Promoting Moral Repair in Business Ethics Education: Making the Case for Restorative Practices Following Cheating in Academic Contexts

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Abstract. Academic integrity is a growing concern in colleges and universities worldwide, with business programs no exception. Business educators have wrestled with the best ways to promote a culture of ethical behavior by implementing effective policies and practices to prevent and respond to academic misconduct (McCabe *et al.* 2006). Traditional punitive systems often fail to deter misconduct effectively. This paper explores both historical approaches to academic integrity and proposes adopting restorative alternatives that are centered on a foundation of moral repair. Considering the unique challenges of the business school context, the paper advances the idea that promoting moral repair through restoration could reshape academic integrity enforcement, fostering a culture of trust and responsibility in business education and beyond. It specifically suggests applying Goodstein and Butterfield's restorative justice model, which was developed with the workplace in mind, to the academic context, emphasizing proactive community standards, faculty involvement, and trust and accountability. The paper includes a case study, which describes an initial effort in applying these models through the curriculum. The discussion concludes with lessons learned, opportunities and challenges in implementing such approaches, and opportunities for future research.

Keywords: academic integrity, restorative justice, business ethics, moral repair.

1. Introduction

Few problems are as vexing and persistent for college teachers as academic dishonesty and cheating. Colleges and universities struggle with how to inculcate ethical values, promote integrity broadly in the campus community, and remediate rule and policy violations. A sizable scholarly literature exists on these topics, with extensive work in the discrete context of business schools. Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct not only violate principles of ethical behavior but also undermine the credibility and legitimacy of academic institutions. Questions about how universities and business schools should address the ethics of academic dishonesty are perennial problems, and even more so given the rise of artificial intelligence systems.

Historically, universities ensured compliance with integrity expectations by establishing formal systems that lack relationality and rely on back-end punitive enforcement. These punitive systems treat the integrity violation as an individual offense, divorced from concerns about community values. Unfortunately, the literature reveals that formal systems of adjudication threatening high-stakes punitive responses often do little to deter cheating (as opposed to the student's aversion to or perceived likelihood of getting caught) (Frieburger *et al.* 2016). At the same time, the ineffectiveness of such approaches raises questions related to how students are being prepared to behave ethically following graduation.

In light of corporate wrongdoing, business ethicists have considered restorative practices, which offer a promising approach to promoting moral repair and preventing future wrongs, as they address the root causes of misconduct and promote accountability, empathy, and trust (Goodstein & Butterfield 2010). In other words, restorative practices attempt to move beyond retributive justice and involve a process of reconciliation, in which the offender and the harmed parties work together to determine what is necessary to repair the harm and prevent future harm. These practices require a willingness to listen to others' perspectives, to express empathy and understanding, and to develop a shared vision for a more ethical and respectful community.

This paper considers historic approaches to academic integrity (and specific concerns related to academic integrity in business schools) before suggesting how business programs and their faculty might promote moral repair and ethical development through restorative practices. We contend that moral repair is a neglected approach for business ethics educators, both at the level of curriculum inclusion, as well as in the practice of alternative models for remediating academic integrity violations. Specifically, with regard to new alternatives, Goodstein and Butterfield's (2010) conceptual restorative justice model, which has been applied to the workplace, will be considered in the context of academic integrity violations by addressing (1) possible modifications to the existing model related to proactively establishing community standards around academic integrity and professional ethics, (2) the role of faculty as stakeholders and harmed parties, and (3) one curricular approach business programs might consider for restoring trust and accountability in integrity violations, as illustrated by an exemplar case at the authors' institution. Opportunities and challenges and future research will also be discussed.

2. History of Academic Integrity Remediation

Wrongdoing on university campuses has traditionally been addressed through administratively-created quasi-judicial conduct processes. These processes, which are patterned after the criminal justice process, reflect the traditional notion of punitive justice as an opportunity to "get even" with or punish the wrongdoer

(Kara & MacAllister 2010). Specifically, under these processes, students are often treated like defendants in a criminal trial with a formal notice outlining the accusations against them and a hearing before a decision maker or panel, which considers witness testimony and other evidence before handing down a punishment (Kara & MacAllister 2010). However, these approaches rely on systems of progressive exclusion, often moving from a loss of privilege, suspension, and expulsion resulting in isolation and weakened relationships (Karp & Armour 2019).

In this regard, universities have utilized various methods for preventing and resolving plagiarism and other academic dishonesty situations, mostly centered on the clustered concepts of process and culture. A process refers to a formal set of procedures and quasi-judicial techniques designed to investigate, fairly address, and punish academic dishonesty, simultaneously sending a clear message to the student community that such behavior is unacceptable within the academic environment. For example, the "deterrence approach" relies on the power imbalance between faculty and students to "reduce cheating by convincing students that if they cheat, they will be caught and punished" (McCabe *et al.* 2004, p. 128).

Culture, in this context, refers to university or department/school attempts to inculcate certain values of honesty and integrity into the curriculum and co-curricular activities, such as through an honor code or ethical priming (Simola 2017). Some universities use an honor code as an attempt to develop or articulate the communal dimensions of academic integrity. Honor codes have a long history in American higher education, with debatable efficacy (Tatum & Schwartz 2017). Honor codes vary, but they often require a student to pledge to be honest, and then also require the student to be intolerant of dishonesty in others. Formulations of this basic, traditional two-pronged honor code at the United States service academies are typical in this regard: "A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal or tolerate those who do" (Honor Code, n.d.).

There is a significant body of scholarship on honor codes in American higher education, with many pointing to the generally supportable – but not definitive – assertion that universities with honor codes have fewer student integrity violations (Tatum & Schwartz 2017). McCabe, *et al.* (2004) suggest that students in institutions with honor codes tend to feel themselves embedded in communities of trust and responsibility, which in turn reduces integrity violations. The honor code moves a student integrity violation out of an individual-achievement problem to be remedied by individual penalty and makes it a problem with community effects and dimensions, which is often remediated through a quasi-judicial process involving other students and an honor council.

While cultural approaches are alternatives to the strict deterrence approach, focusing instead on the prosocial behaviors related to building an integrous ethical community, in practice, those theoretical approaches are traditionally paired with an honor code that includes some form of punitive process (McCabe,