# Academic Integrity in Hospitality Programs

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**Abstract**
To ensure a culture of integrity, academic institutions need clear, accessible policies aligned with practices. This study compared how faculty in 14 hospitality programs perceived their institutions' academic integrity policies and practices with the accessibility, clarity, and comprehensiveness of integrity policies published at their websites. Overall, faculty reported the belief that their institutions had clear integrity policies and supports, but the study found that it was often difficult to locate the policies and their components, indicating a possible impediment to establishing a culture of integrity.

**Introduction**
Concerns about the rise in cheating and ways to the aid faculty to prevent forms of academic dishonesty at colleges and universities have increased over the past several decades (McCabe & Trevino, 1996; Merritt 2008; Serviss, 2016). Institutions of higher education have been studying cheating since the mid-1960s (Bowers 1964), scrutinizing which students cheat, why, and what the consequences are when they are caught (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001; Sacks, 2008). Plagiarism is now the most prevalent form of academic dishonesty (Sacks, 2008), aided by the availability of online resources that students can copy (Calvert-Evering & Moorman, 2012) as well as a large industry of papers for sale, from undergraduate essays through whole dissertations (Bartlett, 2009).

Cheating is rampant in both secondary (Merritt, 2008) and postsecondary education. According to self-reports, 70% to 80% of college students engage in some form of cheating (Marsden, Carroll, & Neil1, 2005).  Tricia Gallant, past Advisory Council chair of the

International Center for Academic Integrity, claims that everyone has cheated at some point in their academic career: "Cheating is, after all, a normal part of being human and an inevitable part of learning. Cheating is, and likely always will be, endemic to the institution of education" (2011, p. 5).

This view reflects a widespread perception among students that cheating is a necessity in school (Mujtaba & Preziosi, 2006) and that cheaters are efficient or smart (Davis, Drinan, & Gallant, 2009), putting a positive spin on cheating. Punishments for academic dishonesty are inconsistent, ranging from very mild to expulsion whether the incident is blatant, passive, or incidental (McCabe, 2005; Robinson-Zanartu et al., 2005; Eisner & Vicinus, 2008). The pervasiveness of cheating, the ease of plagiarism of online sources, and inconsistency in punishment may work together to trivialize academic integrity in students' eyes.

Meanwhile, despite plagiarism detection software, instructors are unable to keep up with the high incidence of cheating in their classes (Syam & Al-Shaikh, 2013). As university faculty come to expect more cheating in their on-line classes, Grebing (2015) found that an on-line academic integrity tutorial for undergraduate students had no significant effect on their perceptions of cheating.

College professors are faced with cheating and plagiarism not only in their undergraduate classrooms, but in their doctoral-level courses as well. Vittrup (2016) comments, "Because so many doctoral students stay in higher education, going to the professional world often means becoming a researcher or professor at a college or university. And we have all seen incidents of cheating professors really hurt the reputation of science and academe."

In the hospitality industry a positive ethical climate is critical for organizational success as it enhances the quality of customer service (Luria & Yagil, 2008). In a study of MBA students, Randi Sims (1993) found that those who reported engaging in academic dishonesty also admitted to a wide range of work-related dishonesty. Thus it is important to take steps to create a culture of academic integrity in hospitality management programs. A search of the literature found no studies of a culture academic integrity in these programs.

A formal integrity policy is a critical piece of a culture of academic integrity. Bretag et al. (2011, p. 21) point out,

> How a university defines and explains the role of academic integrity (AI) in its policy will affect the way it is taught and embedded in the curriculum. It therefore follows that policies, procedures, teaching and assessment practices should be interconnected.

The study presented here investigated two questions:
1. What are the perceptions of hospitality faculty regarding academic integrity issues and polices in their programs?
2. Do hospitality programs and their institutions have comprehensive, easy-to-access integrity policies?

The framework for this study was based on the Culture of Academic Integrity model proposed by Bretag et al., who analyzed the integrity policies at the websites of all Australian public universities and identified five core elements of exemplary academic integrity policies:
1. Access: ease of finding and understanding policies
2. Approach: clear values, purpose, and commitment to academic integrity as an educative process
3. Responsibility assigned to students, faculty, and staff
4. Support for implementation, dissemination, and training
5. Detail in description of breaches, levels of severity, reporting, and appeals

Bretag et al. concluded,
> An exemplar policy needs to provide an upfront, consistent message, reiterated throughout the entire policy, which indicates a systemic and sustained commitment to the values of academic integrity and the practices that ensure it. (p. 21)

**Method**

*Participants and Survey Instrument*

This study targeted U.S. universities with hospitality management programs. Selection criteria for the institutions were (1) offering six or more courses in hospitality management, and (2) having over 50 students enrolled in the program. Approximately 140 institutions were found that met both criteria. From that list, 14 schools (10%) were chosen to achieve a balance across 6 regions: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, Rocky Mountains, and West. Specifically:

1. West 1
2. West 2
3. West 3
4. Southwest
5. Rocky Mountains 1
6. Rocky Mountains 2
7. Rocky Mountains 3
8. Midwest 1
9. Midwest 2
10. Southeast 1
11. Southeast 2
12. Southeast 3
13. Northeast 1
14. Northeast

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Research question 1 was investigated with a 10-question anonymous survey e-mailed to 233 hospitality faculty at the rank of assistant, associate, or full professor in April 2016 using Survey Monkey. Forty-four completed surveys were returned (a 19% response rate). Of those who responded, 73% were male and 27% were female. The rank distribution for full, associate, and assistant professors was 41%, 34%, and 25%, respectively. The age distribution was 31–35 years old: 7%; 36–40: 2%; 41–45: 14%; 46–50: 11%; 51 and over: 66%. Thus the majority of participants were mature scholars.

The 10 questions on the survey inquired about demographics (gender, academic rank, age), whether the department, program, or school had encountered problems with academic integrity with either students or faculty, and whether respondents believed that their school's policy included the five core elements listed by Bretag et al. Participants indicated their agreement with statements about the core elements using a 4-point Likert-type scale on which 1 = disagree, 2 = semi-disagree, 3 = semi-agree, and 4 = agree.

*Academic Integrity Policy Analysis*

With respect to Question 2, the main criteria under study were (a) whether the universities' academic integrity policies contained the exemplar components established by Bretag et al. and (b) whether students and faculty would be able to locate all of the components with a brief online search. Only one of the 14 hospitality departments had an academic integrity policy at its website; therefore, the data was culled from university rather than department websites. The search term academic integrity/dishonesty was entered in the websites' search engine and the list of matches was examined to locate policies related to each of the five core elements of Access,

Approach, Responsibility, Support, and Detail as defined above.
The five core elements were broken down into 18 key components suggested by Bretag et al. (See next page )  For example, the Access element included easy to locate, easy to read, explicit language, logical headings, links to relevant resources, and has downloads. In order to evaluate ease of access, the number of searches required to locate components of the policies was an important part of the recording and analysis. Table 1 (See page 16)  shows components that were located with 1 or 2 searches (√, easy), 3 searches (+, moderately difficult), and those that could not be located with 3 searches (–). One to three searches were deemed to pass the search criterion for accessibility while more than three searches were considered a failure, corresponding to reduced motivation of students and staff to hunt for the policies.

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Adapted from Bretag et al., 2011

ACCESS
1. Easy to locate
2. Easy to read
3. Explicit language
4. Logical headings
5. Links to relevant resources
6. Downloads

APPROACH
1. Clear statement of purpose and values
2. Coherent institutional commitment to academic integrity

REPONSIBILITY
1. Clear outline of student responsibilities
2. Clear outline of faculty/staff responsibilities

SUPPORT
1. Procedures for implementation listed
2. Resources/modules/training to facilitate student understanding
3. Resources/modules/training to facilitate faculty understanding

DETAIL
1. Explains breaches
2. Explains levels of severity for breaches
3. Description of reporting process
4. Description of recording process
5. Description of appeals process

**Results and Discussion**

*Faculty Perceptions of Integrity Problems and Policies*

The results of this study confirmed that academic integrity issues are common in hospitality programs. With respect to students, 89% of participants said their department or institution had encountered integrity issues, 4% had not, and 7% were unsure. The incidence of integrity issues was significantly lower for faculty: 34% of participants said their department or institution had encountered an issue with a faculty member, 43% had not, and 23% were unsure. A clear majority of participants—at least 70% in each category—agreed or semi-agreed that their institution's academic integrity policy incorporated the key components of all five core elements, Table 2 (See page 17), broken down as follows:

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1. Access: 77% believed that their university had an academic integrity policy that was easy to locate and read and was well written, clear, and concise.
2. Approach: 82% believed that their university's academic integrity policy had a clear statement of purpose and values that was easy to understand.
3. Responsibility: 78% believed that their institution's academic integrity policy clearly outlined responsibilities for faculty and students.
4. Support: 70% believed that their department, program, or institution provided resources such as training modules, training seminars, and professional development to help students, faculty, and staff understand academic integrity.
5. Detail: 75% believed that their institution's academic integrity policy explained procedures for reporting, recording, and appealing breaches of academic integrity.

Table 1. Ease of locating integrity policy components at institutions' websites*

| Schools→ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Access | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | ✓ | ✓ | − | − | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2 | ✓ | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3 | ✓ | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 4 | ✓ | + | − | − | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | ✓ | + | − | − | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6 | ✓ | + | − | − | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Approach | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | ✓ | + | − | − | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | ✓ | − | + | − | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Responsibility | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | − | − | + | − | + | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2 | ✓ | + | − | − | − | ✓ | − | + | − | + | − | + | ✓ | + |
| Support | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | + | + | + | − | + | ✓ | − |
| 2 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | + | − | + | − | − | ✓ | − |
| 3 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | + | − | + | − | − | + | − |
| Detail | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | + | − | + | − | − | + | − |
| 2 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | + | − | + | − | − | + | − |
| 3 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | + | − | + | − | − | + | − |
| 4 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | − | − | + | − | − | + | − |
| 5 | ✓ | − | − | − | − | ✓ | − | − | − | + | − | − | + | − |

* See Appendixes for list of components and institutions.

Symbol key
✓ Component was located with 1–2 searches (easy to find)
+ Component was located with 3 searches (moderately difficult)
− Component was not located with 3 searches (failed search criterion)

*Quality of Integrity Policies*

The participants' largely positive perceptions of their school's integrity policy were encouraging. But did the policies themselves live up to the positive perceptions of faculty? First, the fact that only one of the 14 hospitality departments had an integrity policy posted on its website means that students and staff at the other 13 schools would need to search the institution's main website for guidance. Instructors' motivation to search for and enforce the policies might not be high if 70% believe that their institution is already providing training to students and staff.

Table 2
Hospitality Faculty Perceptions of Integrity Policies

| | Disagree | Semi-disagree | Total % disagree | Semi-agree | Agree | Total % agree | μ | σ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Access | 4 | 6 | 23 | 11 | 23 | 77 | 11 | 7.38 |
| Approach | 5 | 3 | 18 | 15 | 21 | 82 | 11 | 7.34 |
| Responsibility | 2 | 7 | 22 | 11 | 24 | 78 | 11 | 8.15 |
| Support | 6 | 7 | 30 | 11 | 20 | 70 | 11 | 5.52 |
| Detail | 4 | 7 | 25 | 7 | 26 | 75 | 11 | 8.75 |

*Note.* n=44; μ = mean; σ = standard deviation

For all 18 exemplar components taken together as a group, the average success rate of the 14 institutions was 34% for the "easy" search criterion (1–2 searches) and 48% for "moderately difficult" (1–3 searches). The overall failure rate was 52%. Thus these schools are meeting about half of Bretag et al.'s definition of an exemplary policy.

Of the five core elements, websites most strongly met the search criterion (locating information with one or two searches) for the key components of Access, while Support and Detail were noticeably weak. The pass rates by key element were Access 61%, Approach 54%, Responsibility 50%, Support 40%, and Detail 33%. The low pass rate for Support is a particular concern because this key policy element provides procedures and resources for implementation, student instruction, and faculty training. Without those components even a clear, comprehensive policy is of little use. The same may be said of the Detail element. Thus positive accessibility to policies at institutional websites is undermined by weaknesses in other critical areas.

The study found a wide range in overall quality of integrity policies. Four schools (29%) passed the search criterion for 13 to 18 components; 4 (29%) passed on 7 to 12 components; 2 passed on 1 to 6 components; and—of greatest concern–-four schools failed on all 18 components. Only one school met the definition of an exemplary policy: its policy contained all 18 components and they were easily located with one or two searches.

There was no discernable pattern in the quality of integrity policies with respect to geography—the best and worst policies were scattered across all regions. There was also no discernable relationship between the demographics of the survey participants and their answers to the questions, but it is noteworthy that 73% were male and 27% were female. Examination of the hospitality faculty listed at the 14 institutions found 59% men and 41% women.

The results of this study indicate that hospitality management faculty face challenges teaching and implementing integrity policies in their classes, especially as the policies tended to fall short in the key element of Support, pointing to a lack of training and resources for faculty. The researcher's difficulty locating key policy elements indicates that students and faculty may not persist in their searches. Many websites contained a general statement that academic dishonesty would not be tolerated, which is not helpful to students or faculty beyond serving as a warning. The low quality of many policies is at odds with the awareness of existing academic integrity problems expressed by 89% of the survey respondents.

The study found disconnects between instructors' belief that their institution has a cohesive integrity policy and the actual quality of those policies. It is difficult to correct a recognized problem—widespread academic dishonesty—when there is no consistent approach to defining it, educating stakeholders about it, and dealing with it. It appears that institutions are not effectively acknowledging this disconnect and the lack of a system-wide commitment to academic integrity.

With some exceptions, the integrity policies examined in this study can be generally described as inadequate, lacking cohesion and a consistent message regarding prevention and sanctions. At the level of hospitality departments, policies are almost entirely absent, indicating that the departments are not emphasizing academic integrity in their programs separately from inadequate institution-wide efforts.

**Study Limitations**
One limitation of this study is that many of the key components, such as easy to read and explicit language, required subjective judgment of their adequacy. To form more objective judgments, the researcher compared the websites to the detailed Bretag et al. model, referenced literature on academic integrity, and recruited a student to provide feedback on his experience with the 14 websites. A second limitation is that institutions may provide integrity resources and training that do not appear on their websites. The low survey response rate of 19% may also be a limitation—a meta-analysis by Shih and Fan (2008, p. 257) found a mean response rate of 34% for web surveys.

**Conclusion**
Previous research has confirmed the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty in higher education. To foster a culture of academic integrity, institutions must develop and make available a comprehensive policy, and faculty must be aware of the policy and its details in order to communicate it to students and enforce it. The goal of such efforts is to reduce dishonesty not only in education, but in future places of employment, which has major significance across society.

The results of this study, along with the growing problem of dishonesty, point to the desirability of instituting nationwide standards, models, and best practices for integrity policies based on a comprehensive framework of components such as those proposed by Bretag et al. Higher education institutions could use such a framework to review their integrity policies and how they are disseminated at their websites, with an emphasis on facilitating user experience and increasing transparency of policies. A unified policy communicated through easily accessible materials would demonstrate an institutional commitment to academic integrity. Hospitality management programs will also benefit from developing a detailed academic integrity policy accessible from the department's home page, bringing it to the attention of students and faculty at the department level and linking it to hospitality industry customer service standards.

**Endnote**

A version of this paper was presented at the CHRIE  Conference, Florida International University,  Miami, FL  on March 9–10 2017
https://www.chrie.org/files/SECSA_Innovations_V2N1_March2017_Proceedings.pdf

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