) at UNL and one of the study's authors. "They cheat on tests, homework assignments and when writing reports. In some cases, though, students simply don't grasp that some dishonest acts are cheating."

Researchers assembled the data from an anonymous survey of 100 members of the junior class of a large midwestern high school. Students were asked to share their beliefs and experiences with cheating as it pertained to tests, homework and report writing.

The results suggested that in some ways, students had clear views of what constituted cheating - not that it stopped them from doing it. For example, 89 percent said glancing at someone else's answers during a test was cheating, but 87 percent said they'd done that at least once. Also, 94

percent said providing answers to someone during a test was cheating - but 74 percent admitted to doing it.

Other behaviors weren't as cut-and-dried in students' minds.

Surprisingly, only 47 percent said that providing test questions to a fellow student who had yet to take a test was academically dishonest, and nearly seven out of 10 admitted to doing so.

"The results suggest that students' attitudes are tied to effort. Cheating that still required students to put forth some effort was viewed as less dishonest than cheating that required little effort," Kiewra said.

For example, divulging test answers was likely perceived more dishonestly (84 percent) than divulging test questions (47 percent) because receiving test questions still requires some effort to uncover the answer, he said.

In general, attitudes on what constitutes cheating when it comes to homework and reports were less pronounced than in the case of cheating on tests.

The study showed:

- Sixty-two percent said doing individual take-home tests with a partner was cheating (51 percent said they'd done so);
- Just 23 percent said doing individual homework with a partner was dishonest (91 percent had done so); and
- Only 39 percent said writing a report based on the movie instead of reading the book wasn't cheating (53 percent had done so).

The results suggest that out-of-class misdeeds are viewed less harshly than in-class cheating, Kiewra said - a dynamic that is likely caused by teacher monitoring in class, and, therefore, a greater risk of getting caught.

By understanding students' cheating beliefs and actions across different settings, educators might better learn about how students think about cheating, Kiewra said.

"Based on our findings, teachers should spell out for students what constitutes cheating. If a third of students are taking credit for ideas of others, then it's time to make cheating actions clear," Kiewra said.

"Teachers also need to be more vigilant about policing and sanctioning cheating because just knowing what [cheating](#) is, is not enough. Students will do it anyway, if they can get away with it."

More information: The study, which appears in the current edition of *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, was authored by UNL's Kiewra and alumna Kelly Honz, now a high school educator; and Ya-Shu Yang of the University of Connecticut.

Provided by University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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