There are many forms of academic dishonesty. These include the copying of text or ideas, buying an essay, surrogacy (having someone else complete an assessment for you), cheating in examinations, fabricating data, misrepresenting personal circumstances to gain an extension or some other form of leniency, and misrepresenting your academic record. These practices are damaging. They subvert the process and purpose of education. They give dishonest candidates an unfair advantage, potentially awarding them qualifications they have not earned and do not deserve. This affects honest students because it undermines the value of the award, and allows dishonest students to compete unfairly for employment and training opportunities after graduation.

Academic dishonesty is also costly for staff. The process of investigating cheating can be time-consuming, especially in cases that escalate. Data fabrication could even misdirect the development of a research program. One colleague, for instance, had to withdraw a journal submission because the undergraduates who ran one of the experiments could not produce the raw data.

This introductory guide considers processes that can help lecturers to manage and control academic dishonesty. After briefly outlining some background data, it considers the prevention, detection, and handling of such cases.

### Occurrence

Academic dishonesty is relatively common, but sometimes there are large differences in incidence estimates given by staff and students. As well, what little data there is suggests that detection rates are extremely low.

Table 1 (overleaf) summarises data from three studies of the incidence of different forms of academic dishonesty. The first column includes the percentages of students estimates of various forms of academic dishonesty as well as estimates given by staff of student dishonesty. The studies labelled UK 1995 and USA 1995-1996 include the percentage of students admitting each type of dishonesty according to self-report. The UK studies show that staff gave consistently lower estimates of the frequency of dishonesty than students with particularly large underestimates for data fabrication and exam cheating.

### Profiling a cheat

Evidence from US and UK studies associate higher levels of (self-reported) cheating with students who are men, less mature, or have lower ability. A large number of other individual variables are also associated with cheating, however, multivariate studies typically find that these variables account for relatively little or no unique variance (Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2003; McCabe & Treviño, 1997; Kerkvliet & Sigmund, 1999). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that there is a core group of determined and incorrigible cheats (Hasen & Huppert, 2005; Underwood & Szabo, 2003).

### Managing academic dishonesty

To successfully manage academic dishonesty, it is important to set out a systematic framework that aims to prevent, limit, detect and address cases of dishonesty. However, where the line falls between dishonesty and acceptable practice is not always clear.

### Ground rules and grey areas

**Copying** Where should we draw the line between unfair copying and an acceptable paraphrase? How far do lexical substitutions and adjustments to syntax have to go? The distinction between acceptable paraphrasing and unacceptable minor re-wording is important not just because one may be penalised, but because it is also the difference between good quality and academically weak work. Students will sometimes genuinely make a mistake, forgetting a note made was a literal copy, and not re-worded.

What counts as acceptable re-wording depends on many things, including the topic and the task set. “The fact that it is
nearly always caught on baited lines suggests that the Bramble shark is a bottom feeder.” (Norman & Fraser, 1937, p. 53). If the question set is superficial, then the light paraphrase of an indirect quotation could be fine: “Bramble sharks are thought to feed at the sea-bed (Norman & Fraser, 1937).” However, a fuller re-wording could show more convincingly that the writer had understood not only the conclusion, but also the nature of the evidence: “If Bramble sharks fed at the surface, as some have speculated, they would be caught more often in drift nets, but they are most often caught on lines (Norman & Fraser, 1937).” This way of using the source involves combining and integrating its information with relevant prior knowledge in a response that reflects the writer’s own rhetorical agenda.

To help students avoid copying, consider providing guidance on note-taking skills so that students learn to clearly mark the words and ideas of others; teaching them how to re-work source material into their own words emphasising why this is important educationally; and training them in citation techniques including the use of quotations, ellipses and square brackets.

**Collusion is especially likely if students find the task set overwhelmingly difficult**

One example of collusion would be where a student provides the solution to a coursework problem to another student, when the task requires independent working. In a large class, this could be achieved by setting up a Facebook group to exchange hints or intermediate discoveries. The line is drawn because of the way the assignment is set. If students are told only that their report must be independent, then the Facebook group breaks no rule. That may even be what we want for a specific assignment. It is important to be clear in our own minds how we want students to tackle assignments and to make that explicit.

**Common knowledge** There are some facts that we would not expect to cite a source for, but when does a piece of information start to become so uncommon that its source should be documented? I can illustrate this with a range of statements, from one for which it would obviously be ridiculous to cite a source, through intermediate cases to an example that would require careful documentation in a professional article: people have two hands; in most people, one hand is dominant; the dominant hand is typically controlled by the contralateral cerebral hemisphere; language is lateralised along with handedness; apes have cerebral asymmetries. This is complicated by the fact that we would probably expect students to provide sources for some information that we would not expect a professional colleague to document in the same way.

**Reduce opportunities to gain from dishonesty**

Careful assessment design is a key step in managing academic dishonesty. There are many techniques available, and not all will be appropriate in a given situation. Some place greater demands on resources than others, and of course these demands must be balanced. However, one of the most straightforward approaches is to avoid setting coursework that could be completed satisfactorily by copying from material that already exists. Consider the suggestions in Box 1 when planning assessments:

**Box 1: Assessment design**

- Avoid setting the same title as last year as well as the same title as others teaching the same subject
- Search the web using the title as the key to check what is available
- Make assignments relatively specific or individualised

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**Table 1: Estimates of the incidence of academic dishonesty from various surveys (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copied from a textbook</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copied from another student</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copied from the Internet</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabricated data</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying in an exam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking notes to an exam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Data are from second year psychology students from one cohort at one university. UK 1995 data is from science students at two universities. The US data is from a multi-site study. Thus, the last two columns contrast institutions that do or do not have Honor Code systems (explained in the final section of the guide).*
Add specific requirements such as “You must refer to two studies from the last year” (Harris, 2002; according to a number of sources, essay mill papers are typically rather dated)

- Require copies of literature searches including dates and keywords or the first page of all articles cited
- Ask for annotated bibliographies (Galles, 1997; Harris, 2002)
- Include practical elements requiring students to gather new data or construct a unique solution

Teaching staff are often attached to a particular assessment and can be reluctant to change the title. If the existing title has proved effective in the past, and designing a new assessment would be time consuming, it can be tempting to stick with the tried and tested. If copy-checking software is in use, at least the most blatant re-use by students will be detected. Even then, however, the subtle cheat could easily benefit by borrowing an essay from a friend in an earlier cohort. It is good practice to vary coursework assessment tasks.

Individualising assignments may not always be practical or appropriate, but for some tasks it can be easy to implement. For example, a dataset can be individualised by sampling random subsets, a process that can be automated. The outcome of this could even be used to teach students about cross-validation, sampling error and related concepts.

Another way to mix things up is to set a non-standard word-length. Galles (1997) suggests setting lower word or page limits. This makes it less likely that off-the-shelf models can be found and forces students to be selective and thoughtful about abstracting key issues and evidence. Non-standard genres can achieve the same end, and are often highly successful in engaging students. For example, rather than an essay, students could be asked to prepare a briefing on a psychological topic for a court or parliamentary committee.

Students can also be asked to complete a meta-essay on the process of essay production (Galles, 1997; Harris, 2002), or can be given oral examinations on coursework (Galles, 1997) which provide checks on the provenance and authenticity of submitted work.

A distinction can be made between essays that require the re-presentation of knowledge and those that demand critical, independent thinking. Both types may be appropriate. Essays requiring re-presentation of knowledge may be appropriate in the first year, for example.

However, an essay that focuses mainly on re-presentation makes it more difficult for students to see how to make the material their own. Analytical or critical essays, however, oblige students to express material in their own terms.

**Supervise data gathering**

Staff underestimate the incidence of data fabrication making it of primary concern. A student can potentially gain a significant advantage by omitting the time-consuming process of recruiting and processing participants, or by steering the results towards an interesting conclusion. Data fabrication can significantly damage a lab, perhaps diverting attention towards (or from) a particular research path, or leading to the publication of fabricated data. This is a further example where setting ground rules and expectations may be a key step. Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995) found that students rated the seriousness of data fabrication much lower than staff. One way to convey the seriousness of it may be to point to the severity of penalties for academics who fabricate data (see Box 2).

Staff can take steps to wrap an assurance framework around the data collection process by requiring students to retain raw data, asking them to maintain laboratory notebooks containing data collection records, and requiring them to give advanced notice of when and where data gathering will occur so that you or your assistant might drop in to observe. Check the dates and times computer files were created. Require students to obtain explicit consent, and to retain participant consent forms. Some departments advise students that failure to produce these forms will be taken, in itself, as prima facie evidence of data fabrication.

Professional survey organisations employ a call-back procedure, in which random participants are contacted to confirm participation. This practice permits a useful check on the way in which researchers conducted themselves during data gathering. Explaining the need to check that research participants are treated professionally and ethically is a way to increase student acceptance of this procedure.

Again, resources are limited and project supervisors will have to strike an appropriate balance. This will involve focusing more effort in maintaining close supervision on those projects that raise concerns. Alarm bells should ring, for example, if students gather data far from the department without an obvious reason, or if there is an unwarranted delay in beginning data collection. However, such quality assurance processes are good professional practice and valuable for students to learn in their own right.

**Box 2: Academics fabricating data**

Stephen Breuning, an extremely productive researcher, conducted studies into cognitive development and disability in the 1970s and 1980s. While discussing a methodological issue with Breuning’s assistant, Richard Sprague, Breuning’s research director, found out by chance that Breuning was getting 100% agreement between nurses rating a complex behaviour. This raised doubts, which Sprague followed through. When events unwound, Breuning’s work was found to be associated with deliberate and systematic misrepresentation. He received a ten year research funding ban, and in 1998 was sentenced to 60 days in prison.

More recently, in 2006, medical researcher, Eric Poehlman, was found to have fabricated data and obtained over $2 million in research funds fraudulently. He was banned from receiving US federal research funds for life and sentenced to a year in prison.

There may be ways to develop circumstantial evidence that data has been fabricated through statistical analysis, particularly where a paradigm is well known. For example, response-time data has a characteristic distribution, and data from personality instruments will have characteristic covariance structures. Sometimes data cheats have been caught out by reporting data that were too perfect (see Box 2). Although it can be difficult to prove beyond all doubt that data have been fabricated, statistical evidence can be used to identify concerns.

**Raise detection levels**

It is a commonplace of classical and neo-classical criminology that the risk of being caught is more important to deterrence than the penalty (Beccaria, 1963; Nagin & Paternoster, 1991). Textual methods are important in detecting coursework plagiarism and collusion. Harris (2002)
Staff gave consistently lower estimates of the frequency of dishonesty than students

style might be expected where they are given the opportunity to use this software on one or two occasions prior to the final uploading of each paper. Example originality reports generated by this software may be used effectively in induction sessions related to academic integrity.

Such software use will highlight many instances of very minor plagiarism and this may pose an organisational or administrative challenge to lecturing staff where institutional regulations forbid any instance of plagiarism. In addition, the software will highlight text which uses the standard idiomatic phrases so common in software will highlight text which uses the standard idiomatic phrases so common in instances of very minor plagiarism and

method for a student can lead to extreme hardship. A university that applies a very limited range of penalties for a wide spectrum of situations or applies its rules in a restrictive way may be criticised. pp 24-25, 2006 Annual Report of the OIA

The 2004 Psychology Network (Dunbar, 2005) survey asked departments what penalties would typically be applied in different scenarios. A key finding was sometimes wide variation between departments. For example, in the case of a final year student who had illicitly copied one paragraph in an essay, most departments would reduce or give a zero mark, some would give neither penalty nor warning. Additional data on current practice has been provided by reviewers of this guide. Table 2 (overleaf) summarises typical penalties based on this information.

The Psychology Network survey (Dunbar, 2005) found that it is common for departments to treat a first offence by a first year student more leniently. This recognises that it can take time for some students to fully appreciate what is expected, and often takes the detection of cheating in these cases as an opportunity for learning and development rather than punishment. However, no department reported that it would allow mitigation where, for example, a complete essay had been copied. It is also typical for second offences to be punished more severely, and some institutions have explicit policies on this. Persistent plagiarism normally leads to expulsion, although this would usually happen only after a formal university hearing. At this, the student would have the opportunity to present a defence, and details of any mitigating circumstances to senior staff from outside their own department.

The survey also asked a class of second year students what they thought was an appropriate penalty. Responses were broadly in line with Table 2, with two main categories of penalties:

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), which covers universities in England and Wales, has identified inconsistencies in punishment between institutions as a serious issue, with some institutions making regular use of severe penalties such as expulsion. The OIA (2007) has also indicated there could be a two-way ANOVA with repeated measures…", bibliographic records, and appendices listing items from standardised instruments. It is important to avoid such spurious false positives, not to place reliance on the headline number "% overlap", and to have shared guidelines on what constitutes evidence of plagiarism.

Braumoeller & Gaines (2001) found that exhorting students not to cheat does not reduce cheating, but that explaining that electronic detection methods will be used can. However, Hasen & Huppert (2005) used an electronic detection scheme, told students about it, and still found 5% plagiarised anyway. Electronic detection methods have a role to play, but they do have limitations, and they do not alone solve the problem of plagiarism.

Statistical methods can be used to detect copying in multiple-choice examinations (McManus, Lissauer & Williams, 2005). The possibility of cheating in such exams can be reduced if multiple versions are created.

Set out and follow transparent procedures

Students should be told explicitly what is acceptable and what is not. They should be told the institutional and departmental rules, procedures and penalties. Good practice, found in some institutions, is regularly to compare cases across departments, leading to convergence and greater consistency in penalties across the university. Students can be required to declare that they are aware of the rules, and have adhered to them, when submitting work. It can be useful to have students confirm the final versions of the work submitted for assessment, to avoid wasting time with a plea that they handed in the wrong draft, the one that didn’t have quotation marks added yet. If students are accused of cheating, they should also be told where they can get advice and support (Levin, 2003).

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), which covers universities in England and Wales, has identified inconsistencies in punishment between institutions as a serious issue, with some institutions making regular use of severe penalties such as expulsion. The OIA (2007) has also indicated there could be more clarity and consistency about the standard of proof that should be used, while pointing to a consensus that "the more serious the allegation, the higher the standard of proof should be" (see Box 3).

Box 3: Penalties

"The extent of the plagiarism should have been taken into account and a full range of penalties considered, not just expulsion. The OIA condemns plagiarism but it is also recognized that the degree of culpability can vary significantly depending on the context and the personal circumstances of the student. The OIA considers it good practice for a university to have penalties that are proportionate to the offence, bearing in mind that expulsion of a student can lead to extreme hardship. A university that applies a very limited range of penalties for a wide spectrum of situations or applies its rules in a restrictive way may be criticised." pp 24-25, 2006 Annual Report of the OIA
exceptions. First, an uncited secondary source was regarded as less serious than a single copied paragraph, and, second they felt that the penalty for allowing someone to copy work typically merited a reduced mark, rather than a zero mark. This indicates that it is important to emphasise to students that they must not allow other students to read their work and, indeed, that they need to protect themselves from accusations of plagiarism by ensuring no-one, such as a flatmate or boyfriend taking the same course, could access their work without their knowledge.

Some universities exercise a penalty whereby students are required to resubmit work for a maximum mark of “pass” (typically 40%). This has the advantage of requiring the student to demonstrate achievement of the relevant learning outcomes.

Create an interpersonal context that reduces dishonesty
McCabe and colleagues (2001) have reached the conclusion that the key to reducing academic dishonesty lies in what they term contextual variables. The last two columns of Table 1 contrast self-reported levels of cheating at US universities that do or do not have an Honor Code system. It has consistently been found that levels are lower where a code system is in place.

Points made above, such as the importance of clarity about ground rules, and transparency of procedures, are key aspects of the creation of an appropriate context. Honor Code institutions emphasise that students are being admitted as colleagues within an academic community, and that membership brings privileges and responsibilities. The community has certain standards that members must uphold. Among these privileges may be the right to take examinations without invigilation (it can be an offence for staff to enter an examination room). Clearly, this is a powerful statement of trust and confidence in the student. Honor Codes assign duties as well as privileges, requiring students to share responsibility for identifying, reporting and judging cases of academic dishonesty.

McCabe’s research shows that reported cheating is lower at institutions with Honor Codes. In addition, it is lower where peer disapproval of cheating is high. Table 1 shows that the Honor Codes do not eliminate dishonesty and it could be argued only bring levels down to those already found in the UK. Nevertheless, while certain details of this US research do not transfer directly to the UK setting, it does indicate the importance of creating an appropriate context by articulating, emphasising and demonstrating a set of values and expectations.

Academics and members of the profession should, of course, follow high standards in their own work, and should deal rigorously and appropriately with academic dishonesty. There is evidence that many students are uncertain whether their tutors really think academic dishonesty is a big deal (Underwood & Szabo, 2003). We should not leave them in any doubt.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Dishonesty</th>
<th>Penalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One paragraph lightly paraphrased</td>
<td>reduced mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncited secondary source</td>
<td>reduced mark, or sometimes zero mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One paragraph copied</td>
<td>reduced mark, or sometimes zero mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing someone else to copy</td>
<td>zero mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabricating data</td>
<td>zero mark (in some cases, no degree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete essay copied</td>
<td>zero mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought essay</td>
<td>zero mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating in an exam</td>
<td>zero mark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Typical penalties for different forms of dishonesty in UK psychology departments. Penalties were usually restricted to the piece of work involved, although some departments reported applying penalties to entire modules (Dunbar, 2005).

Quick tips to enhance academic integrity
Teach students to:
- take notes properly, clearly marking words and ideas of others;
- re-work source material into their own words;
- use citation techniques including quotes, ellipses and brackets;
- recognise when a source must be cited and when it is common knowledge;
- manage their time well by planning ahead for assignments;
- maintain raw data, detailed research records, and consent forms.

Clearly define where the line is drawn between collaboration and collusion. Allow students enough time to complete work appropriately.

Avoid giving unreasonably difficult assignments or exams.
Submit essays to a plagiarism detection service.
Make rules and penalties transparent to students.
Ensure the punishment fits the crime; some instances of plagiarism can be used formatively.
Design assignments that reduce opportunities for dishonesty (see Box 1).
Have students agree to a written code emphasising honesty and integrity.
References and suggested reading

Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe). Oxford Brookes University. See www.businessbrookes.ac.uk/learningteaching/aske


By George Dunbar, Associate Professor of Psychology, University of Warwick. Acknowledgements: Caprice Lantz has expertly guided and overseen the creation of this leaflet, and I’d like to thank her for inviting me to write it, and for her excellent advice. I’m very grateful to a number of colleagues who generously provided constructive and helpful comments: Chris Atherton, University of Central Lancashire; Pia Lee-Wilson, University of East London; Elizabeth Newton, London South Bank University; Jane Oakhill, Sussex University; Lorna Smith, James Watt College; Wendy Smith, St. Mary’s University College; William Spence, Glasgow University; and Jacqui Taylor, Bournemouth University. William provided a couple of paragraphs relating to Turnitin that I have simply adopted. I am also grateful to participants at recent Higher Education Academy Psychology Network workshops on this topic.