What About Cheating at Iowa State?

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Abstract

IT IS IN THE NATURE of some men to try to get something for nothing. When these people operate in a system of formal education, the practice is called cheating. We here in America are products of the same basic culture, and as a result, have much the same idea of what is right or what is wrong...
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The charge—

IT IS IN THE NATURE of some men to try to get something for nothing. When these people operate in a system of formal education, the practice is called cheating. We here in America are products of the same basic culture, and as a result, have much the same idea of what is right or what is wrong. Thus we can agree of what cheating does or does not consist. It is simply any form of dishonesty, and runs the gamut from casually peeping over a neighbor's shoulder to openly writing answers from a crib.

While cheating is not peculiar to Iowa State, it certainly is a very real problem here. The percentage of these liars may or may not be increasing; the important thing is that the dishonesty does exist, and even more important, there is a change taking place in attitudes toward cheating. Instead of attempting to stamp out the practice we tolerate it. As proof, think of the lack of concern exhibited throughout recent years. Therefore, if we tolerate, are we not, in effect, condoning? The answer is obvious. Furthermore some students are going so far as to say they simply can't pass certain courses without cheating, while others rationalize to justify their acts. Incidentally—and considering the source, this is undoubtedly a greater evil—the administration and faculty taken as wholes are guilty of being apathetic and/or complacent about the problem. Proof of this idea, however, is another story.

Unfortunately, when one mentions the subject of cheating he always encounters many people who say the whole thing exists in his head—an aberration or a figment of his

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The charge refuted—

IT IS EASY to see why some people think cheating is an accepted practice in a college or university such as Iowa State. In our classes, we see it all the time.

Actually, there is less cheating than one would imagine. And it is erroneous to think the school officials do nothing to put a stop to cheating. Because of certain actions on the part of some college officials, cheating is becoming less and less prevalent in college classes.

And there is one aspect of cheating which many students realize. This is the fact that the person who cheats in college will meet the day of reckoning when he goes out into the big wide world and must get by on what has been gained in college.

There are many opinions on cheating. The person who maintains an honesty throughout his college days will think it terrible indeed for someone else to waltz through with little effort—except on preparing crib sheets.

That person asks, "Why should I study hard when so-and-so gets by on cheating?" And we can't blame him for thinking that either.

Other persons, the cheaters, ask, "Why shouldn't I cheat? It's an easy way to get by and I don't get caught." Then there are those who don't care. They feel that if someone wants to get by on cheating, it's up to him.

Now it is true that the cheater will be less qualified to hold down a job after graduation than the person who got through college with hard work over the books. The cheater might even have a more impressive grade record but it won't take long for the employer to learn there was something in-
adequate about what his employee got at college.

And after all, what is college for but to prepare the student for the future? If one student wants to cheat, let him do it in college, if that's the way he wants to get by.

Of course, we can't say have no restrictions on cheating. Every test can't be "open-book" and something must be done to hold cheating at a minimum.

But the reason for saying let cheaters cheat is that a student, by his very nature and existence, is playing a game with himself, and only himself, when he cheats. If he wants to get gypped out of money he pays to go to school, that's his privilege.

It is unfair to the student who is honest, though, to permit the cheater to function unnoticed. Some restraints must be placed on cheating.

What restraints are placed on cheating in classes at Iowa State? There are many—each department has its own extremes of checking.

This writer has not experienced classwork in all the departments in the college. But, in talking to others, he finds there are several ways of discouraging cheaters.

The Chemistry Department employs enough instructor help during a combined-class examination to keep watchful eyes for cheaters. When a student sits in a chemistry final and sees 20 or so proctors ambling about, he is hesitant to look at other papers.

The Chemistry Department also, as well as many other departments, employs the practice of two sets of exams. A student taking the examination has a different copy of questions than the students sitting on either side. This reduces the feasibility of looking at other papers by would-be cheaters.

The Physics Department, in giving examinations, tries to stop the cheaters by requiring all students to leave their books notebooks, etc., at the front of the test room. It also requires students to sit at least one seat away from the other students.

The T&AM Department eliminates possibilities of crib notes in test booklets by having the students turn in a certain number of "blue books" at the beginning of each quarter.
The Government Department has the students turn in "blue books" several days before the examination and the books are checked for cribs and then turned back at the time of the test.

One possible result of attempted cheating which is supposedly practiced at Iowa State keeps many students from depending on cheating to pass a course. That result is the fact that if a student is caught cheating he will automatically fail the test, or the course, or could possibly be expelled from school.

Luckily, this possibility does not become a reality very often. But it is a weight over the heads of the students and probably, without actual proof or awareness, does some good.

There are other cheating preventatives which are in practice at Iowa State. It is good that the various departments have these methods for discouraging cheating.

But, we can't say that one of the chief functions of a department in a college should be to put a stop to cheating. Students must be given some credit for being honest, whether they are or not, and it is the purpose of the instructing bodies to impart knowledge, not to act as a police force.

This student honesty introduces the honor system method of cheating control.

The Division of Veterinary Medicine has for a long time used the honor system in tests and there have been very few cases of it failing. Under the honor system, no attempt is made to prevent cheating.

Given that sense of responsibility and also possessed with the feeling that he is trusted, the student is shy to make any effort at cheating and usually the end result is honesty on the part of all the students.

The Chemical Engineering Department also uses the honor system. After the test questions are passed out, the instructor leaves the room and the students are left unsupervised—with every opportunity to cheat. But, there is little cheating, according to some of the students in that department.

The honor system has failed in certain places. That is only natural when a department or division or college is inhabited by a bunch of youngsters who are unable to see the faith
which has been put in them.

But, for the most part, students will always rebel against some restricting force. If a club is held over them to prevent cheating, they will endeavor to find ways of cheating, just for spite.

If they are left alone and unwatched the students will take the responsibility and trust and keep honest intentions. There will be a few who cheat, certainly, but those few will be discriminated against by their fellow classmates.

And it will all come out in the wash. The fellow who gets average grades with honest efforts will be boss over the cheater when they both are earning their bread and butter.

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imagination. These optimists are usually those who have a very mature attitude toward their studies. They are honest, learn the required material, and rarely notice the surreptitious backhanded intrigue usually characteristic of the cheater. As a case in point, I offer the statement of a highly intelligent and extremely earnest engineer who said there was very little cheating going on in physics exams. Bless him for his confidence in people, but from actual observation, not a day passed when he couldn’t have reached out and touched people sitting on crib sheets, reading formulae from papers glued to slide rules and actually copying his work!

At any rate, for the people who do not cheat and have somehow failed to notice it in their classes, I have done this: I have asked about fifty or so people both, in their estimation, what percentage of people cheat? And what is the prevailing attitude toward cheating? The sampling is inadequate, but I merely wish to indicate a trend. Still, the people were representative of all important residence types and were from all divisions. Some I know to be habitual cheaters; some have unquestionable integrity. Here are the answers. The lowest figures were, “Oh, some do cheat,” and “ten per cent.” Several said 85 per cent or above; one honestly estimated 98 per cent of the people on this campus have cheated! The majority voted that around 50 per cent, or half of us, have cheated at one time or another.
Several people said certain military classes had become farcical due to the rank and open cheating carried on in them. I wonder if many teachers of freshman English realize how students cheat on an in-class theme? I talked to four people who hadn’t done a single one throughout the course. Instead they wrote papers beforehand, corrected them, scribbled during the class and turned in the pre-written theme at the end of the hour. One fellow said he took the first test in a history course without cheating and failed. He had looked around and estimated over seven out of ten cheating. He did the same the remainder of the quarter and, as he said, “did all right in the course, too.” Another said he took a dendrology course in which he thought everyone cheated, “and what’s more, they had to.” Still another said he saw the answer to an economics question passed along a row of ten people. Several reported general cribbing in physics. Agronomy courses were mentioned as usually containing many cheaters.

In the really big classes, such as freshman chemistry, I have time and time again heard people discussing the test before it was ever passed out. Last spring, I understand, psychology tests could be purchased for a small price from some “enterprising” students. Modern language was the most often mentioned. One fellow frankly said “about four people in the class naturally get A’s, the rest cheat.” Nowhere else did people see the thing brought more out into the open. Papers are passed around the room and people speak out to each other.

Another person said he saw someone who, because he had studied, enabled seven of his friends to pass! Yet another said, “That’s nothing; if you really want to see some cheating, just look over at the Ag side of campus.”

I suppose I should say that some campus groups do not cheat. Veterinary Medicine students have a very successful honor system. A forester said his group cheated very little in the upper classes. It is impossible for a third or fourth year engineer to cheat in certain courses, such as the T&AM series. Some instructors speak out often against cheating; consequently, very little goes on in their classes. Finally, almost everyone whom I talked with said that, in general, the men, not the women, are the cheaters.
The answers to the questions on attitudes were also extremely revealing. Some said there were certain courses they could not pass without cheating. Most (who cheated) said they only did what the rest of the class seemed to be doing. Some couldn't understand how others fail to see the cheating going on. One said nobody cheated in a certain professor's class because it was that teacher's pet peeve. Another who was a cheater said he'd never cheat in a class where the teacher put the students on their honor. Still another told me not to worry, it wasn't such a terrible thing. Many people believe there are habitual cheaters, but do not become alarmed about them.

Some people also told me methods employed by the cheater. Result, the following impressive list: book open on floor, two blue books, thin sheets of paper over answers, sitting on a crib, cribs written on cards, slide rules, match covers, arms, hands, and cuffs. The cheater even uses true and false signals and reduced photographs of cribs! Of course, the most popular method is simply taking the answers from a neighbor's paper. In addition, there are the hundreds of people who plagiarize other's themes, experiments, speeches and reports.

Now with this appraisal of the situation, in mind, we should return to our generalizations. Cheating not only exists at Iowa State, it flourishes. Furthermore, new attitudes having rather bad moral implications have crept into our thinking. For the most part, we no longer rebel at the thought of cheating; rather we accept it as a part of campus life. Some of us try to justify cheating. Periodically someone speaks out against the thing, but the hue and cry necessary to rid us of the practice dies before it starts. The cheating here is bad, but the apparent attitude of complacency exhibited by just about the entire student body is much worse.

Now if we are interested in seeing that our moral values do not become perverted in one hundred per cent of our people, if we want to wipe out not only the cheating but the attitudes that have attached themselves to the problem, it seems that our best bet as students is to start talking about it loud and long. Stiff penalties and honor systems on campus-wide bases have been successful elsewhere.
If, through a change in popular opinion, we could make the thing embarrassing, unstylish and socially distasteful, we could all but wipe out the practice. Perhaps Cardinal Guild could instigate a mass meeting or series of meetings where the student body might express opinions and pass on any proposed honor systems. We don't ask for sanctimony or for the power to turn our friends over to an inquisition. We do want a realization of the present extent of the problem plus an honest attempt to sound-off against the thing. The real question is, however, do we want to do anything at all? From where I sit, the thing looks like the toughest challenge to come our way in a long while. We can't afford to refuse it.