

# Cheating and Plagiarism: Perceptions and Practices of First Year IT Students

Judy Sheard, Martin Dick and Selby  
Markham – Monash University

Ian Macdonald and Meaghan Walsh  
Swinburne University

# Introduction

- ◆ The research is part of an ongoing effort at Monash University
- ◆ In late 2000, a survey of 600 undergraduates and postgraduates revealed 80% of students had cheated
- ◆ Literature shows this is not unusual in the USA or United Kingdom
- ◆ Needed more information to determine if this was unusual for Australia
- ◆ At the same time our colleagues at Swinburne were keen to determine the level of cheating in their institution

# Research Method

- ◆ The survey was distributed in early Semester 1 2001 to 1<sup>st</sup> year Swinburne IT students
- ◆ Swinburne and Monash have similar student intakes and entry levels
- ◆ Survey was distributed in lectures and was anonymous
- ◆ Response rate was around 90% of students who were given the survey

# Survey Questions

- ◆ Demographics (but anonymous)
- ◆ 18 scenarios
  - How acceptable (1 = acceptable, 5 = unacceptable)
  - Have they performed the practice
  - Do they know anyone who has performed the practice?
- ◆ Student response to seeing cheating
- ◆ Student perception of University attitudes to cheating

# Demographics

- ◆ Number of responses
  - Swinburne – 150
  - Monash – 137
- ◆ Gender Balance
  - Swinburne – Male 78%, Female 22%
  - Monash – Male 67%, Female 33%
- ◆ Full-fee Paying
  - Swinburne – 29%
  - Monash – 33%

# Admissions of Practice (1)

Scenario	Monash	Swinburne
Two students collaborating on an assignment meant to be completed individually	51.5%	42.4%
<b>Posting to an Internet newsgroup for assistance</b>	20.9%	10.2%
Showing assignment work to a lecturer for guidance	28.1%	25.2%
Resubmitting an assignment from a previous subject in a new subject	42.1%	45.9%
Submitting a friend's assignment from a past running of the subject	21.3%	17.4%
<b>Being given the answer to a tutorial exercise worth 5% by a class mate if the computer used has problems</b>	11.0%	3.3%

# Admissions of Practice (2)

Scenario	Monash	Swinburne
Hiring a person to write your assignment for you	4.4%	0.7%
Copying another student's assignment from their computer without their knowledge and submitting it	10.4%	5.4%
Not informing the tutor, that an assignment has been given too high a mark	27.8%	24.2%
Taking a student's assignment from a lecturer's pigeonhole and copying it	3.0%	2.0%
Copying material for an essay from the Internet	22.4%	18.8%
Copying the majority of an assignment from a friend's assignment, but doing a fair bit of work yourself	33.6%	28.2%

# Admissions of Practice (3)

Scenario	Monash	Swinburne
Copying all of an assignment given to you by a friend	10.4%	2.7%
Hiring someone to sit an exam for you	2.2%	2.0%
Using a hidden sheet of paper with important facts during an exam	2.2%	2.7%
Obtaining a medical certificate from a doctor to get an extension, when you are not sick	11.9%	6.7%
Copying material for an essay from a text book	23.7%	18.4%
Swapping assignments with a friend, so that each does one assignment, instead of doing both	8.1%	9.5%

# Overall admissions of cheating

- ◆ Monash – 85.4%
- ◆ Swinburne – 69.3%
- ◆ In terms of knowing someone who had performed a practice
  - Monash higher on all scenarios
  - Monash significantly higher on 6 scenarios for assignment and lab work

# Acceptability of Cheating

- ◆ Scenarios involving
  - Exam cheating
  - Theft
  - Fraud
  - Gross Plagiarism
- ◆ were all found to be unacceptable at both universities (mean > 3.5)

# Differences

- ◆ Monash students were more accepting of every scenario (except using hidden notes in an exam)
- ◆ Significant differences were found for
  - Two students collaborating
  - Posting to the Internet for assistance
  - Submitting a past assignment from a friend

# Student response to cheating

- ◆ Students indicate they will do nothing in general if they see cheating
- ◆ In an exam
  - Monash 77%
  - Swinburne 82%
- ◆ In an assignment
  - Monash 77%
  - Swinburne 79%

# University Policy and Attitudes

## ◆ Know University Policy

- Monash 84%
- Swinburne 81%

## ◆ University Attitude to Cheating

- Swinburne 4.2
- Monash 4.0
- Difference is significant

# Explanations

- ◆ Swinburne surveys conducted earlier than Monash surveys
- ◆ Swinburne had recently cracked down on plagiarism, with senior staff visiting lectures to explain both policy and penalties
- ◆ Swinburne uses electronic submission with automatic plagiarism detection

# Conclusion

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- ◆ Swinburne's problem is slightly less than Monash's problem
- ◆ Levels of cheating are too high at both universities
- ◆ At Monash, we plan a program to change the culture to reduce cheating over the next 12 months