Knowledge Bias: The Student's Perception Regarding Copying During Examinations, A Case Study of Israeli Colleges

Yoav Gal[1*], Lior Pery[2], Tomer Gal[2] and Adiv Gal[3]

[1]Department of Academic Research, Biba B.Y. Nihul Ltd, Gidona POB #17, DN Gilboa, 1912000, Israel.
[2]Department of Economics and Management, Tel – Hai College, Upper Galilee, 12210 Israel.
[3]Department of Science, Kibbutzim College of Education Technology and the Arts,149 Namir Road, Tel-Aviv 62507, Israel.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author YG designed the study, wrote the protocol and supervised the work. Authors LP and TG carried out all laboratories work and performed the statistical analysis. Authors YG and AG managed the analyses of the study. Authors LP and TG wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author YG and AG managed the literature searches and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The object of the article is to examine the view of students at Tel-Hai College regarding the phenomenon of copying amongst their fellow-students. The question was raised as to whether the learning process really affects the students' views and whether the phenomenon of copying bothers them more the later they are in their college career, i.e. when they are in their junior and senior years. Note that the baccalaureate degrees in Israeli colleges typically require three years of study. In order to conduct the study, questionnaires were distributed to students of the Department of Economics and Management and to students of the Department of Nutrition, for control purposes. In addition, open questionnaires were distributed to provide additional

Corresponding author: E-mail: yoav_gal@smile.net.il;

verification for the variable of opinions on copying. No significantly statistical difference was found between the two different departments regardless of the year of study. However, a difference does exist between students in the first and third years of college in general and the difference is greater amongst the Economic and Management students. The study's hypothesis, which states that students in their third year of study will be more sensitive regarding copying than will students in their first year, was disproved and the findings show that it is just the opposite. No changes in the opinions of students regarding copying occur during their college careers, because grades are what are most important to the students. The principal conclusion of the study is that there is a considerable disparity in the code of honor between the academic institution and the students who study there.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the internet era and over time as technology has advanced, the means for copying have become more accessible, simple and inexpensive, which enables students to get academic credit for work that they did not do, with very little risk of them being exposed. This phenomenon starts as early as elementary school, and a generation has grown up with the 'culture' of copying, bringing it with them to their academic studies as well. They do it largely without associating the meaning of 'crime' to the phenomenon. Becker, in 1968 (as quoted in [1]) proposed an economic model for crime that presents the theory that the criminal makes a rational decision; the criminal weighs the expected benefits against the expected costs of carrying out the crime, and thus chooses his actions. Later, the model was adapted to the dishonesty and copying found in academia. Kerkvliet and Sigmund [1] posited that the student also considers the costs/benefits in making a decision about copying.

The phenomenon of copying is perceived as a world-wide problem [2]. It can be found in a range of institutions, from the leading universities to the smallest community colleges, from the United States, through Europe, to the Far East. Bar-Yehuda [2] notes that 89% of all students let their friends use their work as study tools, 83% were actually involved in copying during tests, and 55% in copying papers. In addition, it was found that 95% of all students took part in small incidences of cheating.

During the last 30 years, an increase in cheating has been observed. The most important factor that affects cheating has been the need of students to improve their grades [3]. The researchers examined cases of dishonesty in academia and found that they are perceived in two different ways. One is the level of severity of the act and the second is the difference between copying on examinations and on papers. The first aspect refers, for example, to copying on a mid-term exam compared to copying on a final exam, or copying homework versus copying a final paper. The second aspect is the difference between copying on an examination and copying an assignment that is done at home, wherein the dishonesty on examinations is considered to be worse. In addition, it was found that a considerable number of students copy and the researchers assumed that the students do not learn much, because most of their energy is invested in projecting an image of knowledge, rather than acquiring knowledge.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of copying is increasing due to internet sites that provide papers and examples of examinations. A greater number of books and sources of information providing guidelines on how to cheat on examinations are also available and accessible [4]. Other reasons for the phenomenon, according to the researchers, are the deterioration in societal ethics and mores generally; and the competition between students striving for higher grades. Two types of factors in cheating can be distinguished: One relies on the students' behavior, and the other on the academic institution's culture and the messages it promulgates. The factors that were found to affect cheating that were associated with the students depended on such variables as: demographic variables; academic ability; psychological, ethnic, social and environmental variables. The factors associated with the institution's messages are characteristics of the institution, like the behavior of the academic staff, the institution's policies and the institution's perception of cheating and enforcement of its rules.

Researchers [1] state that most studies examining copying are of very little benefit to the university teacher, because they examine students' copying throughout all their years of studying and do not provide any precise information about the scope of the problem in the classroom itself. Various lecturers utilize various processes in the classroom; each one makes different demands on the students. Accordingly, the students copy in different ways, depending on the teacher. Furthermore, the researchers are sure that the universities should increase their efforts at deterrence. By contrast, other researchers say that the students' behavior reflects a general deterioration in society's ethics and mores and that in the face of this societal trend, methods to deter and suppress copying are considered to be ineffective and can sometimes even encourage copying. These methods include sanctions, threats, proctoring of exams and using different versions of the exam.

1.1 Social Ethics and Norms

Thinking bias in the direction of personal benefit leads a person to erroneous conclusions, according to which an act which is not in fact ethical is perceived as ethically legitimate. A widespread opinion in society holds that 'If everyone cheats then I can too, since I want to be like everyone else'. That causes students to refrain from reporting on cheating, because such behavior is considered to be normal. It can thus be said that students' values have changed over the years, and the desire to succeed at any cost and by any means has become the most important factor [4].

A different study [5] found that students tend to differentiate between intangible ethics and their real behavior. That is, students know that copying is unethical, but they nevertheless copy. In the study, the researcher tried to differentiate between students who saw copying as ethical issue and those who didn't. He found that only one of the four groups he studied defined copying as amoral problem that violated universal values, while the other three groups saw cheating as violating social convention rather than universal values. It was found that, to a statistically significant extent, ethical students will show a lower tendency toward copying than will those who are unethical. Put another way, students who believe that copying is wrong will have a lower probability of copying. Students, who felt personally responsible for

preventing copying, copied less on examinations [6]. When a student identifies a situation as having ethical characteristics, he/she takes the following steps: Ethical judgment, founding an ethical intention and in the end, behaving ethically. If a student does not identify a situation as one has ethical characteristics, he/she does not consider any of these aspects. He/she might, instead, use another consideration, i.e. relying on social norms or cost/benefit considerations [5].

Researchers examined the factors influencing copying [6] and found that students who frequently copied in high school had a higher probability of copying in college as well. Students learn what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable from their peers and from their teachers, long before they enter the portals of institutions of higher education. Therefore, most students reach college with certain norms that they've learned in the past. They have indicated that they know the importance of ethical education beginning at young ages [5]. The frequency of copying in high school clearly indicates copying on tests, but not copying homework. The researchers suggest that copying on a regular basis begins during high school, leading to the development of the students' copying skills in college, thus changing their assessments of the cost/benefit of copying. Since the benefit of copying on an exam is usually higher that copying homework, students who are experienced at copying prefer to go straight to the act that will yield the highest benefit, i.e. examinations [6]. Schools and teachers do not have to assume that students disagree with ethical intentions [5]. Teachers must clarify that copying is not a rational decision but an ethical choice and that copying of every type is wrong and cannot be justified by circumstances. Therefore, the principal aim of the educational institution is not to expose the copiers but to create an environment in which academic dishonesty is not socially acceptable.

Norms among student peers can positively or negatively affect copying. Social norms that encourage copying have been found to lead to a positive personal approach towards it, to a statistically significant degree. Students who were among people who encourage copying, copied more than those who were in an environment that supports honesty and fairness on tests. When there is a clash between the norms of an educational institution and social

norms, many students prefer to invest in their social relationships, and breach the educational institution's code of ethics. In the absence of values shared by teachers and students, the students perceive the situation as "us against them". Thus, fertile ground is laid for social norms that see copying as legitimate means of achieving high marks [5].

Despite the fact that most students understand that copying is illegal, they frequently ask their peers for approval concerning which behaviors and approaches are considered normative and accepted at the educational institution. Thus, a student's belief that many other students are copying, together with the belief that copying is an accepted social norm, can lead to social pressure to copy. Peer pressure by students who copy on those who do not can lead the latter to begin copying. When dishonest behavior is considered to be normal, there is no breach of ethical rules and thus no need to eradicate it. Moreover, observation of copying is the beginning of a social learning process; new students learn how to behave by observing their peers. A theory of learning states that when a new student observes copying and internalizes the behavior, he'll imitate that behavior. On the assumption that if students are not perceived nor taught to behave fairly, copying will increase and snowball to additional dishonest and deceitful acts. Social acceptance demands that we behave appropriately, and so those students who copy on examinations need to be the ones who have to justify their behavior. It was found that an environment that does not support copying correlates to a decrease in copying, which is substantiating evidence of the existence of a culture of copying. The latter approves of violating academic honesty, while the former rejects such ethical breaches. It was found that low educational levels and a teaching style that presses for achievements cause students to consider copying positively and see it as justified, while blaming the teacher as responsible for the cheating [7].

1.2 Academia and the Code of Honor

It was found that the greater the prestige of the academic institution, the lower the incidences of copying. Also, good students complain about others who are unfairly benefiting from cheating. According to the study, despite the fact that most students agree that copying is unethical, a considerable portion of them nevertheless copy. In addition, it was found that certain

communities cheat more than others, e.g. younger students cheat more than do older students; and single students cheat more than do married students [3]. One of the aims of the study [1] was to examine the argument that lecturers cannot do anything to reduce cheating. This argument was rejected, which indicates that copying is under at least partial control by the academic institution. Supporting this finding is the assumption that, the higher the status of the academic lecturer, the more students tend to value and respect him/her, and the probability of copying declines.

Educational institutions that require reporting of such incidences had lower rates of copying. When students are required to report on their peers, observation of copying causes an uncomfortable obligation and internal conflict. As a result, students do not want to copy themselves, so as to avoid uncomfortable situations in the present and the future. An atmosphere of honesty prevails. At an institution wherein the students enforce the prohibitions against copying, honesty is the normal behavior and a breach of ethics is blatant. Such behavior, which does not match the social mores of the institution, is more difficult for the student to justify [7].

By contrast, another study [4] found that many students do not link their cheating behavior to their rights and responsibilities. Thus, in the absence of obvious, transparent and consistent institutional policies that nurture a sense of responsibility for enforcing academic honesty amongst its students, an increase in the cases of cheating is observed. Because accepted norms constitute important factors influencing cheating behavior among students, institutions should adopt programs aimed at developing organizational cultures supporting academic honesty. Transferring responsibility for enforcing honest behavior to the students can be effective in eradicating the phenomenon. The idea is not only to establish strong rules, but to establish a learning process in which each individual understands the importance of maintaining the rules, and of trust. Moreover, many students feel that, if the academic institution took more disciplinary actions against cheating on examinations, it would reduce the phenomenon. However, in the absence of supervision, students copy assignments wherein the policy is hazy, less defined and less enforced, as in homework assignments. In addition, the researchers found that the academic

institution's official policies regarding trust have no significant relationship to copying [6].

The principal recommendation of the researchers Rettinger and Kramer [7] is to reinforce the requirement and the culture of reporting in academic institutions, using codes of honor, and applying them as much as possible. It was found that students who believe that copying is taking place, copy more themselves. Thus, it is important to give students the real sense that they can be caught and that the ramifications will be dire, much more so than they thought. It is important to note that if, by doing so, the academic institution gives the impression that violations of honesty are widespread than the outcome is likely to be the opposite of the desired result.

Examinations can be given under the honor system, without proctoring [8], when it is done in concert with the students. Apparently, the problem of copying on university exams can be overcome through education and publicity. The study theorizes that the educational damage resulting from the lack of trust that prevails between the students and teachers is greater than the possibility that some of the students will copy on un-proctored exams. Zamski states: "So what? So the weaklings will cheat on honor exams and the other students will judge them or they'll fail the exams".

1.3 Cost/Benefit Considerations

It can be argued that the greater the benefit from cheating [5], the higher the motivation for students to breach ethical norms or risk punishment. Thus, the more important a test is to the student, the greater the likelihood of cheating. The researcher differentiates between two types of cheating, active and passive. Obviously, students view passive cheating as more justified than active copying. The student who participates in passive cheating faces a dilemma, of whether to help his classmate or not, i.e. whether to participate in cheating. The difference in active cheating, in which the student actively and knowingly copies, was found to be significant. However, the importance of the exam had no effect on passive cheating, in which a student allows another to copy from him/her, but does not him/herself copy. At the same time, due to cost/benefit considerations, the student who might cheat on an exam thinks that the risk is too great when the exam is proctored, thus

accounting for the statistically significant decrease in cheating on proctored exams.

A study conducted of engineering majors in 11 colleges in the U.S. found that first year students copy infrequently, both on exams and on homework assignments, and in general, reported a lower rate of rules violations. However, it was found that cheating increases over the years and students in their last years of college copy on exams at a statistically significant higher rate than do freshmen. Sophomores cheat more on homework than do first-year students. Quite possibly, students who cheat develop these skills over the years. During the first year of their studies, some students display dishonesty primarily on assignments which carry a low risk of getting caught. Later, they "advance" to cheating that has a greater cost/benefit risk. Thus, it was found that students in their last year of study copied more, to a statistically statistical extent, than did students in their first year [6]. In other words, the closer the student was to completing his studies, the higher the chances of his cheating. By contrast, another study found that if a student's grade point average was high, the probability that he would copy was lower, even in the later years of study [1]. Other studies have found no distinction between students with high grades and those with low grades in their tendency to copy [2].

Students who belong to closed social groups have a higher probability of copying on exams [6]. Membership in such groups enables the students to pool their aggregated knowledge in a way that enables students who are inexperienced at cheating to gain the benefit of doing so, while reducing the risk inherent in being discovered. It should be noted that the researchers found no statistically significant correlation between social pressure and copying.

1.4 Motivation

Two types of motivation can be distinguished amongst students: Internal and external. Internal motivation is what inspires study in order to acquire knowledge. External motivation prompts students to learn so as to prove their ability and display their diplomas. One view, therefore, holds that as early as elementary school, students can be distinguished by what motivates them to study. Furthermore, it is external motivation that is linked to dishonest

behavior. A student who is motivated by performance and thus by external factors was found to have a higher probability of copying. By contrast, a student who is motivated by learning for its own sake and relies on internal motivations, was found to have a lower probability of cheating [7].

A student who is under pressure, for example, to maintain a high grade point average, and/or is trying to avoid failure and disappoint his family, is highly motivated to escape the situation, even if that entails doing things that are wrong [6]. Students who are required to take a lot of courses to accumulate credits in one semester have a higher probability of cheating, due to their lack of time to invest in studying in each of their courses. Thus, the student will cheat more in the courses in which he has invested less time [1]. It was found that students who receive scholarships will copy more than do those students who paid for their studies themselves. The researchers theorize that students who receive scholarships are frequently under a great deal of pressure, because the benefit to cost ratio of copying on exams is higher than it is for students who pay their own way in school [6]. In addition, students are under pressure not only from their fear of failure, but also as a result of competition with their classmates. Competitiveness and the desire to succeed are attributes that receive social approbation. Other studies show that a certain level of correlation exists between cheating and the student's perception of the work load of assignments and studying. A student who carries a heavy study load tends to copy more than does a student whose study load is lighter, even when the environment does not project competition [4].

1.5 Methods of Dealing with Cheating

Two principal factors affect the extent of the phenomenon of cheating. One is enforcement and the other is the norm of enforcement. For the most part, the latter has not been internalized by the academic staff members and exam proctors. Other aspects, like the students' values, according to which copying on exams is legitimate, combined with the pressure to get high marks, contribute to the extent of cheating [2]. Factors that contribute to reducing the phenomenon are, for instance, warning the students verbally before an exam. A number of different versions of the same exam and the presence of proctors are factors that were found

to be effective in reducing copying, because they increase the probability that the student's cheating will be discovered. It was also found that the number of exams given in a course has a relationship to copying, in direct proportion. The more opportunities there are to copy, the higher the probability that copying will in fact take place. Avoiding the use of multiple-choice questions, and placing the students further apart physically during the exams were not seen to have any effect on copying [1].

Because it was found that the social climate has a greater impact on the copiers than do threats and sanctions, the researchers propose the use of alternative methods of dealing with cheating. Such alternatives include the student's admitting that he has copied, apologizing for it and paying remuneration, while simultaneously creating social norms for ethical behavior. It should be noted that the study also recommended increasing the likelihood of punishment and thus making the cost higher for the student in relation to the possible benefit [9]. In addition, in most academic institutions, the administration encourages reporting and hearings, and after that punishment. By contrast, some researchers do not see how punishment will stop students from copying and maintain that an active campaign to suppress the phenomenon can disrupt the normal learning process [3].

Bar-Yehuda [2] emphasizes specific methods. Long examinations enable the students to exchange information: when the test is a long one, the students must be allowed bathroom breaks. Using the same exams for every student, even if the tests are thought to be protected and secret enables students to reconstruct them. Using exams from prior years in a three-year course can lead to at least a reduction in cheating. Allowing students to bring some materials into the exam room can lead to them bringing in proscribed materials as well. Thus, stipulating ahead of time a limited list of materials related to the exam, or in cases in which the material is too great, not limiting the materials that students can bring, can also reduce attempts to break the rules. This means that if the bar is lowered, i.e. the rules are made more lenient, they won't be broken. In addition, Bar-Yehuda [2] recommends forbidding the use of laptops, even if the exam is an "open book" one. These and other communication devices make it easy for information to be passed from one student to another. Limiting the length of an

exam to two hours, and not allowing anyone to leave, or, in the case of an especially long test, dividing it into two shorter sessions, is likely to reduce the opportunities to cheat.

Lee [10] states that we're deluding ourselves if we think that dealing with the problem of cheating in education will be easy. Utilizing effective monitoring and techniques to reveal cheating, along with processes that ensure that those caught cheating will be punished, creates the illusion that aggressive policies will reduce cheating. It would be better to invest time in explaining to students why cheating is a mistake for them, and in encouraging an atmosphere of mutual respect. According to Lee, taking these measures are all the reasons one needs to believe that cheating will become less frequent.

1.6 Ethics and Gender in the Business Community

A study conducted in schools for Business Administration in the U.S. found that exposing students to theoretical ethics and moral dilemmas increase the benefit to the business community in practice and in academia [11]. The earlier students understand that moral behavior is admired in the business community, and the more ethics are integrated into courses in Business Administration, the more students will adopt ethical and polite approaches in business, in theory and practice. At the end of the day, the students will learn to value this type of behavior because of the values that they have internalized and not from self-interest or the desire to win prizes. Separate courses in business ethics are less effective than integrating business ethics in each business course. In another study that was also conducted in the U.S. [12], the researchers examined two questions: Whether it was right for the faculty in Business Administration programs to teach courses in ethics and; whether they thought that a course in ethics would help the student or lecturer solve a business problem in the field. They found a need for courses in ethics, and that a great deal of appreciation for the subject of ethics existed. Furthermore, they discovered that students value polite business manners and courses in ethics more than the academic staff itself does. Apparently, students depend on the academic staff as a source of authority and information in a broader way than the staff members think they do, which is what creates the disparity in their perceptions. Based on this disparity in

expectations and differences in perceptions between the students and the lecturers, the researchers state that the discussion of how to deal with the problem of cheating should begin with the staff.

In a study conducted among students of Business Administration at the University of Southern Mississippi, it was found that women's perceptions are more ethical in dealing with business situations [13]. In general, female students showed a higher degree of moral judgment than do male students [14]. Another study found that age has a statistically significant effect on students' perception of business ethics. Those aged 40 and above have high ethical standards, and as the age of the respondents decreased, their ethical standards decreased proportionately, until the age of 21. A close correlation exists between age and gender on the one hand, and problems in business ethics on the other [13]. Based on their findings, the researchers propose developing a more concrete theoretical framework regarding ethics, in order to find solutions that can be implemented. In the absence of this type of theoretical framework, we must concentrate on developing skills to learn how to use and apply existing theories of ethics [14]. Future researchers can point the way to new directions in academic study on which to focus, one of which is to teach lecturers ethical pedagogic approaches. A need exists to train the academic staff to address the subject of ethics [12].

1.7 Dealing with the Ethics of Examinations at the Bar-ilan Academic Conference, 2012: Whose Job is it? [15]

Today, silence reigns concerning the internal issues of ethics in universities; the academic institutions do not want to publicize internal information and thus be shown in a negative light. Despite that, the number of students who copy just keeps increasing, and it is obvious that no distinction exists in cheating based on gender, religion, discipline, etc. of the students. Copying is more widespread in the social sciences and less so in the natural sciences. Most of the copying can be found in longer papers, when the lecturer does not have the time to go over each paper carefully enough, and the students take advantage of this. One of the arguments most often heard is that copying

is allowed, because everyone does it. A number of additional factors influence cheating, like the accessible and user-friendly data bases which offer a wide range of papers for sale. Each year, more and more papers are sold or exchanged between friends on Facebook. Other factors in cheating are related to the academic institution, including data bases that are difficult to access; use of loftier language than the students understand; types of lectures that are incompatible with the natural way that students learn; what is done in class has nothing in common with the learning process; and minimal, if any, relationship between what is being taught and the demands of the employment market.

There are many ways to identify cheating, e.g. copying entire paragraphs from the internet; using fake interviews and providing false details for the interviewees; submitting papers very quickly after being assigned; changing the subject of a paper a number of times; the quality of the paper, which is incompatible with the academic level shown by the student(s) in class, including the large number of interviews conducted, their high quality and location; a writing style which is unlike the student's own; imaginary names and use of initials rather than names. If and when students copy, two methods can be used to address the problem. One is a frontal attack, like increasing enforcement by installing advanced search engines and computer programs; punishing more severely, including suspension of students, throwing them out of school, even registering a crime with the police; or using preventive measures, like assigning someone to personally supervise the student throughout the assignment and having the student present the paper verbally. The other is by building a code of ethics and behavioral norms that censures cheating; changing the teaching method with more student discussions in class; writing papers at home; honest evaluations; and work with multimedia, films, etc., to make lessons more interesting and increase the students' desire to learn. The future of society is a source of concern, because, according to Prof. Miriam Faust, Vice Rector of Bar-Ilan University, a person who buys his academic papers does not go out into the world having undergone the process he was supposed to have experienced. At some point, he can obtain a key position in the community without having the required knowledge to carry it out.

2. HYPOTHESIS

The research hypothesis, as worded in the research proposal, was that students in their third [last] year of study at Tel-Hai College would be more bothered by the phenomenon of copying than would students in their first year of study, even if they themselves, i.e. the first year students, do not cheat. We came to this hypothesis because students in the last year of their studies are already thinking about their professional future, and it was assumed that they would place greater emphasis on professional honesty. Also, they would try to link theory to practice, leading them to choose courses in which they were interested and which would provide them with greater personal benefit. In addition, we thought that most students undergo a process of learning and maturing throughout their students, are more mature when they reach their senior year, and so do not engage in petty behavior.

This hypothesis is the antithesis of what is written in the professional literature, which for the most part concludes that first-year students will copy infrequently, both on exams and on homework assignments, and in general report a low level of disciplinary infractions. We thought that the phenomenon of copying at Tel-Hai would subside over the years.

Findings in literature show that more pressure for good grades is in last year than in first year more copying. However, the college's decision-makers believed that the phenomenon is marginal, and in any case it takes place mainly at the beginning of the learning process. Therefore, researchers have adopted this position as the starting point of the study. As shown, the results obtained have revealed that this hypothesis is incorrect, and this is only a wishful thinking of the college administration.

3. METHODS

Because the college's decision-makers believed that the phenomenon is marginal, the researchers decided to look into the matter. Would be redundant of course to point out that all the topic of the study was politically very complicated. The sample population was composed of students at Tel-Hai College majoring in Economics and Management, and in Nutrition. The two are considered to be of higher quality, and the college administration takes pride in their high level. The experimental group consisted of those studying Economics

and Management, with the Nutrition majors serving as the control group. The choice of students in Economics and Management derives from the fact that these students are supposed to be the future managers and rely on 'reports of truth' in their decision-making processes. The control group was chosen because Tel-Hai College is one of the only places in Israel that teaches that major and has relatively high standards for admittance. For this reason, we thought that the students were likely to be of higher caliber, with greater awareness of ethics. Furthermore, the students need to keep their grade point averages high so as to continue to specialize after graduation, which increases competition and the desire to stand out. We thought that they would refrain from cheating due to these factors. Therefore, we hypothesized that the phenomenon of cheating amongst the Nutrition majors would be very low, in fact insignificant.

In each of the departments questionnaires were distributed to two groups: First-year students and to students in their third [last] year of college. We decided to choose freshmen and seniors because they constitute the groups entering and leaving college.

The questions that were given to the students were constructed in a matrix. Some of them were worded positively and some negatively, so as to ensure reliability and consistency of the answers and thus filter bias and operate controls in an unseen way. The questions in this part were closed questions, utilizing a Likert scale with four levels, thereby precluding the participant from avoiding expressing an opinion or expressing an intermediate one. Thus, the respondent was required to take a position in a certain direction. No emphasis was placed on the link between ratings and grades or on any other link; rather, it was characterized as an opinion survey. That is, the object of the study was not stated explicitly, although that could have been inferred generally from the questions themselves. Some of the questions were constructed in a general manner to the group of students as a whole and others required individual responses. The aim of utilizing this structure was to reduce the creation of formulaic answers customarily deriving from stereotypes and prejudices.

The study was conducted amongst a sample of 30 students in each group, so as to get a normal sampling range with an average as close as possible to the population's average. During the second semester of the 2011-2012 academic year, 120 questionnaires containing 14 questions each were distributed to the students in the study. The 14 questions represented the variables, derived from the research hypothesis. The answers were made on a Likert scale, from 1 to 6, so as to produce a wide range of answers without a midpoint. The main variables derived from the research hypothesis were the students' perception of ethics and the level of effort of the students in their studies. Analysis of the questionnaires was done by cross-matching the questions in such a way that the scale was reversed, and went from 6 to 1 instead of 1 to 6. In this way, unity between the original questions and those correlated with them was achieved. After this process, a t-test was performed, to compare ordinal variables between the two groups.

In order to examine the subject, another set of questionnaires was distributed. The new questionnaires had only two open questions, examining the reality as perceived by the students concerning cheating. The first question was "Why does cheating occur?" and the second was, "What can be done, or should be done, about it?" This questionnaire was distributed only to students majoring in Economics and Management; 80 were students in the course' Fundamentals of Marketing' and 40 were students in the course' Knowledge Management' during the first semester of the 2012-2013 academic year. These questionnaires were distributed so as to provide an additional viewpoint regarding the perception of cheating variable. When the answers are written, it is easier to understand why the phenomenon of cheating exists, and the reasons leading up to it.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Student Perception of the Cheating

In the comparison between the years of study of students majoring in Economics and Management and students majoring in Nutrition regarding the perception of cheating variable, 357 observations were received for the first year and 358 for the third year. These numbers stem from the fact that six questions referred to the variable and 60 questionnaires were distributed to each department. No statistically significant difference found between the two departments. However, a statistically significant difference

exists in the answers given by the two groups: First and last year of the two departments as one sample. Third year students tended to agree that when the students were allowed to choose their courses, students would prefer the easier course to facilitate the achievement of higher grade, while first-year students did not agree with this statement. Third year students preferred to choose an 'easy' course to improve the average grade and this is in line with other literature claims that a student close to completing his/her studies would have a greater probability of cheating. Seniors also tended to agree that although some courses are not interesting, that is no reason to neglect their studies. Seniors tended to agree that stressful situation, like maintaining a high grade point average and avoiding failure are factors in the high motivation of students to improve their situations and thus engage in prohibited methods. By contrast, freshmen tended to agree less with these statements. From the analysis of all questions relating to the perception of cheating, as detailed in Table 1, one can see that there is a difference between freshmen and seniors in the perception of ethics and the higher the mean, it means that there is a more forgiving attitude toward cheating.

Table 1. Student perception of the cheating variable, T-test between first and third year students majoring in economics and management and students majoring in nutrition

	First year students	Third year students
Mean	3.817927	4.234637
Variance	2.126869	1.810338
Observations	357	358
Hypothesized mean difference	0	
Df	708	
t Stat	-3.97057	
P(T<=t) one-tail	3.95E-05	
t Critical one-tail	1.647009	
P(T<=t) two-tail	7.9E-05	
t Critical two-tail	1.96332	

As noted above, a student who has a very heavy load tends to copy more than does a student carrying a lighter load [4]. This study, too, found that third-year students tended to agree that when an easier course can be chosen, students tend to do so and when it

cannot be chosen the cheating option is considered.

4.2 Level of Effort

In examining the variable of the level of effort of the students in their studies the difference between the two departments, a comparison of all of the students majoring in Economics and Management with all of the students majoring in Nutrition was done. Two questions reflected these questions, and 60 questionnaires were distributed to each department. Thus, 115 observations were collected from the Nutrition majors and 119 from the Economics and Management majors. As the average of the sample increases, the resulting tendency of the students is to invest less in their studies. No statistically significant difference found between freshmen and seniors. However, a statistically significant difference was found between the two departments. Students studying Nutrition do not think that their level of effort in their studies less than do students in other majors. Although students studying Economics and Management are more 'moderate' in their views about their level of efforts (see Table 2).

Table 2. Student perception of their level of efforts variable, T-test between students majoring in economics and management and students majoring in nutrition

	Economics and management	Nutrition
Mean	3.470588	2.791304
Variance	2.217348	2.149047
Observations	119	115
Hypothesized mean difference	0	
Df	232	
t Stat	3.516231	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000263	
t Critical one-tail	1.651448	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000526	
t Critical two-tail	1.970242	

In addition to the first questionnaire, a class questionnaire was distributed to the students of the department of Economics and Management in order to provide a foundation to the question about why the phenomenon of cheating exists. The answers included: A lack of self-confidence; lack of time to study the material; laziness; it's easier to rely on others; failure to understand the material taught; fear of low or failing grades; if everyone else does it, I can

too; lack of trust between the lecturer and student; striving for excellence, an ambition to achieve high marks; and behavioral norms.

The answers to the second open question, "What can or should be done about cheating?" included: Enable students to express themselves freely; teach learning processes and ways of thinking; provide options to improve grades; lengthier and more in-depth explanations of the assignments; change the educational system; punishment and even criminal charges; better enforcement; increase proctoring; use different versions of exams.

The study's hypothesis, which states that students in their third year of study will be more sensitive regarding copying than will students in their first year, was disproved and the findings show that it is just the opposite. No changes in the opinions of students regarding copying occur during their college careers, because grades are what are most important to the students. This article reviewed a sample of students at Tel-Hai College regarding the phenomenon of copying amongst their fellow-students. The question was raised as to whether the learning process really affects the students' views and whether the phenomenon of copying bothers them more the later they are in their college career, i.e. when they are in their junior and senior years. The principal conclusion of the study is that there is a considerable disparity in the code of honor between the academic institution and the students who study there.

The policies of Tel-Hai College is to provide as many students from the peripheral areas of Israel as possible with access to higher education. That statement creates difficulties, especially because the college's catchment area is larger than the distance to the closest metropolitan area. Furthermore, a declaration like this one creates an entire edifice of expectations by the students, who come to Tel-Hai College expecting that demands on them will be considerably lower than would be the case in other academic institutions. Such a policy isn't just left hanging, and the students do not ignore it. They absorb the message and function accordingly. There is a group of students, which act energetically to lower the quality of teaching, reduce the demands made on them, make things easier for themselves and contemn efforts to improve academic processes.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

The principal significance that arises from the aforesaid and from the corpus of articles that deal with criticism of the issue, is that the way in which grades are obtained today, i.e. via the old exams system, must be fundamentally and materially changed. Proof of this conclusion is that the students see the grades they get as something that can be manipulated, which they in fact do, so as to create more comfortable conditions for themselves, rather than improving the teaching quality. The moment that a tool of test becomes distorted and biased, use of the data obtained from it is also biased and unreliable, and leads to erroneous decision-making processes.

First-year students enter Tel-Hai College without knowing or understanding the system in details, level of difficulty of their classes, or demands from them. Furthermore, during the first year, there are few elective courses compared with the third year of study, in which the students choose their courses. During their college careers, the students integrate into the academic system, and the demands from them increase. Due to the heavy load and burn-out, it's obvious that, when the choice is left to them, students choose easier courses rather than harder ones. Both groups: Freshmen and seniors, agree that cheating should result in serious ramifications. However, as noted, they prefer to choose easier courses and the question is then, what happens when they encounter a tougher course? The results of the study show that when a student encounters difficulties, he'll find reasons to cheat and to show that it's a normally accepted pattern of behavior, or at least will find ways of excusing it, usually by blaming the lecturer and the academic institution. On the other hand, the students state that punishment and more severe treatment should prevail concerning cheating. Thus, an obvious, significant contradiction exists between what students say and what actually takes place, which indicates that the students aren't always honest in their answers to questions about cheating on various questionnaires.

The responses to the questionnaires show that the students' norms encourage cheating. It can be assumed that they come to college with these norms and when they're in an environment that encourages copying, they incorporate these norms and see copying as

something legitimate. That is, they seem to be saying, "If everyone is doing it, I'm allowed to as well". This sort of justification is apparently widespread among students, due to the desire to be like everyone else. Students know that copying isn't ethical, but they nevertheless do so in order to improve their grades. Students come to academia with certain norms that they acquired in the past, which indicates the importance, or lack thereof, that is placed on ethics in elementary and secondary school education. Social norms that encourage cheating will lead to a positive approach to it; students in an environment that encourages cheating will copy more than will those in an environment that supports fairness. The study found that there was unity in all of the responses concerning the students' internal feelings. When the students were asked about academic honesty, all of them responded with apathy, without any real opinion in any specific direction. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that there is a problem amongst the students, which is that a code of ethics and a code of honor that guide behavior in cases with ethical aspects do not exist. It should be noted that during the analysis of the responses, we realized that providing a choice of 1 through 6 created a range that was too broad for the answers. Quite possibly, due to that problem, some of the variables were not statistically significant. In retrospect, perhaps it would have been better to use a more limited scale of 1 through 4, so as to see differences in the groups more clearly.

Examining the process of learning as student advances through the college shows that there are no changes of attitudes. Thus, it can be concluded that the learning process does not interest the students at all. We would have expected that the later in his college career a student is the more the student would want to invest in his/her studies and his/her desire to learn would increase. However, that did not seem to be the case. It turns out that the only thing that interests the student is the grade he or she gets. The findings from the second set of questionnaires distributed to the class also show that students are worried about getting a low grade, and seek ways to more easily achieve high grades. Thus, they're busy finding the answers to exams or assignments, without paying attention to the way they found them. That is, from the students' perspective, "The end justifies the means". This additional aspect

is a further evidence that no emphasis is placed on actually learning.

An examination of the differences between freshmen and seniors shows that seniors majoring in Economics and Management think that there is more cheating in their major than in other departments. By contrast, freshmen in that department and seniors majoring in Nutrition, do not think that more cheating goes on in their departments than in others. One possible explanation for these responses is that during their first year of study, the students majoring in Economics and Management are not sufficiently united and do not know what's going on around them at the college. Another possible explanation for the response of Nutrition majors in their last year of their studies is gender. The majority of students majoring in Nutrition are females, while the majority of Economic and Management majors are males and the literature indicates that female students exercise a higher level of ethical judgment than do male students [14].

One possible assumption that can be made on the basis of the study's findings relates to the organizational message that the students take away from the academic staff. That is, that the academic institution and the teaching staff utilize teaching methods that encourage elementary 'School-Solutions', i.e. memorizing the material and then taking an exam and getting a grade for it. In contrast to highlight the learning process in conditions of accelerated knowledge economy. Instead of that, we see a situation in which there is a 'war' between the students and academic staff, each blaming the other for the phenomenon of cheating. Such an outcome indicates a low pedagogic level and a style of learning that pushes for excellent grades, which causes students to consider copying as something positive and justifiable, while placing responsibility for it on the lecturer. The message transmitted by the lecturers here is that the grade is sacred, which is one of the principal factors in cheating. Accordingly, it can be assumed that most of the lecturers contribute to the phenomenon of cheating by the students, even if most of them have no idea that they are doing so. This happens despite the fact that different lecturers use different teaching methods, and each one makes different demands on the students. In fact, it is due to these differences that students use different methods of cheating, "customizing" their actions to the styles of the various

lecturers, but the essence of their actions remains the same.

Another factor contributing to the problem is the lack of a code of honor, in which the students rely on a system of agreed-upon values. The disciplinary rules at Tel-Hai College state that "The student should behave in a manner befitting his status as a student in an institution of higher education and should follow the principles of a public institution." These leads to the conclusion that even though the college has promulgated rules and regulations pertaining to the behavior expected of students, they remain just a set of rules and not a code of honor; they certainly haven't been internalized. Beyond the hidden organizational message sent by the academic staff to the students, that the most important aspects of their studies are their grade points, there is also the message that if they get high marks in a way that isn't blatantly cheating, the lecturer will not go out of his/her way to call in the disciplinary committee for something that is perceived as inconsequential.

The study's hypothesis is not supported by its findings, because the phenomenon of copying is a problem throughout all the years of college study. The principal finding is that, despite the fact that all of the students state the phenomenon of cheating isn't right and should be eradicated, in reality, the students cheat. At the beginning of the study, we thought that students would benefit from the learning process throughout their college careers, and thus decrease their desire to copy. However, this hypothesis was proven to be incorrect. An additional conclusion that arose in trying to answer the research question is that the learning process itself lacks meaning and significance for the student, and that they are focused on anything that will get them higher grades.

6. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY AND APPLICATIONS

The study can provide focus and direction to the academic staffs of universities in general, and to those at the Tel-Hai College in particular, concerning the possible factors causing students to copy on exams. Thus, the problem can be addressed more easily. It was found that the students rely on the academic staff as a source of authority and information, in a much broader way than what staff members had thought. That creates a disparity in the perceptions of each group. Basing their views on expectations of differences in the perceptions of students and lecturers, researchers state that discussion of addressing the problem should begin amongst staff members. Furthermore, changes can begin to be made in the accepted learning methods today, teaching the students how to learn should be paramount. The earlier a student understands that ethical behavior is valued by the business community and the more ethics are integrated into the regular courses in Business Administration, the more students will apply an ethical approach in practice. In the end, the students will learn to value such behavior, due to their own values and not self-interest or the desire to win prizes. Today, the student is required to memorize the material, rather than acquiring the tools to think critically and broaden his horizons. The study shows that, in line with the students' opinions, learning does not really take place at the college. Thus, emphasis should be placed on the subject which can lead over the years, to students who are interested in absorbing knowledge, and so the phenomenon of cheating will be reduced.

A possible application of the study's conclusions is to build a code of honor at the college, so that cheating will be perceived by the students as something to be ashamed of. On the other hand, the lecturers should be aware of the significance of what they say and should know how to prevent transmitting hidden messages. Another method of addressing the problem is canceling exams and instead having the students submit small papers throughout the semester, or establishing another way to assess cumulative study that does not require the students to show their knowledge at one specific time, i.e. the end of the semester. Thus, stress and tension will be lower, in turn decreasing the motivation to copy. In this way, both students and lecturers would benefit. The first to benefit would in fact be the college, which would save a great deal of resources that are now invested in exams. The second to benefit would be the students, who would be exposed to a way of learning and sharing knowledge, under the assumption that the courses are taught the way they should be.

7. FUTURE STUDIES

During the study, we found that a difference exists in some of the answers given by students

majoring in Economics and Management compared to Nutrition majors. A possible explanation for these differences is the gender difference in the two groups of students. Thus, other studies should be done, to focus on this factor. In addition, the individual impact of a code of honor on students' behavior should be examined, and whether such a code does, in fact, contribute to a significant reduction in the scope of cheating, as other researchers have indicated. Finally, studies should be conducted to examine what would be necessary to instill a code of honor in an academic institution, and what changes that would require on the part of the academic staff.

8. CONCLUSION

The principal conclusion of the study is that there is a considerable disparity in the code of ethics between the academic institution and the students who study there. The study's hypothesis, which states that students in their third year of study will be more sensitive regarding copying than will students in their first year, was disproved and the findings show that it is just the opposite. No changes in the opinions of students regarding copying occur during their college careers, because scores much more important for students than maintaining a code of ethics.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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