

# ACADEMIC DISHONESTY OF TAIWANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*Academic dishonesty (AD) is a global plague. This study examines an understudied population, Taiwanese college students from Zhongli, Taiwan (n=603). We used two scales, student attitudes towards academic dishonesty and one measuring the frequency of those behaviors. Both were found to be reliable. Defining AD is key to getting a complete understanding of the concept. We found self-reported academic dishonesty behaviors prevalent both in exam cheating and plagiarism. When we expanded the definition of AD to include homework assignments, we found cheating to be near universal. We conclude the paper with limitations and a call for further research.*

**Key words:** *academic cheating, plagiarism, survey, college student, Taiwan*

## INTRODUCTION

Academic cheating is a global problem (Orok et al, 2023), but its importance extends beyond the classroom. College students are the future workforce and leaders in society (McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2006; Lin & Wen, 2007). Their unethical behaviors now could be problems for the future. Based on current research, we should be worried. Cheating on campus is rampant. Brown & Choong (2005) found that 95.9% of private U.S. university students and 96.7% of public U.S. university students had admitted at least one dishonest practice. While some findings have lower percentages, depending on how you define dishonest acts, the results are staggering.

While the American college campus has been thoroughly examined, much of the world has not. Taiwan is underexamined on academic dishonesty (Ludlum, et al., 2019; Iberahim et al., 2013). In the current project, we surveyed Taiwanese college students on academic cheating. To support this analysis, we will first review the relevant literature.

Next, we will examine the survey methods. Then, we will discuss the findings. We conclude by suggesting further research in this area.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

We know a great deal about academic dishonesty, and the results are quite dire. In this project, we use the terms academic dishonesty and cheating interchangeably. We rely on the heavily examined American college population. In the classic study, Bowers (1964) surveyed over 5000 students across 99 US campuses and found 66% of students had cheated at least once. More recently, McCabe and his co-authors examined multiple large groups on AD. McCabe (1997) surveyed 16 campuses to compare business and engineering students and found that 84% of business students and 72% of engineering students admitted to cheating within the last year. McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino (2006) surveyed over 5000 students from 32 colleges and found 56% of business students and 47% of non-business students admitted to cheating at least once during the last year. McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield (2001) reported on a variety of contexts, including differences of major, emphasis or lack of honor codes, and numerous individual factors, always with a similar result: most college students cheat.

Individual factors have been correlated with academic dishonesty. Age matters. Older students are less likely to commit academic dishonesty (Kisamore et al, 2007; Olafson et al, 2013; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Klein et al, 2007; Landa-Blanco et al, 2020). Consistent with this finding, the year in school also matters. First year college students are more likely to cheat than upperclassmen (Adama et al 2023).

One factor that gathers a great deal of attention is gender. Most studies (but not all) have found that males commit AD more than females (Hensley et al, 2013; Bowers, 1964; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Whitley, Nelson, & Jones, 1999). However, within the same major, gender differences are more modest (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001).

Religion should be an important factor in AD, as ethics are often grounded in religion. However, the method of reporting has resulted in mixed results. Religious identity (which denomination a student chooses) has little effect on AD (Yu et al, 2017; Huelsman et al, 2006; Bruggeman & Hart, 1996). This does not mean religion is immaterial. Choosing one religion from a list of many does not significantly affect AD. However, religious attendance / participation is positively correlated to academic honesty (Bloodgood et al, 2008; Burton, Talpade, & Haynes, 2011, Rettinger & Jordan, 2005). In addition, more intense religious feelings (regardless of denomination) were tied to more self-reported academic honesty (Rettinger & Jordan, 2005).

In addition to individual characteristics, international comparisons are important as ethical standards vary with culture (Lin, 1999). There are strong differences in how people from the East and West see academic dishonesty (Thomas, 2017). In the current project, Taiwan's culture is heavily influenced by Confucian doctrine (Lin, 1999), making a direct comparison to USA results difficult.

In contrast to American and Western European students, the literature on Taiwanese undergraduates and academic dishonesty is limited. Lin & Wen (2006) completed a national study of undergraduates (n=2068) in Taiwan. They used a scale of 17 cheating behaviors divided into four areas of academic dishonesty, including cheating on tests, cheating

on assignments, and plagiarism. Lin & Wen (2006) found that 61% of Taiwanese students admitted to cheating. Further, they found that the top five most practiced academic dishonesty behaviors in Taiwan were providing an assignment for another student, giving prohibited help to others on their assignment, copying others' assignments, passing answers to other students, and copying answers from other students. They also concluded that female students were more honest, and first year students were more dishonest.

Hsiao (2015) compared undergraduate students in Taiwan (n=525) and compared their unethical conduct and the cheating intentions while controlling for work experience. They concluded the anticipated negative affect appears to be stronger than positive effect on cheating intention. Hsiao (2015) found significant determinants of cheating intention are quite different in the part-time job and full-time job student groups. Hsiao did not analyze other demographic groups.

Hsiao & Yang (2011) surveyed Taiwanese business undergraduate students with a full-time job (n=215). They restricted the concept of academic dishonesty to traditional forms of cheating on exams. They concluded that the students' ethical behavior was influenced by peer behavior. Furthermore, a lack of penalties for cheating behavior may also provide excuses for students to interpret their cheating behaviors as insignificant. They did not examine students by age, gender, or occupation.

Yang, Huang, & Chen (2013) investigated undergraduate students in Taiwan (n=431) using the Academic Dishonesty Scale (ADS) which included plagiarism, cheating on exams, improper cooperation, and tampering with grades. They found social science students cheated more than business or engineering students. They also discovered that students, regardless of gender or major, were significantly more willing to report classmates than friends. In addition, they found that male students reported a slightly higher level of involvement in three types of misconduct.

Ludlum & Gwinner (2016) examined undergraduate business students in Taiwan (n=1410). They found that 30% claimed to have never seen a student cheat on an exam, however 33% claimed it happened frequently. When asked about reporting another student, 60% claimed he/she would never report another student cheating. Less than 4% indicated would always report a student cheating. These findings indicate that cheating incidents are likely under detected.

Yang (2012) examined graduate students in Taiwan (n=586) using a 26-item Academic Dishonesty Scale (ADS) related to publishing academic papers and plagiarism. Yang (2012) found the fraudulence subscale ranked the highest in terms of perceived frequency, followed by plagiarism, falsification, and delinquency. Yang (2012) also found that master's students participated in more academic dishonesty than doctoral students, that males assumed more students committed bad behaviors, and that females were more critical of those behaviors. This result cannot be compared to the current study since those behaviors (ranking of authors on a published paper, etc.) have little application to the undergraduate experience.

The current project's first goal is to build on this knowledge of the understudied Taiwanese student population. Also missing in current research is an examination of the individual characteristics (age, gender, religion, and employment) for differences in academic dishonesty, especially among undergraduates. This paper's second goal is to fill that void. This

project will examine two broad research questions. First, is academic cheating common in Taiwan? Second, do individual factors affect students' attitudes towards academic cheating?

### METHOD FOR THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

The participants were from Chien Hsin University of Science and Technology in Zhongli, Taiwan. The university has over 13,000 students in five colleges with seventeen (17) degree programs (Chien Hsin, 2023). Our survey included a sample of students (n=603) by first finding professors who volunteered their students (and class time) to participate in this project. We attempted to include all business majors, our intended study group.

**Table 1. Demographic data of sample**

<b>Major</b>	Business 67%	Non-Business 33%		
<b>Year in School</b>	First 47.3%	Second 28.2%	Third 14.1%	Fourth 10.3%
<b>Gender</b>	Males 57%	Females 43%		
<b>Relationship</b>	Married 3%	Single 97%	Has children 2%	
<b>Religion</b>	Non-Religious 47%	Taiwan Folk Religion 25%	All others 28%	
<b>Employed</b>	Part time 50%	Unemployed 50%		
<b>Parents' education</b>	Legacy student 37%	First generation student 63%	Military experience 7%	
<b>Taken business ethics course</b>	Yes 56%	No 44%		

Underclassmen were underrepresented in our sample. Males outnumbered females 57% to 43%. Our group consisted of primarily traditional students (95% were aged 18-22).

Only 15 students (3% of the respondents) were married, and only 11 (2%) students had children. Half of the students (50%) worked part time while attending school. Taiwanese Folk Religion was the dominant group with 25%, while 47% identified as non-religious. Other students were spread among other faiths. Nearly all students (83%) reported going to a church service less than once a month, and only 4% identified with being "strongly religious." The majority of students (63%) were the first in their family to attend college. Only 7% had military experience. Over half (56%) had taken a business ethics course.

## PROCEDURES

A convenience sample was taken from large, introductory classes at Chien Hsin University in Zhongli, Taiwan during a series of guest lectures in the spring of 2019. To avoid language/translation issues, the bi-lingual survey was conducted simultaneously in English and Mandarin Chinese. The students at Chien Hsin are multilingual (Mandarin and English), with several programs taught in English to benefit their international exchange programs. Most foreign teachers in Taiwan are English speakers (Chang, Bai, and Wang, 2014). The Mandarin translation was accomplished by one of the authors, who is a language professor, and the translation was pilot studied before implementation.

Students were asked to complete the questionnaire during class time. The survey was voluntary and anonymous. No inducements were offered to the students to participate. A total of 603 surveys resulted. Some surveys were returned blank, but the exact number of these were not retained. We would estimate a return rate of approximately 90% or higher. The text of the questions is included in the tables.

## MEASURES

We used two measures for academic integrity. First, we replicated the 18 item Attitudes Toward Cheating (ATC) scale from Simha, Armstrong, & Albert (2012). These items used a three-level scale, Not Cheating, Trivial Cheating, and Serious Cheating. Second, we replicated the 18 item Frequency of Cheating (FOC) scale from Simha, Armstrong, & Albert (2012) which put the same behaviors of ATC into first-person and past tense (“I did \_\_\_”). For the FOC, we used a five-level scale, Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Many times, and Always. The scales were reliable with an American student sample. Simha, et al., (2012) found that business students had more lax attitudes toward cheating and cheated more often than leadership students. This project is the first known use of the ATC and FOC scales on a Taiwanese sample.

The project appeared to have face and content validity. As a test for internal consistency, we conducted Cronbach’s alpha for our two scales. Our first construct, Attitudes Toward Cheating resulted in an alpha of .947 for the 18-item scale. Our second construct, Frequency of Cheating resulted in an alpha of .938 for the 18-item scale. We used SPSS version 24 for analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We were best able to minimize the socially appropriate response bias by using a large group survey, anonymous results, and confidential submissions. We begin by first looking at the overall results of our two constructs, Attitudes Toward Cheating (ATC) and Frequency of Cheating (FOC). We started with an original sample size of 603. See the complete results below in Table 2. Note that ATC9 is missing. One of the demographic questions was inserted in that spot to break up the pattern.

**Table 2. Attitudes Toward Cheating Results.**

<b>Attitude Towards Cheating Questions (n = 603)</b>	<b>Not Cheating</b>	<b>Trivial Cheating</b>	<b>Serious Cheating</b>
ATC1.Copying homework assignments from others	26	59.1	14.9
ATC2.Allowing others to copy homework assignments from you	26.1	56.5	17.4
ATC3.Collaborating with others on assignments meant to be completed alone	42.7	45.2	12.1
ATC4.Collaborating with others on tests meant to be completed alone	33.1	39.6	27.3
ATC5.Using unauthorized cheat-sheets on an exam	32.4	28	39.6
ATC6.Looking at or copying from other's exam copies	30.9	28.3	40.8
ATC7.Allowing others to look at or copy from your exam copy	27.4	38.7	33.9
ATC8.Obtaining exam questions illicitly beforehand	38.8	15.7	45.5
ATC10.Using unauthorized electronic equipment for use in exams	35.4	31	33.6
ATC11.Fabricating bibliographies on assignments/papers	38	31.7	30.2
ATC12.Copying from a source without citing the source	31.4	38.5	30.1
ATC13.Obtaining papers from the web and turning them in as your own work	36.2	19.4	44.4
ATC14.Making others write your papers for you, and then turning them in as your own work	38.6	22.7	38.6
ATC15.Referencing materials without reading them	37.3	44.8	18
ATC16.Falsifying grade scores	37.8	11.5	50.7
ATC17.Changing one's answers after getting the grade in order to increase one's score	35.9	17.5	46.5
ATC18.Making false and fraudulent excuses to postpone assignments and/or tests	31.8	37.8	30.2
ATC19.Falsifying school documents	39.1	13.1	47.4

Overall, with the ATC, we found that Taiwanese students do not view homework violations (ATC1-2-3) or failing to cite references (ATC15) as serious cheating. Bad behaviors while taking an exam (ATC4-5-6-7-8) and making false excuses to avoid assignments (ATC18) were viewed as more serious. The students viewed the most serious infractions as falsifying scores (ATC16-17) and providing false documents to the school (ATC19).

**Table 3. Frequency of Cheating means.**

Frequency of Cheating Questions (n = 603)	Mean
FOC1.I have copied homework assignments from others	2.50
FOC2.I have allowed others to copy homework assignments from you	2.81
FOC3.I have collaborated with others on assignments meant to be completed alone	2.74
FOC4.I have collaborated with others on tests meant to be completed alone	2.43
FOC6.I have used unauthorized cheat-sheets on an exam	2.04
FOC7.I have looked at or copied from other's exam copies	1.99
FOC8.I have allowed others to look at or copy from your exam copy	2.25
FOC9.I have obtained exam questions illicitly beforehand	1.55
FOC10.I have used unauthorized electronic equipment for use in exams	1.57
FOC11.I have fabricated a bibliography	1.50
FOC12.I have copied information from a source without citing the source	1.70
FOC13.I have obtained a research paper from the web and handed the paper in as my own	1.46
FOC14.I have had others write my research paper for me, and then handed in the paper as my own	1.48
FOC15.I have referenced materials without reading them	1.83
FOC16.I have falsified grade scores	1.49
FOC17.I have changed test or assignment answers after getting my grade score	1.46
FOC18.I have made false and fraudulent excuses to postpone assignments or tests	1.58
FOC19.I have falsified school documents (i.e., parking permit, certificate, doctor notes etc.)	1.36

The scale used to capture the Frequency of Cheating behaviors was a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). A higher mean indicates the behavior was more common. The most common behaviors in our sample were reported as homework and collaboration infractions (FOC1-2-3-4) and allowing another person to copy from your exam (FOC8). We were not surprised to find that the behaviors viewed as minor infractions (homework and collaboration) were also those that happened most frequently. We were surprised, however, to find that letting another person copy from your exam (FOC8) happens frequently, as students considered this a serious infraction.

The behaviors reported as occurring the least often were plagiarized papers (FOC14), falsified scores (FOC16-17), and falsified school documents (FOC19). These behaviors were rated as the most unethical in the ATC. This was a positive sign. The behaviors that were viewed as most unethical were occurring the least.

Overall, the amount of cheating was dismal. Serious exam cheating at least once any time in college (FOC 5, 6, 8, & 10) was self-reported by 70.6% of Taiwanese students. Serious plagiarism at least once any time in college (FOC 11, 12, 13, & 14) was self-reported by over half (51%) of our sample of students. When we expanded the scope of AD to include minor cheating (like homework), the results were shockingly bad. Only 2.82% of students claim to have never cheated in any way at any time in college. When we expanded the concept to never cheated or only cheated once, only 4.81% of the students were cleared. While bad, these results

are in line with studies from other nations (see Bowers, 1964; McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2006; Orok et al, 2023) and previous studies in Taiwan (Lin & Wen, 2006). Cheating is frequent, common, omnipresent, with the only differences being how AD is defined. These findings support the conclusion that widespread academic cheating is a global phenomenon.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTHER RESEARCH**

All survey projects have limitations. Academic dishonesty research is sensitive, and it is difficult to control for the social desirability bias (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2002) despite our best efforts. Second, the results relied on self-reported data from the students. Self-reported data were not confirmed by any other means. Self-reported data always has problems of generalization and reliability. However, with student privacy concerns, as well as the content of the survey (unethical behaviors) anonymous surveys were the only possibility. Another limitation was that we only examined one institution. This school might not be representative of all Taiwanese universities. In addition, most were business students, however individual sub-disciplines (accounting, finance, economics, management, etc.) were not delineated. Differences in these sub-disciplines could be significant. Other discipline areas (science, math, history, language, etc.) were under-represented. Our sample also did not include graduate students who could have far different views on ethics. In addition, our sample consisted of almost exclusively traditional students (young, unmarried, without children). Future projects should target the non-traditional students as their views should not be assumed to be the same as traditional students. Another limitation of this study is the non-random sample. A random sample could result in more generalization.

### **CONCLUSION**

Is academic cheating common in Taiwan? We can confidently conclude that academic cheating is common in Taiwan, no more and no less than any other nation, and depending on the definition of AD, the offenses can be nearly universal. Academic cheating is assumed to be a global phenomenon, and our findings would support that conclusion.

Future projects should examine more cultures to confirm that academic cheating is a global problem, not just a few isolated countries. In addition, future endeavors should include other parameters to allow for more in-depth statistical analysis. Further, new projects should strive to gain a well-rounded sample to examine subgroups of students (by religion, major, age, marital status, having children, etc.). Finally, any future projects should examine in detail the newest cheating behaviors of students. New technologies are adding new opportunities to cheat while on campus.

### **AUTHORS**

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