

Promoting Academic Integrity on Campus:
A Personal Code of Values and Academic Integrity

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Good morning.

My name is David Bozak and I am the Associate Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at SUNY Oswego. I also serve as the Chair of the Provost's Committee on Intellectual Integrity, a new body that grew out of recommendations from earlier ad-hoc group examining cheating and plagiarism.

One of my responsibilities as associate dean is to deal with issues of student academic misconduct. Most of my work in this area deals with providing faculty with advice as they sort through how best to respond to an incident of cheating or plagiarism. At other times, I am one link in the chain of appeal of an academic penalty assessed by an instructor for an incident of dishonesty. A predecessor referred to herself as "Dean of Consequences."

My undergraduate degree is from Rice University, a school with a strong honor code. Consequently, I take these matters seriously.

One of the (minor) advantages of being an associate dean is that I get to look over the results of various assessments that are conducted without necessarily having to respond in some way. My interest in the issue of integrity was tweaked one day while scanning the results of the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) "is designed to obtain, on an annual basis, information from scores of colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development." (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006). SUNY Oswego has participated in two of the past three NSSE administrations (2003, 2004), providing us a gauge of how our students view our campus environment in a national context.

Oswego was classified as a Master's institution, based upon our (old) Carnegie classification. I identified 181 of the 473 schools participating in the 2004 NSSE administration as part of our cohort. The results of the NSSE survey provided us with comparisons to both the cohort of other Master's institutions as well as to the entire NSSE sample.

The Oswego data related to one question in particular caught my attention. Question 11 asks, “To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?” and then lists a number of various items – working effectively with others; solving complex real-world problems; acquiring a broad general education. One of the items was “Developing a personal code of values and ethics.”

We did not score well here. On a four-point scale, with 4=very much, 3=quite a bit, 2=some and 1=very little, our first year students had a mean of 2.42 and our seniors a mean of 2.43. These values are significantly lower than both our cohort and the entire NSSE sample. Even worse, our seniors score further below the national averages than did our first year students.

	Oswego	Masters	NSSE
FY	2.42	2.57*	2.61**
SR	2.43	2.71***	2.72***
* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 FY – First Year students SR – Senior students			

Our 2003 values are a little higher for FY, but pretty much the same for SR and for masters and NSSE means; only the SR values differ significantly.

Given the 2003 and 2004 data, it appears that scores were flat over the four year academic career of our students. Clearly our students did not recognize, or did not take advantage of, the opportunities and programs that we believe are available at our campus. And lacking the opportunity to develop a personal code of values, it is no wonder that our students do not understand, embrace and value intellectual integrity.

This data was, ultimately, not a great surprise to me. I have been increasingly contacted by faculty confronting incidents of cheating and plagiarism. While everyone has anecdotal stories, and impressions based on those stories, the only objective data that we have dates back to the Spring 2003 administration of the Student Opinion Survey, an instrument administered at SUNY institutions every three years that gathers student opinions on a wide variety of topics and services. There is one question on the survey that touches on the issue of academic dishonesty. The question asks how often you “observed student dishonesty when completing assignments or exams” using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very frequently to never. Assuming that any answer other than “never” indicates some form of academic dishonesty, 86% of respondents have observed academic dishonesty. Now, they may all have seen the same incident of cheating, but more likely there is a “culture of cheating” on our campus, as there is across the country.

So what are we doing wrong? Or rather, what are others doing that lead to higher scores on this NSSE question? To the extent that we can determine what strategies are

successful on other campuses, we can restructure opportunities on this campus so that students better recognize and take advantage of those opportunities.

I sought to contact individuals at institutions in our 2004 NSSE cohort, inviting them to complete a short survey that would invite them to share their scores on this item. I also asked them to indicate what they believed was responsible for their success, or lack of success. Invitations were extended to contact persons identified at each institution, most often the director of institutional research and assessment, to complete a short web-based survey.

The survey, available at <http://www.cs.oswego.edu/~dab/survey/>, is short, containing only three questions. These are:

- (1) a single question regarding FY and SR scores,
- (2) a request for information regarding the perceived reasons for the scores, and
- (3) demographic information

Ultimately the response rate was about 20%. There are several reasons that would account for the low response rate. Aside from the usual non-responsiveness to survey requests, there were three issues that led to a lack of response. First, the survey was written to look for those institutional efforts that led to *above average* scores on this NSSE item. Schools scoring below average might believe that they had little to offer and would likely not respond, though some did. Second, in several instances I received an email contact from a school indicating that they, as a matter of policy, do not share any of their NSSE data, and so declined to participate. Third, schools hard hit by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were unable to respond or could not assign the survey any sort of priority given their rebuilding efforts.

Of the responses that I did receive, the distribution of responses closely matched the geographic distribution of schools participating in the 2004 NSSE.

New England	10%
Great Lakes	27%
Mideast	20%
Plains	7%
Southeast	23%
Southwest	7%
Far West	7%

The responses were more likely to be from public institutions than private institutions

Public	60% (42% in NSSE)
Private	40% (58% in NSSE)

FTE Enrollment showed a distribution that reflects the skewed distribution towards private institutions:

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1,000-2,499	10%
2,500-4,900	33%
5,000-9,999	37%
10,000-19,000	13%
20,000-29,000	7%

One-half of the schools responding had an honor code in place:

	Public	Private
Honor Code	33%	17%
No Honor Code	30%	20%

Looking at First Year scores:

		Below Avg	No Sig Diff	Above Avg
Public	Honor Code	20%	3%	10%
	No Honor Code	27%		
Private	Honor Code			17%
	No Honor Code		3%	17%

and SR scores:

		Below Avg	No Sig Diff	Above Avg
Public	Honor Code	3%		7%
	No Honor Code	20%		
Private	Honor Code			7%
	No Honor Code			10%

Most of the responses to the survey came from schools scoring above the Masters cohort average. The results are what we call a “grandmother theory” in psychology – the results would prompt your grandmother to say, “I could have told you that!” In this case, success (defined as above average scores) was associated with private schools rather than public schools, and with schools that have honor codes. Private schools were more likely to have lower enrollments than public schools.

Interestingly, public schools that had scores below average show that those with an honor code had fewer scores below average for SR than public schools with no honors program.

Regardless of the enrollment, what matters is to what each school attributes their success, or their lack of success.

The perceived reasons for success are consistent with what the literature reports as crucial in promoting integrity.

To start, the campus mission statement is a strong statement of the value of integrity. Campus officials take the lead in emphasizing its importance, faculty reinforce the value of personal (academic and non-academic) integrity, and students are drawn into the campus culture of integrity.

The student population matters. A number of the private schools are faith-based schools and they recruit from faith-based high schools. These students have been brought up in a culture that emphasizes a value system. One mid-sized public school reported that their student population is rural, with a strong work ethic and mostly first generation college students.

Of course, schools with honor codes should score above average. Honor codes provide a set of values that can serve as a core for each student in their development. In one instance, at a school without an honor code, a “solid” misconduct process serves to clearly define values of honesty and integrity.

Faith-based colleges also provide a core curriculum for their students, a core that includes 9 or more hours of courses in ethics, philosophy, religion/theology. Again, the campus culture endorses and promotes integrity.

Three additional reasons provided by these schools reflect programs we at Oswego thought would promote the development of a personal set of values. These include programs that promote leadership skills and service learning as well as residential programs that are living/learning communities. That our students, taken as a whole, did not report that such programs assisted them in developing a personal set of values seems unusual. A closer examination of the data from our students might be able to tease out the responses of students in these programs, if our sampling did not marginalize this group.

Finally, I would like to talk about another term that showed up in the survey responses, spirituality. The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA has released two reports in the past two year: *The Spiritual Life of College Students* (Higher Education Research Institute, 2005), based on a fall 2004 national survey and *Spirituality and the Professoriate* (Higher Education Research Institute, 2006), based on a fall 2005 national survey.

This is a term that may make us uncomfortable yet these existential questions speak to most incoming students.

Ninety-four percent of freshmen believe that college will prepare them for employment (Higher Education Research Institute, 2005, p. 6). According to the HERI survey, “...two-thirds consider it ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ that their undergraduate experience enhances their self-understanding ... prepares them for responsible citizenship ... develops their personal values and provides for their emotional development” (Higher Education Research Institute, 2006, p. 6).

A pilot study of third-year students, reported in *Spirituality and the Professoriate*, show a failure of the institution to meet these expectations. “Fifty-six percent ... say that their professors never provide opportunities to discuss the meaning and purpose of life. Sixty-two percent say professors never encourage discussion of spiritual or religious matters” (Higher Education Research Institute, 2006, p. 1).

Yet 80% of faculty describe themselves as “a spiritual person.” Faculty who score high on “spirituality” “...place a premium both on enhancing student’s Civic-Minded Values (community service, citizenship) and contributing to students’ ‘personal development’ (self-understanding, personal values, moral character, and the search for meaning and purpose, as well as spiritual development)...highly spiritual faculty support the use of ‘student-centered’ pedagogical approaches such as cooperative learning, group projects, and reflective writing” (Higher Education Research Institute, 2006, p.8).

What is important is the contrast between students who come to college with a need to define who they are and who they wish to become – basic components of spirituality – and the faculty from whom they take classes, a faculty who themselves are spiritual but who do not reflect this in discussions with students even though they value integrity.

The dissatisfaction that students have expressed with faculty who do not talk about spiritual matters with them is reflected in another NSSE question, “To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas - Developing a deepened sense of spirituality.”

On only a four point Likert scale, the 2004 NSSE Senior Year students’ mean response is nearly three-quarters of a point below their mean response to developing a personal set of values, from 2.71 for values to 2.00 for spirituality. With such a small set of possible responses, the size of this difference is remarkable. Many institutions across the country are not addressing the existential questions of students and we cannot divorce discussions of values from questions of spirituality.

To return to the suggestions for success, unless the campus (faculty, administration and students) are open to discussions of the value of integrity and spirituality, the campus culture will not value integrity. We can choose to live with the consequences of a lack of dialog or choose to change the campus culture by promoting these discussions.

Thank-you for your kind attention.

References

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