



# Academic dishonesty in distance education in nursing programs

O. Ed. Reitz, PhD MBA RN NEA-BC Assistant Professor Mennonite College of Nursing Illinois State University

## Background

- The number of online programs for nursing education has increased dramatically in the last few years (AACN, 2009).
- Perceptions of educators are that there are greater opportunities and incentives to cheat than ever before (Bushweller, 1999).
- The current body of research on Academic Dishonesty (AD) in a distance learning environment has been limited and inconclusive (Watson & Sottlite, 2010). This research is designed to address this limitation.

## What is Academic Dishonesty?

Before a rigorous examination of the phenomenon of academic dishonest (AD) in distance learning environments can be made, a consensus regarding what exactly constitutes AD must be completed. Academic dishonesty (AD) may be defined as anything that gives a student an unfair advantage (Mullens, 2000).

## Types of Academic Dishonesty

- Plagiarism
- Prohibited collaboration
- Use of memory aids
- Falsifying information
- Fabricating documentation
- Receiving external assistance
- Unauthorized copying or photographing
- Acting as a substitute for another student
- Influencing an academic evaluation
- Turning in the same work for multiple classes (self-plagiarism)

## References

Furnished upon request

## Purpose

“In the evidence based research from 2005 until present, what factors are associated with academic dishonesty and distance education?”

## Method

Databases were searched using the keywords academic dishonesty and distance education.

## Limitations

The amount of research related to Academic Dishonesty in a distance education environment is relatively scarce. Even less available was research that related AD and distance learning for nursing programs. In addition there are numerous methodological difficulties with various individual research articles.



## Results

Several themes emerged from an examination of the literature including:

- There is a scarcity of research examining academic dishonesty and distance education in nursing
- Academic dishonesty is related to professional misconduct
- Currently there is a lack of consensus regarding the prevalence of AD in a distance education environment
- Plagiarism and collaborating on exams are the primary forms of AD identified
- There is an inverse relationship between AD and age
- Solutions to mitigate AD have either a short term or long term focus

## Proposed Alternatives to Discourage Academic Dishonest

1. Implementation of Academic Integrity Policies
  - *Explicitly define what constitutes Academic Dishonesty*
  - *Provide an Honor Code, have students read, discuss and sign*
  - *Integrate Academic Integrity Policies throughout the entire curriculum across academic disciplines*
2. Engage students with ongoing interaction
  - *An assessment of AD can be made by reconciling the differences between exam performance and the quality of discussions*
3. Proctor exams use of biometrics or webcams
  - *Costs are a primary factor*
4. Use of plagiarism fighting technologies
  - *Software such as 'Turnitin.com', Grammarly.com*
5. Modify assessments
  - *Instructor selects the topic for assignments*
  - *Asynchronous threaded discussions*
  - *E presentations*
  - *Process oriented assessment*
  - *Sequential segments of a larger assignment could be assigned*
6. Modifying exams
  - *Using different random questions for each student from a standardized test bank*
  - *Shortening the times that exams can be taken*
  - *Release scores only after all assessments have been completed*
7. Record student interactions
  - *Numerous issues related to confidentiality*
8. Faculty development
  - *Faculty need to be as knowledgeable as the students regarding the technology being utilized*

## Conclusions

- Instead of using approaches that aim to disrupt AD, a positive strategy based on trust may be more effective.
- An approach based on having each student sign an honor pledge of academic integrity may be more effective than proctoring exams because it demonstrates a level of trust.
- Ways of increasing integrity may be much more effective than attempting to decrease academic dishonesty and represents a fundamental reconceptualization of the entire concept of academic dishonesty.