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Using the Sociological Imagination to Teach about Academic Integrity

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Abstract

The sociological imagination is a useful tool for teaching about plagiarism and academic integrity, and, in turn, academic integrity is a good case to help students learn about the sociological imagination. We present an exercise in which the class discusses reasons for and consequences of dishonest academic behavior and then examines a series of scenarios using the sociological imagination. Students and instructors consider whether each scenario is a violation of academic integrity norms and how it can be viewed as both personal and public. We demonstrate that this kind of discussion helps students learn about academic integrity and how to think of violations (including causes and a range of outcomes) sociologically. In other words, we encourage students to think of academic dishonesty (both causes and consequences) not just as "personal troubles" but also as "public issues."

Keywords

ethics, sociological imagination, student writing

Many students do not understand what kinds of behaviors are dishonest, and, perhaps even more troubling, many do not think of actions that faculty would consider to be academic dishonesty as problematic (Howard and Davies 2009; Jones 2011; Power 2009). Despite widespread institutional, departmental, and course-level policies promoting academic integrity,[1] both classic and contemporary studies find academic dishonesty to be prevalent among college students. For example, LaBeff et al. (1990) found that more than half of students had engaged in dishonest behavior within a six-month period; fewer than 2 percent had been caught. More recently, Stephens, Young, and Calabrese (2007) and McCabe, Butterfield, and Trevino (2012) found that more than two-thirds of college students report some form of cheating behavior.

Instructors find such behaviors to be very troublesome. Confronting students about plagiarism or other academic misconduct is unpleasant, and stopping cheating can create distance between faculty members and their students (Bertram Gallant 2008). "Policing" academic dishonesty has been compared to a splinter that irritates (Murphy 1990); it distracts instructors from ensuring that their students are learning (Bertram Gallant 2008) and from acting as mentors (Howard 2001). Even when they do confront students, faculty are reluctant to bring forward official charges because of the time and effort involved (Moore 2002; Schneider 1999).

In her book on plagiarism in college culture, anthropologist Susan Blum argues that there are two distinct "ideologies of quotation" (2009:58):

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one generally held by faculty, which emphasizes authorship and authenticity of expression, and one often found among students, which places value on sharing and allowing "others to speak for or through them" (2009:65)—often using quotations and links to popular culture, a process facilitated by the Internet. In fact, technology presents a variety of new ways to cheat and allows easy access to a wide array of tools for dishonest behavior. For example, dozens of videos on YouTube demonstrate cheating methods, a "how to" Wiki details more than 25 techniques for cheating on a test,[2] online paper mills abound, and Twitter makes it easy to look for papers from former students.[3]

A great deal of educational literature attempts to help faculty detect and prevent dishonest behavior in their classrooms. Suggestions range from including clear academic integrity policies in course syllabi (e.g., Davis 2009; Svinivki and McKeachie 2011) to designing "plagiarism proof" assignments (e.g., Nilson 2010; Svinivki and McKeachie 2011), giving a quiz or homework assignment on plagiarism (e.g., Cizek 2003; Schuetz 2004), having students check their work using plagiarism-detection software such as Turnitin.com, or assigning online plagiarism modules, such as those found at Purdue University,[4] The College of New Jersey,[5] and elsewhere. While such practices may be helpful, the majority of these suggestions and modules focus only on plagiarism, ignoring other kinds of academic dishonesty in which students might engage. They are also likely to be generic solutions and do not engage students in thinking about academic integrity as it relates to broader questions common in sociology.

Academic integrity is important for a number of reasons. As Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) argue, academic dishonesty affects all students, not just those who cheat. Those who witness cheating and see no repercussions can become disillusioned with the educational system. Moreover, academic dishonesty exerts a toll on faculty, damages faculty-student relationships, and gets in the way of teaching and learning (Bertram Gallant 2008). At stake is the reputation of the institution and even public confidence in higher education.

Attention to such issues in the academic community is widespread. Our search of *Higher Education Abstracts*, a journal that indexes more than 200 education-related journals in a wide range of disciplinary fields, found 230 journal articles published between 1992 and 2012 that included the phrases "academic dishonesty," "plagiarism," and/or "academic integrity" in their abstracts. The articles cover a range of related topics, including student behaviors and/or perceptions in particular disciplines (e.g., Eastman, Eastman, and Iyer 2012; Woith, Jenkins, and Kerber 2012), student self-reports of dishonest behavior (e.g., Gaberson 1997; Marsden, Carroll, and Neill 2005), detection of academic dishonesty (e.g., Fulda 2009; Stamatatos 2011), and prevention (e.g., Weidler, Multhaup, and Faust 2012; Williams and Hosek 2008).

Despite the importance of academic integrity and the fact that some have identified "plagiarism panic" to be "the quintessential new millennial dilemma" (Maruca 2006:241), there has not been much attention devoted to the topic in sociology. Only a small handful of studies in sociology journals have applied sociological theories to cheating. For example, Vowell and Chen (2004), Cochran et al. (1998), and Cochran et al. (1999) tested criminological theories in relation to academic dishonesty (including rational choice/deterrence, social bond, self-control, social strain, and differential association theories); LaBeff et al. (1990) and McCabe (1992) analyzed students' rationales for cheating in terms of Sykes and Matza's (1957) "techniques of neutralization"; and Pershing (2003) considered the use of neutralization when students decide how to respond to honor code violations. With regard to the sociological pedagogy literature, a quick search of the *Teaching Sociology* archives turned up only five articles that mention the word "plagiarism," three that mention "academic dishonesty," and two that use "academic integrity." With the exception of Brezina (2000), who asked students to submit anonymous personal accounts about academic cheating and led a class exercise about motivations for this behavior in a discussion of deviance, none of these articles appear to have plagiarism or academic integrity as a central focus.

We propose an exercise that teaches and facilitates a discussion about academic integrity while at the same time teaching about the "sociological imagination" (Mills 1959) and helping students learn how it applies to the case of academic

dishonesty. In this exercise, students use their sociological imagination to brainstorm and discuss (1) reasons why students sometimes behave dishonestly; (2) student-level, faculty-level, class-level, and institutional-level effects of academic dishonesty; and (3) reasons why students and faculty might see the same behaviors differently. We present a series of six vignettes that address a wide range of behaviors—not just plagiarism—that may or may not be academically dishonest. For each scenario, the instructor leads a discussion about the situation, the reasons why it would be considered academically honest or dishonest behavior, and its implications.

We think this discussion exercise is more likely to foster student learning about academic integrity than are more individually oriented activities (e.g., those done online or at home). According to Blum (2009), academic dishonesty stems from a lack of communication between students and faculty and a kind of culture clash; thus, dialogue about faculty expectations can be a way to teach students about norms of citation and academic integrity, while recognizing student culture and norms about student practices. Moreover, the context of the discussion—couched in terms of the sociological imagination—is a good way to engage students in thinking about a familiar personal dilemma in broader terms, which reinforces a sociological perspective on the world around them and helps them to better understand the relationship between "personal troubles" and "public issues." Because the sociological imagination is central to sociology, this exercise is appropriate in a wide array of courses.

EXPLANATION OF THE EXERCISE

This exercise is a universal technique that is appropriate for almost any undergraduate sociology class and, depending on the instructor's goals, could be effectively used to teach about academic integrity, the sociological imagination, or both. We have successfully used this exercise at a liberal arts college in classes of 15 to 30 and at a large public research university in classes of 60 to 80. Instructors should gauge course level to determine how much background students are likely to have in academic integrity policy and practice. We propose five or six vignettes below; instructors could use all of them or a selection and could tailor the vignettes to the course or students. The scenarios we present here are broadly applicable, but instructors could add or subtract vignettes. For example, for a course that involves an internship requirement, one could include a vignette about misreporting internship hours; for a course in which student attendance is monitored, one could add a vignette about "signing in" another student for attendance. Academic integrity policies at any given institution cannot cover the specifics of every possible violation, but this is an assignment that gets students thinking about academic integrity in a way that is at once broad and anchored in the course and sociological material.

SETUP OF THE EXERCISE

The first part of the exercise is to review the institution's academic integrity policy with the class.[6] Policies are generally posted online, and if technology is available to project the site on a screen, it might be helpful to show students how to navigate to the site and to review it together, highlighting the most important parts of the policy. If the classroom is not equipped to do this, instructors might want to print out a handout with this material.

In the second part of the exercise, the instructor should ask students to brainstorm about why students cheat and—if possible—note their responses in a list on the board. Students commonly make suggestions such as "everyone does it," "they think it doesn't matter," "it's an easy way out," "they think they won't get caught," "they feel pressure to perform," "they procrastinate," and (less often) "they don't know any better." In a large class, it might be appropriate to divide the class into small groups to brainstorm about why students violate academic integrity policies and then to share with the whole class as the instructor writes on the board. By building on responses, the instructor can reinforce them, perhaps by adding quotes to engage students (e.g., in response to the common rationale "procrastination," Trautner shares a quote from her brother, who says, "Procrastination and desperation are wild-eyed lovers"). If students do not come up with some of the items the instructor wants to discuss, they can be added as the instructor's contribution to the brainstorm.

Table 1. Vignettes.

Vignette 1. Jane writes a paper for an Introduction to Management course on the topic of "Flexible Workplace Benefits in a Diverse Workforce." The following year, in a class on Benefits and Compensation, she submits the same paper. Has she behaved dishonestly? (Illustrates misrepresentation.)

Vignette 2. Kristen was absent with bronchitis for a week. She obtained the notes from Bob and copied them. Kristen then used the notes to study for the upcoming midterm exam. Has she behaved dishonestly? (Illustrates no dishonest behavior; red herring.)

Vignette 3. Sarah and Peter were lab partners in a chemistry class. One week they split the 30 homework problems in half. Sarah did the odd numbers and Peter did the even numbers. They met Sunday night to share the answers. On Monday, Sarah and Peter individually submitted the completed 30 problems. Have they behaved dishonestly? (Illustrates misrepresentation.)

Vignette 4. Jeff is writing a paper for a political science class. He needs to describe the workings of the British parliamentary system. He has a source that explains the system very concisely and well. He can't think of a better way to summarize the system, so he uses some of the exact phrases of the source interspersed among his own words. He cites the source at the end of the paragraph. Has he behaved dishonestly? (Illustrates plagiarism.)

Vignette 5. Robert writes an excellent essay on the causes of crime for his criminology class and offers it for sale the following year. Has he behaved dishonestly? (Illustrates facilitating plagiarism.)

Vignette 6. A professor distributes a review sheet to students in Organic Chemistry. Jessica answers all the questions on the review sheet and sells it to other students. Has she behaved dishonestly? (Illustrates new possible violation of academic integrity, intellectual property violation, facilitation of plagiarism, cheating.)

After brainstorming, the instructor should lead a discussion on the listed items using the sociological imagination. Teachers can ask how "personal problems" like pressure to perform could be thought of as "public issues." For example, for the item "they think it doesn't matter," one could use follow-up questions to draw out public consequences. Instructors might question whether dishonesty matters more for some majors than others (specifically, would cheating matter if a doctor, accountant, or engineer cheated through his or her training?). The instructor can also inquire how academic dishonesty might matter to a college or university—does it cheapen the value of the college's degree? It is valuable to ask students to consider an instructor's perspective and how dishonest behavior in one class might have repercussions for future students whom that instructor will teach.

We discuss the rationales "they think they won't get caught" and "they don't know any better" by highlighting a 2004 case in which a UK student, penalized for plagiarism in his final year of schooling, tried to sue his university for not catching him sooner. The student said, "If they had pulled me up with my first essay at the beginning and warned me of the problems and consequences, it would be fair enough. But all my essays were handed back with good marks and no one spotted it" (BBC News 2004). Using this or other media reports—possibly by showing the articles on screen in class—can help to illustrate some of the implications of academic integrity in a way that engages student interest and encourages discussion and interaction.

DISCUSSION OF VIGNETTES

After brainstorming about why students might engage in dishonest behavior, we tell them to reflect on hypothetical cases presented as vignettes (see Table 1), asking whether the cases violate the institution's policy. We use PowerPoint slides to present each vignette individually, but if this is impossible, one could read the vignette aloud or ask a student volunteer to do so. Before presenting the vignettes, instructors should change the names so that no student's name in the class is used. Vignettes are particularly well suited to broaching such a dialogue because they are a good way to get people to consider sensitive topics they might otherwise put off or distance themselves from (Barter and Renold 1999; Finch 1987; Schoenberg and Ravdal 2000).

Vignette 1 is a clear case of misrepresentation: The student resubmits a paper that she wrote for another class. According to common institutional policies, it is academically dishonest to submit required material that has been previously submitted—in whole or in substantial part—in another course, without the new (and sometimes previous) instructor's prior and expressed consent. This is a good opportunity for instructors to illustrate their own policies about previously submitted work; for example, one might encourage students to speak with the instructor about how to extend a project from another class. To apply the sociological imagination, the instructor can ask how this "double dipping" can be seen as a "public issue" and how it affects students (e.g., encourages academic laziness, forecloses a chance to learn from the assignment), faculty (e.g., facilitates distrust of students, wastes their time), the class (e.g., equity), and the institution (e.g., credentials graduates with less mastery in research and writing). It may also be useful to ask students to consider the same example applied to situations or professions other than academia, for example, a journalist who "recycles" writing.

We include Vignette 2, an example of students sharing notes as they prepare for an exam, as a "red herring"—to illustrate the point that some collaboration can be helpful. The instructor may want to illustrate how this would be the case in the course. We find that this scenario helps "break the ice" in conversations about academic integrity. It also offers the chance to think about a positive case in terms of the sociological imagination (how students, faculty, the class, and the institution can benefit from an ethos of cooperation).

Vignette 3 is another case of misrepresentation, for the lab partners in the example are passing off someone else's work as their own. Including this vignette would be particularly helpful in courses where students complete homework and dishonest collaboration might be tempting. However, it might also be good to include it in courses where this is not a problem as a precursor to Vignette 4 (on plagiarism), so students get used to talking about the cases in a nonthreatening fashion.

One of the most important scenarios for sociology courses is in the plagiarism case presented by Vignette 4. Discussing this vignette brings up the need to paraphrase and quote properly, and the instructor can review how to use citations. This is also a good time to discuss how tempting it is to use Internet sources like Wikipedia but that students must learn to use their own words and not copy other people's phrasings. Instructors can review any specific policies about sourcing for course assignments (e.g., use of peer-reviewed articles). Again, the class could brainstorm about how the personal problem of feeling unable to find a better way to phrase the information might be seen as a public issue in terms of technology and easy access to others' writings and also could discuss how and why such actions might be viewed differently by the student, the instructor, classmates, and the institution.

We include Vignettes 5 and 6—cases of selling papers and answer sets—to address increasingly common practices. The first (Vignette 5) is a generally agreed upon example of dishonest behavior, and almost every student easily recognizes why selling (or purchasing) a course paper is dishonest. However, there is a lot of variability with regard to the second (Vignette 6), and despite a proliferating market for such services,[7] many universities do not in fact have clear policies with regard to the selling and buying of academic materials other than papers. Instructors themselves might have different perspectives on the issue, so we think it is especially important for faculty to make clear to students their own policies. The vignette's example arose for Trautner in 2011 when she learned of a student who was selling online study guides for her course to other enrolled students (for $6 each). During the discussion of this vignette, some students revealed that they routinely receive 5 to 10 emails from other students selling course materials before every exam, in every class. While the level of usage of websites selling course materials will vary by campus, and instructors have a range of arguments for or against this practice, Trautner framed the discussion in terms of violating The University at Buffalo's policies against "selling . . . any inappropriate assistance in the preparation, research, or writing of any assignment" (University at Buffalo 2013). She argued that instructors view exam study guides as an opportunity to learn and review and that selling a completed study guide to another student is in fact selling assistance in the preparation of an assignment (the exam).

In class discussions, we have found students to be most vocal about Vignettes 1 and 6. In response to Vignette 1, about 25 percent of students in both classes we evaluated spoke up and about half of these argued they have a right to use any original work they have completed for any purpose, at any time. Some students have difficulty understanding the institution's norms against such use; thus, it is helpful for them to consider the views of others. For many of the same reasons, students struggle with Vignette 6 (although this may vary by campus culture). From a seller's perspective, they wonder why they should not be free to profit from their hard work, and from a buyer's perspective, they wonder how buying a review sheet that someone else created is any different from hiring a tutor or using the popular study guide CliffsNotes. In this case, again, it is useful for students to consider others' perspectives and for instructors to make very clear their own views and course expectations.

There are numerous other possible vignettes that instructors might consider including in addition to, or instead of, those in Table 1. For example, the instructor might include a vignette about changing graded exam answers to claim they were graded incorrectly or misrepresenting a family emergency to postpone an exam. Another idea is to use actual cases from the home institution, stripped of all identifying material. As an anonymous reviewer suggested, using real cases of academic dishonesty might make the vignettes more meaningful to students.

In this exercise, we concluded our conversation about academic integrity with a step-by-step discussion of what happens in cases of suspected violations and of our institutions' particular policies regarding student rights and the possible penalties that may be applied. In technology-equipped classrooms, it may be useful to return to the institution's website to review the specific policy.

METHODS OF EVALUATION

We had three goals in designing and implementing this exercise. We wanted students to better understand the sociological imagination, to better understand policies and issues surrounding academic integrity, and to see the relationship between the two. Our evaluation of the exercise demonstrates that we achieved all three goals.

We assessed the effectiveness of this exercise through a pretest/posttest survey in two classes at two institutions. The first class is an 80-student, 300-level criminology elective at Buffalo, a large, research-intensive state university that enrolls approximately 20,000 undergraduate and 10,000 graduate students. The class attracts students from a wide range of majors, as there are no prerequisites. While 58 percent of students are sociology majors, 34 percent come from other social science majors and a few from humanities (5 percent) or professional schools (3 percent). In contrast, the second class, a 16-student, 300-level applied sociology elective at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), a liberal arts college that enrolls about 6,000 undergraduate students, is dominated by sociology majors (100 percent in the semester studied). Introduction to Sociology is a prerequisite, and the majority of students had taken several sociology courses before taking this class (the average was 4 courses). Table 2 presents a variety of information about the students and courses.

We administered the pretest to both sets of students on the very first day of class. We asked students to define the sociological imagination in their own words and to rate their confidence in their knowledge of their institution's academic integrity policies on a 7-point scale. We asked the same questions in the posttest survey, which was administered one week after the vignette exercise and discussion. In addition, we asked students whether they learned anything new about academic integrity (and, if so, what they learned), whether they believed it was effective to examine academic integrity using the sociological imagination (and to elaborate why or why not), and whether the discussion enhanced their understanding of the sociological imagination or academic integrity. Other than learning that the TCNJ students start out with more accurate definitions of the sociological imagination, we found no significant differences between the students at the two institutions in terms of the outcomes reported here, and thus we combine both classes in our discussion of the results.

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

We scored students' open-ended definitions of the sociological imagination on a 3-point scale. Responses were scored as 2 if they effectively

Table 2. Comparison of the Two Cases.

Institution	Buffalo	TCNJ
Course	300-level criminology elective	300-level applied sociology elective
Class size	80 undergraduates	16 undergraduates
Schedule	Two 80-minute blocks	One 180-minute block
Prerequisites	None	Sociology 101
Percentage of sociology majors	58%	100%
Gender composition	66% women 34% men	75% women 25% men
Age composition	94% traditional	100% traditional
Race/ethnic composition	63% white 13% African American 5% Hispanic or Latino/a 8% Asian American 5% Arab American 6% international	75% white 19% African American 6% Hispanic or Latino/a
Class standing	60% seniors 30% juniors 8% sophomores 2% first years	38% seniors 31% juniors 31% sophomores

demonstrated understanding of the relationship between personal troubles and public issues and/or biography and history: for example, "To connect personal problems to social issues. Putting things into a broader context; taking things usually understood on an individual level and understanding them as a more public issue," or "When someone can see their private troubles and how they relate to public issues, they have a sociological imagination. How your biography relates to history." We applied a fairly stringent standard, only awarding a score of 2 to responses that demonstrated full understanding.

We scored responses as 1 if they demonstrated some understanding of the relationship between individual and society but not a complete articulation of that relationship linked with the concept (personal troubles and public issues, or history and biography): for example, "the idea that we are a product of our surroundings" or "society and individuals being connected." These responses indicated that students had some knowledge of the sociological imagination argument but did not articulate a complete sense of it. Some responses in this category omitted the notion of the individual (biography, personal problems): "a way of thinking and explaining events using whatever knowledge you may have about society."

Finally, we scored responses as 0 if they were left blank, if they stated "I don't know" or something similar, if they simply restated the question, or if they noted something that did not demonstrate any knowledge of the meaning of the concept at all. Examples included "the reason why people do things," "means that an individual thinks about the world in an imaginary way," "an imagination or creative outlook on society," "creativity in sociology," or "being able to view the world through a sociological lens." If the student only mentioned C. Wright Mills in their response without defining the concept, we coded the response as 0.

Our analysis of student definitions of the sociological imagination suggests that the exercise was very effective in helping students learn the concept. On the first day of class, just 6 of the 94 students who took the pretest (6 percent) scored 2 for their definition, and only 8 (9 percent) scored 1. The remaining 80 students (85 percent) scored 0. In contrast, 40 of the 84 students who took the posttest scored 2 (48 percent), 17 scored 1 (20 percent), and 27 scored 0 (32 percent). We performed a t test to compare the difference in means for the pretest and posttest definition scores for each student who took both tests, which resulted in a t value of −9.256, significant at the .000 level.[8]

Such differences were evident in students' written definitions. For example, one student scored 0 in the pretest after writing "to think of the world in a sociological way" but scored 2 in the posttest by writing "to connect personal problems to social issues." Another student wrote in the pretest "I think a sociological imagination would be when one thinks of ideas and how they reflect on society" and in the posttest "When someone can see their private troubles and how they relate to public issues they have a sociological imagination. [It's] how your biography relates to history." A third went from defining the sociological imagination as "thinking outside of usual thoughts" to "sociological imagination is society and individuals being connected." In total, 15 students moved from 0 in the pretest to 1 in the posttest, 31 moved from 0 to 2, and 5 moved from 1 to 2. Two students lowered their scores from the pretest to the posttest, and 28 students did not change their score. Overall, what this taught us, as instructors, is that many students need a review of the sociological imagination, even if they have previously taken numerous sociology courses. We think it is a worthwhile concept to review in each sociology course, as it is an important perspective for the discipline and mastery is likely to be an iterative process.

We acknowledge that the definitions that students provided do not necessarily demonstrate evidence of deep learning of the sociological imagination. We asked them simply to provide brief definitions of what the sociological imagination means to them; we did not ask them to write essays or papers or to otherwise demonstrate a full understanding of the concept. However, the definitions that students provided before and after the exercise were different enough from one another that we feel comfortable in asserting learning. In addition, 67 percent of students "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed that the discussion enhanced their understanding of the sociological imagination. Twenty-seven percent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 6 percent "somewhat disagreed." No student "strongly" disagreed.

UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students began class on the first day very confident in their knowledge of their institution's academic integrity policies. On a 7-point scale, in which 1 was labeled "not confident" and 7 was labeled "very confident," 89 percent (n = 84) marked themselves above the midpoint, as 5, 6, or 7 (nearly half of these students, n = 40, marked the highest category, 7). Seven students put themselves at the midpoint, and three rated their confidence at 3. No student rated herself or himself as 1 or 2. A week after the exercise, however, 79 percent of students said that they had learned something new about academic integrity during the exercise, and 87 percent of students "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed that the exercise increased their knowledge of academic integrity policies (seven students neither agreed nor disagreed, two students somewhat disagreed, and one student strongly disagreed).

Sixty-three students elaborated on what they learned, and their responses generally fell into six categories. The majority of students (n = 31, 48 percent) commented about learning something about a particular kind of dishonest behavior. For example, one student wrote, "Things that I consider ok are not necessarily right, for example splitting homework with your friend to half even half odd. I feel that is ok but apparently it is being dishonest." Another student wrote, "I did not know about issues regarding selling or buying course materials," and another wrote, "I had no idea that using a past paper for a present assignment was wrong!"

Other students (n = 10, 16 percent) just made general comments indicating that they had learned more about academic integrity as a whole, for example, "I feel like after our discussion I am more knowledgeable when it comes to [our institution's] academic integrity policies," or "That there are many forms of academic integrity not just plagiarism." Nineteen percent of students (n = 12) commented that they learned that there can be multiple interpretations about behaviors considered to be dishonest or that there are "gray areas." For example, "Some issues may be accepted by some and not accepted by another." Two students remarked that the discussion reinforced what they already knew about academic integrity. As one student wrote, the discussion provided "some clarification with examples."

These responses (and the preceding discussion) revealed to us, as instructors, how vague and open

to interpretation institutional policies can be. We learned that we need to be very clear about our own interpretations and to address our policies up front. Because students and instructors can read the same policy very differently, it is not enough to simply reference the university policy in our syllabi or first days of class.

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

A number of students demonstrated that they understood the relationship between academic integrity and the sociological imagination. Five students (8 percent) wrote that they learned something about faculty or university perspectives on academic integrity. For example, one wrote, "I did not realize how much academic integrity affected the professor as well as the student," and another wrote, "I learned that there are implications for the faculty such as not being able to adequately assess learning." Finally, three students (5 percent) wrote that they learned something new about the relationship between sociology and academic integrity. As one student wrote, "I hadn't thought about academic integrity in terms of sociology before and really the reasons behind the dishonesty as sociological."

Other students made similar comments about sociology in response to our question about the overall effectiveness of the exercise. For example, one student wrote, "It was an interesting way to apply to sociology to something that has been lectured to us so much." In fact, 34 students (47 percent of those who offered an elaboration) commented that the exercise was useful in broadening their perspective about academic integrity in some way: "Academic dishonesty/integrity can have far reaching effects that go beyond just getting a better grade. The 'imagination' can help you see those things," "It was effective because it allowed us to view these policies from the outside and not as students," "Effective—it takes your action (i.e., cheating on a test) and connects it to a social force bigger and broader (it affects the students in your class, the average grade, etc.)," "It was effective because most people believe academic integrity is an individual level but looking at it with sociological imagination allows you to see the bigger picture," and "It was interesting to see the connection between individual issues with academic integrity and issues with the university as a whole."

CONCLUSION

Colleges and universities have legislated en masse a multitude of policies and procedures regarding academic integrity for decades (Bertram Gallant 2008:24), but students continue to violate these norms. Policies are not always consistent, clear, accessible, or detailed (Bretag et al. 2011; McCabe and Makowski 2001). Students are understandably confused about academic citation (Blum 2009) and other scholarly norms, and it falls to us as educators to teach our students about academic integrity so that they will understand how to avoid academic dishonesty and why it matters for students, faculty, their classes, institutions, and society more generally.

The in-class exercise we propose takes on this charge by addressing three goals: teaching students about academic integrity, reinforcing student understanding of the sociological imagination, and strengthening student skills to apply the sociological imagination to the case of academic integrity. Our survey-based evaluation demonstrates that this approach helped students advance their learning for all three goals. They strengthened their understanding of academic integrity, the sociological imagination, and the relationship between the two. The analysis also found that students rated the exercise as effective. On both campuses, students evaluated the exercise positively and reported that it enhanced their learning. Rather than just emphasizing how to avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism and warning students about penalties, the assignment gives instructors a platform to engage with students in a dialogue about academic integrity and the sociological imagination.

Because of the universal nature of academic dishonesty and the prevalence of academic integrity policies at institutions of higher education, we think this kind of exercise could be used in any sociology instructor's undergraduate classrooms. While such an approach could be used for other disciplines,[9] the

activity is geared toward sociology courses because it engages the sociological imagination. We have successfully incorporated the exercise in courses as small as 15 and as large as 75 in about the same manner and in both a large university and a liberal arts college. We tested the exercise in courses with mostly (or solely) sociology majors—in one class with mainly seniors and in another with an even distribution of sophomores, juniors, and seniors—and it was equally effective. Given that the exercise is well suited to review and reintroduce the sociological imagination, we expect that it would be just as appropriate for newer college students. It might be even more important for students (particularly sociology majors) to learn about academic integrity from a sociological perspective early in their college careers, so that they can avoid academic dishonesty as they progress through later courses.

While policies and penalties may vary from institution to institution, we think the general approach to teaching about academic integrity and the sociological imagination is broadly applicable, and the exercise is easily modified to different institutional contexts. In very large classes, where it can be harder to coax individuals to volunteer, instructors could modify the exercise to incorporate small groups or a short writing or to use clickers and closed-answer choices. Instructors can also use more or fewer vignettes based on the length of time they wish to dedicate and the particularities of their courses, and they can tailor the vignettes to their course and/or campus (including using real information from past cases, if this is available).

In conclusion, a solution to the widespread problem of academic dishonesty requires changing campus and societal cultures—a tall order for individual instructors—but, in the meantime, we can do something about the cultures in our own classrooms. By incorporating the assignment early in the semester, the instructor can help create a classroom climate that embraces norms of academic integrity situated in the context of the class. The dialogic nature of the exercise may make it more likely that students will raise additional questions that come up as the course progresses and that they will avoid the pitfalls of academic dishonesty. Our hope is that using this exercise can help instructors to eschew a "policing" role in favor of fostering learning and mentoring for our students.

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NOTES

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1. We draw on Bertram Gallant's (2008:10–11) definitions of academic integrity: "the expectation of being honest, trustworthy, responsible, respectful, fair, and completing work only in the ways that are authorized by the institution." We include, as the principle forms of academic misconduct, plagiarism ("using another's words or ideas without appropriate attribution or without following citation conventions"), fabrication ("making up data, results, information, or numbers, and recording and reporting them"), falsification ("manipulating research, data, or results to inaccurately portray information"), and misrepresentation of one's efforts or abilities (Bertram Gallant 2008:10).
2. http://www.wikihow.com/Cheat-On-a-Test (Retrieved May 2, 2012).
3. See: http://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2012/04/19/at-crunch-time/ (Retrieved May 2, 2012).
4. http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/930/01 (Retrieved May 2, 2012).
5. http://www.tcnj.edu/~liblinks/Module6/index.html (Retrieved May 2, 2012).
6. For schools with honor codes, it may also be appropriate to review this material as well.
7. Websites include Notehall.com, ShareNotes.com, NoteUtopia.com, NoteSurf.com, CollegeNoteShare.com, ClassNotez.com, and countless more.
8. Differences between the pretest and posttest definitions were significant at both campuses, although the relationship is most strongly driven by the large class of students at the research university. At the liberal arts school, $t = -2.876$ (significant at .01 level), and at the research university, $t = -9.030$ (significant at .000 level).

9. Kibler et al. (1988) take a similar approach by using much more detailed academic integrity case studies for use in an array of courses.

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