

Unintentional Academic Dishonesty

Andy Do

Academic dishonesty is considered as one of the most serious problems in many universities and colleges. It deeply affects the quality of education and our values. However, in many cases, academic dishonesty is not intentional. Thus, the best way to deal with this problem is to recognize it, and then to prevent it from occurring. Accordingly, it helps to consider why students act dishonestly.

First, taking careless notes from texts might be the most common cause of unintentional academic dishonesty. In fact, students often jot down citations without using quotation marks when they take notes from books. Perhaps, they think that they will remember that the words or phrases are quotes or remember their sources when they need to use the notes later. However, this can result in unintentional plagiarism when students use a quote or a close paraphrase without realizing it is from a source or remembering the source. Also, this problem can happen more easily when normally careful students work from borrowed notes. Taking notes by writing just the source's words or a close paraphrase, rather than thinking them through to recast differently, is called passive note-taking. In contrast, active note-taking involves thinking an idea through, recording one's own ideas, asking questions, and making connections with other ideas and materials already learned, and generally assimilating the source's ideas in a way that provides a firm basis for developing one's own ideas. Consequently, active note-takers are less prone to unintentional plagiarism.

Furthermore, fear is considered as another common cause of academic dishonesty. In fact, a usual reaction to the writer's block or concern about understanding the course material is to put off writing the assignment or preparing for the test as long as possible. The students who feel they do not have their own ideas or are afraid to express their ideas may be tempted, often unconsciously, to borrow the ideas of other people. Likewise, students who do not understand the material are often tempted to resort to an unacceptable paraphrase of either the original material or other materials that discuss the same topic.

Finally, an increasingly common cause of academic dishonesty is the lack of knowledge about what it is, or failure to understand why such practices are unacceptable. Because these issues may not have been addressed in high schools, especially high schools in Asian countries, students arrive at the university without a clear understanding of what constitutes academic dishonesty or why the consequences are so severe.

In conclusion, teachers should devote more time to developing students' note taking skills and sharing the understanding of unintentional academic dishonesty with their students. Also, teachers should guide their students in developing ideas for essay assignments so that students can gain their own ideas and opinions instead of borrowing unintentionally from others. However, if they do borrow, then they should be able to follow the citation conventions. High school instructors, too, need to educate their students about unintentional plagiarism. Thus, every university student may have a better understanding of unintentional academic dishonesty and be in a better position to avoid it.