

UNL cheaters never prosper

By Kema Soderberg

Just as no one would lop off their head to relieve an earache, no one should rely on cheating to pass a course rather than studying.

Dolores Simpson-Kirkland, assistant to the dean of students, said cheating is not a cure to an academic headache. She said the punishment for plagiarizing, using crib notes, or stealing tests can be severe depending on how a professor decides to deal with the problem.

Simpson-Kirkland said some students plagiarize by not using direct quotes, getting someone else to write their papers or buying papers from other students. Some students seek test help from crib notes or formulas punched into their calculator's memory bank, or those in larger classes sometimes have others take their tests for them, she said.

In response to these types of cheating, professors can fail the student for the exam, fail them in the course, or take them to the Judicial Board. The Judicial Board can suspend cheaters for a semester to a year, or expel them from the university.

Simpson-Kirkland said suspension or expulsion can be costly. She said students usually aren't able to get tuition and money spent on books and materials back. The student may also have to delay his or her career.

Although the punishment may seem harsh, Simpson-Kirkland said she feels letting students pass without learning the given material is a crime against society and against honest students.

Simpson-Kirkland said students passed out of a class because they've cheated may have to cheat to complete the following course levels. She said this could ultimately result in ill-trained professionals.

Simpson-Kirkland said the honest student suffers from cheating because they may know more than the cheater, and yet get lower grades.

Although honest students suffer, many are reluctant to turn in their cheating peers. One business student said he might warn the professor to watch a student's test methods if the cheating is blatant, but it would depend on the person and the situation.

One professor in the Business College felt he'd "been burnt" when someone stole a test earlier this semester. He said the students from the 250-member class said they would report the individual, but they never did.

"There's no honor code at this university, and if you want to cheat, go ahead," he said. "I was essentially told that nothing can be done about cheating and that I should drop it."

The professor said he issued another test and results from that indicated that there had been some cheating.

One of his students, David Halger, a junior in accounting, said almost everyone went down 8 percent on the second exam. Because of this, the professor decided students whose semester work



Illustration by Chris Medley

matches the grade on the first test would receive the first test grade.

Other professors develop test methods that cut down on cheating opportunities. Professor Richard Booher said he gives his life science exams open book, open notebook and designs questions to test knowledge of the material. He said he does this because the life science vocabulary requires knowledge of a foreign language.

"Students can understand, but freeze up on a term during the exam," Booher said. "On the exam questions, just the definition won't help much."

Peter Bleed, associate professor and chairman of anthropology, said he sometimes gives test questions to students in advance and sometimes requires group preparation. He said students aren't tested on all the questions he initially gives them, so they have to have a general knowledge of all the material.

Not much cheating has been done in the Modern Language Department, said its chairman Ralph

Albanese.

"Maybe we're just not on top of it," he said, "or maybe it's harder to cheat in language because we grade on oral participation, compositions and essays, and don't have true and false or multiple choice tests."

John Lynch, another professor in life sciences, said he solved the cheating problem by issuing two exams and alternating them between students. He said it's amazing that people will copy even when they know this procedure.

"I suppose if you're drowning you'll try anything," he said.

Lynch said a few years ago, some students told him a student used an exam to prepare for the test. Although the student got a 100 percent on that exam, Lynch said he couldn't really prove the student had done it.

"Academic dishonesty is something I'd rather not

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No easy answers to cheating problem

Analysis by Chuck Jagoda

Students cheat. Everybody knows they do, and everybody knows why. They cheat because of pressures to get grades, to get job interviews (let alone the job itself), and to get into graduate and professional schools.

Ask 20 students, and most of them will tell you the above or some version thereof. But such a survey contains clues to a more complex answer.

An anonymous, not necessarily representative, but random survey of student perspectives on student cheating yielded general agreement on the major promise that pressure to get grades was the main reason people cheat. But, there were several differing points of view.

Some students were not sure there was such a thing as student cheating. They had never heard or seen a student cheat, nor ever heard one admit to having cheated or even planning to cheat.

Yet there are cases.

Three years ago 12 students in Chemistry 109 admitted to paying other

students to take their final. It is a freshman level course, but required for sophomore pre-medicine students.

The most competitive case involved a graduate student at another university who reportedly shredded the only copy of a required book on library reserve to keep others in his class from using it.

One student was not ashamed to admit that he cheats "for sport." He admits that he could do well in class "the easy way — buying the book, studying, writing your own papers — but where's the challenge? It takes the supremely clever student to meet the challenge without doing the work."

One student claimed he cheated out of a sense of community, "to get a perspective on what my fellow students are thinking and to learn more — it's a learning device. I do it to learn more about human nature. It's more for communication than competition."

For a more complete perspective, it is necessary to go to the other side in the cheating drama: the teachers.

Richard Dienstbier, a UNL psychology professor, described the mental learning aspects.

"When people face moral decisions, like cheating, they try it out mentally," he said. "The ones who have learned moral lessons in childhood, experience guilt and anticipation anxiety. People who cheat are not likely to have much self control."

Dienstbier said cheating has gotten worse because the penalties have eased considerably.

"Twenty years ago, someone caught cheating would have gotten thrown out of school. Current UNL College of Arts and Sciences policy is that the student ought to flunk at least what he or she has been cheating on."

"This is sometimes not really a punishment, since the student may have only decided to cheat because he was going to flunk anyway," he said.

Some fraternities and sororities are said to have collections of old tests and papers its members have used in previous semesters. These collections or "data banks," are sometimes used by students to prepare for exams. Dienstbier said such resources can be helpful, but they should be available to all.

"If they (old exams) are available to

some students, the instructor should have them on the door of his office," he said.

Tony Santmire, chair of the UNL educational psychology department, said cheating students can be divided into three groups.

The first group may have difficulty putting what's in the book into his or her own words.

The second group is committed to receiving a degree, as opposed to getting an education, and the third group turns to cheating because of academic pressure, he said.

Circumstances can make a crucial difference in penalties for cheating she said.

"If a student has been doing well in class prior to cheating — if the cheating has been extra-extraordinary — I will be more sympathetic," she said.

Santmire described a case where three students handed in identical copies of a term paper purchased from a research service.

"It was a very sophisticated paper — way beyond anyone in that course." Santmire said she failed those three students.