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Academic Dishonesty at Ouachita Baptist University

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Professor Pittman

Composition II

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Introduction

Academic dishonesty- a commonly used term on high school and college campuses nationwide, but what exactly does it mean? According to Delta College, academic dishonesty is referred to as, “any deliberate attempt to falsify, fabricate or otherwise tamper with data, information, records, or any other material that is relevant to the student's participation in any course, laboratory, or other academic exercise or function.” This could be anything from looking at a classmate’s quiz paper or jotting down someone else’s answer on a homework question to purposefully plagiarizing on an academic, research paper or stealing the test key from the professor’s office. Any and all forms of academic dishonesty are immoral and unethical, and every offense is deserving of serious punishment by the school or organization in authority of those found guilty of such dishonest acts.

While academic dishonesty is a rising issue all across the United States among almost all ages, specifically in college age students, it is also a major problem at the college that I personally attend, which is Ouachita Baptist University (OBU) located in the small town of Arkadelphia, Arkansas. Though most cases of academic dishonesty here at OBU would be considered minor offenses, many students at OBU cheat or plagiarize on a daily or weekly basis. I, personally, have had students ask me to tell them what questions were on the test or what I put down on an individually assigned homework assignment. I have not participated in these acts of academic dishonesty of course, but the fact that copying, cheating, and plagiarizing have become

such mundane acts frightens me. Some realize the seriousness of their actions, while others believe it to be no big deal. Either way, academic dishonesty of all kinds is occurring on OBU's campus and this issue needs to be further addressed by Ouachita's faculty and staff. While the school has made attempts in the past to fix this problem, it is still occurring on a regular basis. I propose that the students and professors of Ouachita Baptist University unite to come up with and implement not only more rules and regulations to punish those who have been academically dishonest, but also ideas of how to prevent cheating and plagiarism in the first place.

Due to the fact that my audience consists of the faculty, staff, and the entire administration of Ouachita Baptist University, I know that my audience is a mature group that will listen to my ideas and take them seriously. However, I also know that my targeted audience is very busy with their normal day-to-day work. Therefore, I believe that a PowerPoint presentation will be most effective for my audience due to the fact that a presentation is visually appealing and tends to keep the attention of the audience. I also realize that a PowerPoint usually does not take a great deal of time to present and I believe that my audience will appreciate my effort to use their time efficiently by respecting that each member of my audience is on a tight schedule. I believe real change can occur once I reveal my thoughts and opinions on new and improved solutions in an attempt to fix the issue of academic dishonesty occurring on the campus of Ouachita Baptist University.

Academic Dishonesty at Ouachita Baptist University

Academic dishonesty has been a hot topic in recent years among faculty and staff of college campuses nationwide due to the exponentially increasing occurrences of cheating and plagiarism among college aged students. Dorothy Jones, a professor at Norfolk State University, discovered the alarming statistics of how prevalent cheating and plagiarism really are on college campuses in the United States. She revealed that it has been discovered that 54% of undergraduates have admitted to plagiarizing via the Internet, while an astounding 80% have admitted to some form of cheating at least one time in their academic career (Jones 1). Clearly, academic dishonesty is a growing and worsening issue among college age students in today's society. A professor at the renown Stanford University named David L. Jaffe recognized the rise of academic dishonesty and suggested some possibilities as to why there has been such an increase in cheating and plagiarism in recent years. He suggests that more students are being academically dishonest, because everyone else seems to be academically dishonest as well and because few people are caught or punished for their acts, so students believe they also will go unpunished for their acts of cheating and/or plagiarism (Jaffe 1-2). He also states that cheating has become more accepted among college age students and because students are feeling more pressure to succeed in the classroom, they will stoop to anything to receive their desired grade (Jaffe 1-2). Academic dishonesty is definitely on the rise and is becoming a serious issue on college campuses all across America.

While academic dishonesty is a major issue in schools and colleges all across the nation, it is even a problem at my religiously affiliated college, Ouachita Baptist University. Whether that is in the form of plagiarizing a paper or cheating on a quiz or an exam, academic dishonesty is a rising issue and every act deserves to be treated as a serious offense. How can this issue be

prevented on OBU's campus? What policies should be put in place to punish those who have been academically dishonest? What can we, as students and Christ followers, do to hold our fellow classmates up to the higher standard that God has called us to? These are only a few of the questions that arise as I brainstorm possible ways to prevent and punish academic dishonesty on OBU's campus. My hope is that one day, academic dishonesty will no longer occur on Ouachita's campus due to the fact that the students and faculty members hold one another accountable for their dishonest acts and appropriately deal with those who refuse to live up to our standard of living honest lives.

The Problem

One theory as to why academic dishonesty is on the rise among college students is due to the increase in technology, which provides students with a variety of new ways to cheat or plagiarize via their smartphones, tablets, or laptops (*CyberEthics*). A Google search to copy and paste for a research paper or a text to send the test answers to a friend is at our fingertips and only takes a moment to do (*CyberEthics*). Technology is definitely a major tool that college age students are abusing in order to succeed in the classroom, but many times they do it in a way that makes them academically dishonest. According to *CyberEthics* from *Films on Demand*, teenagers and college age students admit to using some form of technology for at least three or four hours a day, every day of the week. The speakers in the video also agree that due to the recent increase in technology over the past few years, academic dishonesty has been on the rise as students are relying even more heavily on the Internet to look up answers, often times in an academically dishonest way (*CyberEthics*). In the *CyberEthics* video, it was stated that due to the constant access students have through the use of their smartphones or tablets, they are using their technological devices to take pictures of exams, text test answers to a friend, or even buy a

research paper from a website and turn it in as their own work. Clearly, academic dishonesty is not a new problem, but the ways that students are able to cheat is increasing. This is an issue that must be addressed.

Here at Ouachita, academic dishonesty is a problem. Our Dean of Students, Scott Haynes, agrees that cheating and plagiarism are issues on campus. He acknowledges that academic dishonesty on OBU's campus is "a pretty big problem" and while he does not believe that it occurs extremely often, he believes that it "is significant when it happens" (Haynes). He says there is no "blanket policy" to punish acts of academic dishonesty, because he believes in the importance of showing forgiveness towards students who have committed an offense (Haynes). He states that, many professors choose to show a lot of mercy and grace towards the students due to the fact that we are Christians "because that's what Jesus would do" (Haynes).

Mr. Haynes believes that the majority of people who are cheating here at Ouachita are nearly failing and are willing to do anything just to pass the class or are simply trying to get their borderline "B" up to an "A." He believes that "the majority of Ouachita students want to have integrity," so he says that he has discovered that it is more common among underclassmen, simply because they are unsure of what is cheating and what it is not (Haynes). According to Mr. Haynes, many college students specifically here at OBU are unable to distinguish what is technically considered academically dishonest versus what is not. Along similar lines, Mr. Haynes states that most cheating is on smaller assignments or plagiarizing a paper, while few instances are for big exams. I believe that this can be attributed to the fact that many students do not realize that they are being academically dishonest when they cheat on a small assignment or take a few sentences from a source word for word and put it in their paper, but students know that cheating on an exam is obviously considered to be academically dishonest. That being said,

a major issue is that many students are simply lacking education on what is considered to be cheating or plagiarism and what is not. Another issue is that many do not believe that their acts of cheating and/or plagiarism will go undiscovered by the professor, because they have seen their friends cheat and they were not caught. Even if they are caught, many students at OBU do not believe that their punishment will be very serious. Therefore, they think that taking the risk of possibly being exposed is less severe than getting the lower grade while being academically honest. It is important that Ouachita's professors have a reputation of catching onto those who are academically dishonest and giving a fair punishment to those who are caught in order for real change to occur on campus.

Past Attempts

Ouachita's faculty and staff have made a number of attempts in the past to prevent and/or catch cheating and plagiarism, as well as making new rules to punish those who have been academically dishonest. A major policy that Ouachita honors is that all Ouachita students must read and then sign the Academic Covenant in a Chapel service that takes place towards the beginning of the school year in front of the entire student body (Haynes). The signing of the covenant is a symbol of their agreement to uphold Ouachita's Covenant Pledge, which reads,

“As a member of the Ouachita community, I am committed to fostering a culture of honor. I affirm that an academic environment can be enriching only when its members commit to mutual integrity, trust, responsibility and respect. I will refrain from all forms of academic dishonesty, and I will act responsibly when confronted with the knowledge of such behavior. I recognize that academic excellence is more than the absence of dishonesty; true scholarship entails devotion to my studies and respect for my professors and classmates. With the aim of academic and personal growth I make this pledge to

myself and to the women and men of Ouachita Baptist University (Ouachita Baptist University Office of Student Services).”

Because all OBU students have read and signed this covenant, OBU’s faculty and staff hope that the students will hold themselves up to this standard and that many possible acts of cheating or plagiarism will be avoided because students have signed this covenant. Mr. Haynes even stated, “I think that that’s also a very good thing for our culture (at Ouachita), to have it be something that’s happening in front of the entire student body not just the new members of the student body. For that to be an annual, pretty formal thing for our freshmen - our incoming students.”

Another way that many OBU professors try to catch academic dishonesty is by now requiring students to turn in their papers through websites that check for plagiarism by comparing the student’s paper to the content of a variety of sources; one example of these plagiarism checking websites is “turnitin.com,” which gives the professor an exact percentage of how much of the paper has been found word for word in another source. Also, a number of rules and regulations have been implemented to punish those who are caught. For example, if a professor witnesses an act of academic dishonesty, they can choose to file a report that will be sent to the Dean of Students, so that the student realizes the seriousness of their academic dishonesty (Haynes). However, Mr. Haynes says that many professors may choose to punish the student on their own without filing a formal report. He says that for someone with multiple offenses or someone who denies committing their offense, the professor can choose to send them to the judicial counsel, which consists of faculty members as well as members of the student body, to receive his or her punishment (Haynes). He says that he receives a formal report from a professor usually six to seven times per semester, but he realizes that academic dishonesty does occur more often than that (Haynes). It is just that the professor may or may not choose to

formally report it; therefore, he does not hear about all acts of academic dishonesty that are caught on campus (Haynes).

The Solution

The next steps in preventing and punishing acts of academic dishonesty include a variety of people and a variety of different actions to take place. First of all, I find it very important that even if a professor chooses to punish a student just in their own power that the professor write up a formal report to be sent to Mr. Haynes, so that if this student cheats again maybe even an entire year later, it will be known that this is not the student's first offense and that a more serious punishment be given. Along these lines, if a student knows that their act of academic dishonesty is going to be taken seriously enough that the Dean of Students will be hearing about it, then hopefully this threat will decrease the amount of cheating and plagiarism on campus.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the lack of knowledge on the topic of academic dishonesty. Even Scott Haynes agreed, he said, "I think that prevention is the key-education." Haynes also stated that most cheating occurs in the underclassmen, so it is extremely important that the focus is on the incoming freshmen. I believe that one possible way to educate incoming students would be, just like the sexual harassment online class OBU incoming students were required to take before the academic school year began, an online class focusing on academic honesty/dishonesty could also be offered and required. If this is not a reasonable option, then another form of educating the incoming students could take place. One other option would be to hold a two-hour class during the new student orientation that informs the students of what academic dishonesty is, how to prevent it, and how the offender will be punished. This way, no student can claim that they were unaware that what they did was considered cheating or plagiarism, because all students were informed before they began attending classes at Ouachita.

Lastly, it is very important that the students of Ouachita Baptist University keep themselves accountable by raising their personal standards and by living up to the higher morals that they have been called (Wowra 1-4). It is also crucial that the professors aid in lowering some of the student's overwhelming, unnecessary anxiety and stress towards the heavy importance of their academic performance in order to decrease the prevalence of academic dishonesty on campus, according to Scott A. Wowra (1-4). I find this to be especially true at OBU. We, as Christians, are called by God to live to even higher standards of living honest, wholesome lives without stealing another's work (Harold, Mark 10:19). This includes keeping ourselves honest, as well as holding other students, as believers, responsible for their academic dishonesty. It all comes down to this: choosing to live wholesome lives and working hard while keeping one another honest and doing things the moral way.

While many professors here at OBU have created their own policies regarding their personal classroom guidelines and rules, including Professor Pittman and Dr. Plymale, it is crucial that more professors show how seriously they take these offenses and that they are willing to send the student to Mr. Haynes or to the judicial counsel and even be willing to fail the student in the class (Pittman, Plymale). Academic Dishonesty is a serious issue here at Ouachita Baptist University and it is crucial that this growing issue be contained. Not only are cheating and plagiarism unethical, according to the title of Miriam Schulman's article, those who are dishonest academically are really only "cheating themselves" and this is will be harmful for the student in the long run (Schulman 1). Not only is academic dishonesty a serious issue here at OBU, it is an issue in colleges and even high schools nationwide and serious changes need to occur in hopes that one day, academic dishonesty will simply be a thing of the past.

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Wowra, Scott A. "Moral Identities, Social Anxiety, And Academic Dishonesty Among American

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Annotated Bibliography

Bloom, Harold. *The Bible*. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. Print.

A number of books in the Bible discuss topics regarding cheating and stealing. One example is Exodus 20:15 that simply states, "You shall not steal." Cheating and plagiarism is exactly that. It is stealing another's ideas and taking credit for the idea. Also, Mark 10:19 also references the importance of not stealing, which refers to another's ideas in this case.

Since Ouachita Baptist University is a Baptist college, I used these Bible verses to reveal how we, as Christians, are called to live. These are rules regarding this topic that God, Himself, set for us. I used these references to show that these are rules that we, OBU students, strive to follow, because of our religious affiliation.

CyberEthics. Films On Demand. Films Media Group, 2008. Web. 5 Apr. 2015.

<<http://digital.films.com.ezproxy.obu.edu:2048/PortalPlaylists.aspx?aid=10845&xtid=38816>>.

CyberEthics discusses how the increase of technology has lead to an increase in cheating on tests. They also point out how direct plagiarism, copying and pasting, in papers and other academic work has also been on the rise. *CyberEthics* acknowledges how serious these offenses are and how they need to be addressed. They go as far as to refer to plagiarism as a form of stealing.

I used this information to prove how technology in classrooms at Ouachita Baptist University can lead to an increase in cheating. I also used this data to introduce my topic of academic dishonesty and its prevalence among college students and I will talk about how it occurs specifically at OBU.

Haynes, Scott. "Academic Dishonesty at Ouachita Baptist University." Personal interview. Apr. 14, 2015.

In this interview, I asked questions such as: what is currently being done to prevent cheating and plagiarism on campus? I also asked: what is being done to improve this system? I asked questions similar to: how often is academic dishonesty turned in and what is usually the proper punishment? He revealed that he knows that academic dishonesty occurs at OBU, but that many times professors choose the punishment and do not formally report the offense to him. He shared that he believes in showing grace and forgiveness due to the fact that we are all Christ followers.

I used this information as the primary source of my proof that academic dishonesty is occurring at OBU. I also used this information to prove to my reader what is being done to stop these dishonest acts by the faculty and staff of OBU through the judicial counsel and other rules and regulations. I also found out more about the council that handles these cases and wrote about what is being done to punish those who are academically dishonest. This was my main source of information since Mr. Haynes is very involved with OBU students and provided me with a great deal of information.

Jaffe, David L. "Academic Cheating Fact Sheet." *ENGR110/210: Perspectives in Assistive Technology*. Stanford University, n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2015.

Jaffe reveals how in today's society, cheating is more common and therefore it is more accepted. Students are more open to the idea of cheating and less appalled by others who cheat. He also discusses how less people are considering academic dishonesty a big deal.

I used this information to prove how common cheating is in today's society.

I also used this data throughout my paper as logos and statistics as proof that cheating is very prevalent among college students.

Jones, Dorothy L. R. "Academic Dishonesty: Are More Students Cheating?." *Business Communication Quarterly* 74.2 (2011): 141-150. *Business Source Premier*. Web. 5 Apr. 2015.

Jones discusses how common academic dishonesty has become on college campuses, as well as how "Internet plagiarism" is a growing offense (141-142). She states that while many universities have attempted to fix the problem in the past, students are finding more and more ways to cheat in today's time (142). Jones also points out that many students may not even be aware that they are being academically dishonest, which is a problem in itself (142).

I used Jones' information on the prevalence of academic dishonesty to prove how frequently these acts of plagiarism and cheating are occurring. I used her information in my introduction to get the reader's attention about the seriousness of academic dishonesty on college campuses. Jones' article helped me reveal how big of an issue this is and then focus in on how it is even occurring at Ouachita Baptist University.

Ouachita Baptist University Office Of Student Services. *Tiger Handbook*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.

Ouachita's Student Services discusses how they address avoiding and then when necessary, addressing acts of academic dishonesty on campus. They make all students pledge to be academically honest themselves and to "act responsibly" when hearing about

the academic dishonesty of another student (2). The Judicial Council is discussed, which is a group to punish those who have cheated or plagiarized (2-3).

I used this information to reveal to my audience how cheating and plagiarism does occur on the campus of Ouachita Baptist University and that the school aims to take such matters very seriously. I showed that OBU has made various attempts to end these issues, but they know that academic dishonesty is still bound to occur. It also reveals how OBU expects their students to behave and how to honor their beliefs.

Pittman, Jennifer B. *Composition II Syllabus*. Arkadelphia: n.p., 2014. Print.

I used this source to show how individual professors at Ouachita Baptist University have taken the general policy that OBU has and added their own rules regarding academic dishonesty. I used this source to reveal how seriously professors treat those who cheat or plagiarize.

Plymale, Ruth. *Zoology Lab Syllabus*. Arkadelphia: n.p., 2014. Print.

Similar to how I used the source from Professor Pittman, I used this source to also show how OBU professors handle acts of academic dishonesty. I showed how Dr. Plymale takes the general policy and also individualizes it to her own classroom, just as Professor Pittman does.

Schulman, Miriam. "Cheating Themselves." *Cheating Themselves*. Santa Clara University, n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2015.

Schulman discusses how one major issue regarding academic dishonesty is that many students do not fully understand what is considered to be academic dishonest. One teacher may allow work in groups, while another may consider that to be academic

dishonesty. This can be very confusing for students. She discusses a number of other aspects to academic dishonesty as well as this one.

I used this source to prove how there is a need for education regarding what is considered academically dishonest and how to avoid it. I used this source to show that it is extremely important for professors to be very specific on their personal policy in order to avoid any possible confusion. This will avoid students claiming that they did not realize they were plagiarizing.

Wowra, Scott A. "Moral Identities, Social Anxiety, And Academic Dishonesty Among American College Students." *Ethics & Behavior* 17.3 (2007): 303-321. *Legal Collection*. Web. 5 Apr. 2015.

Wowra discusses how students suffering from a high pressure when it comes to “socially evaluation” are more likely to be academically dishonest (304). Also, according to Wowra, students who suffer from “social anxiety” or anxiety regarding their “academic performance” are also more likely to give into to make more choices in the academic world (304).

I used this information to show that if students at Ouachita Baptist University can be taught to have higher morals for their personal selves to not put so much pressure on their grades, then as Wowra believes, the rate of academically dishonest offenses will decrease at Ouachita.