

# Academic Integrity

Cheating is defined as “acting dishonestly or unfairly in order to gain an advantage.” However, many American children and young adults seem to think of cheating as a normal, if not acceptable, action towards gaining a desired result.

Cheaters are not predominantly low-scoring, below-average students. The majority of high-school cheaters today are actually high-performing, college-bound students. And they aren't necessarily only cheating on tests. A recent study found that while 22% of students reports having cheated at least once on a test, 43% admits to providing or receiving “unauthorized collaboration” on homework.

The continued proliferation of technology and web-based research and interaction, including the popularity of social media sites such as facebook, plays a role in today's culture of cheating. Some students consider facebook to be one big study group, using it often to network with classmates and solicit assistance. Reliance on social media may also work to normalize the type of “virtual” cheating that looks more like helping out a classmate than smuggling in exam answers.

Unauthorized collaboration at the university level is also highly prevalent, sparking a dialogue about what constitutes cheating. According to Don McCabe, a Rutgers Business School professor, “The number of self-reported cheaters has decreased at the college level, but that merely reflects the increasing number of students who think there's nothing wrong with borrowing work.” Claiming that the definition of cheating is changing, he states that most students view homework as a collaborative effort and that finding answers online or through friends is an example of being resourceful. Some students even argue that they should be allowed to collaborate; after all, in the post-graduate workplace, people are often encouraged to work together to maximize their resources.

Trevor Harding, a professor at California Polytechnic Institute, has documented a definite shift in students' conception of cheating. He discovered something he calls the “technological detachment phenomenon.” Although most students agree that bringing a cheat sheet into an exam is cheating, most think it is acceptable to bring a graphing calculator with pre-programmed equations.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should students be allowed to collaborate on homework assignments? If so, under what conditions? Under what conditions, if any, is cheating morally permissible?