Brown

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A Qualitative Analysis of the Social Environment at Starbucks

99.⁹⁹

CHEATERS

CEOS COOK THE NUMBERS.
BASEBALL PLAYERS TAKE STEROIDS.
POLITICIANS CONSORT WITH LOBBYISTS.
FACED WITH A CULTURE OF SLEAZE,
WHAT'S A NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD TO DO?

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"Working there from the journalistic side, it was very surreal. You're not there to provide relief. In many ways, you're looking for misery. Page 38

DEPARTMENTS

**ON THE
COVER** *Photograph by Fredrik Brodén.*

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FEATURES

REMEMBER WHEN LEAVING YOUR TERM PAPER to the last minute meant staying up all night, ordering pizza at 3 a.m., and typing until dawn? Cheating generally meant copying or plagiarizing a classmate's paper or whatever relevant articles you could track down in the library. Cheating back then was risky business: with so few sources to choose from, the danger of getting caught was relatively high. Your professor might sniff out your vaguely familiar paper's original author, or even recognize that article you found in the Rock, an article that, it turns out, wasn't as obscure as you thought. ● Nowadays, cheating is easier than ever. In fact, with so many easily accessible ways to obtain counterfeit work, it's a wonder anyone bothers to write a real paper. All a student has to do is jump online at schoolsucks.com, one of many sites doing a brisk business in selling a vast array of papers, reports, and theses. The arrangement couldn't be simpler. Choose from a long list of topics and pay by the page. Don't see one that matches your assignment? Order a custom essay written to your specifications and delivered in time for your deadline. For the right price, the work will arrive via e-mail or fax. "Click HERE," schoolsucks.com promises, "and your homework worries will disappear." ● A Google search for "college term papers for sale" returns dozens of hits. There's termpaperrelief.com, which offers papers in British English, should that be your native tongue; 1millionpapers.com, which offers twenty-four-hour cus-

CEOS **COOK THE NUMBERS.** BASEBALL PLAYERS **TAKE STEROIDS.** STUDENTS **BUY TERM PAPERS ONLINE.** WITH CHEATING **EASIER AND MORE TEMPTING** THAN EVER, PROFESSORS ARE BEGINNING TO WONDER WHETHER IT'S **A PROBLEM ON THE RISE.**

CHEATERS

tomer service; and essaytown.com, featuring such monthly specials as two term papers for the price of one. Not that any of these sites condones cheating, of course. Right there in plain text on the schoolsucks.com Web site is the warning that their research reports should NEVER be turned in as your own work, since "we do not want you to violate policies concerning academic dishonesty." ● Unfortunately, a lot of adults are setting miserable examples. News stories about such former CEOs as Enron's Ken Lay and

BY LINDA HEUMAN PHOTOGRAPH BY FREDRIK BRODÉN

TERM PAPER

ESSAY SALE

DISSERTATION

FOR SALE

WorldCom's Bernard Ebbers depict businessmen for whom cheating is just another tool for getting investors to give them good grades, as in higher pay. Martha Stewart emerged from prison to a hero's welcome, as if serving time were a shrewd move to revive a flagging brand. Meanwhile, political leaders such as Tom Delay raise millions by operating on the ethical edge, and former baseball slugger Jose Canseco writes a best-seller stating that steroids, when used right, can be an important performance enhancer.

What's an ambitious nineteen-year-old to do? After surveying more than 40,000 undergrads on sixty U.S. and Canadian campuses over the past two years, Donald L. McCabe, of Rutgers, reported that a quarter "admitted to serious test cheating and half admitted to one or more instances of serious cheating on written assignments." Many students who use the Internet for research, McCabe found, see nothing wrong with "borrowing" a sentence or two and using them in a paper without citing the source. When McCabe surveyed students in 1999, 10 percent admitted to this type of "cut-and-paste" plagiarism. In his most recent survey, the number rose to 36 percent.

Asking cheaters about cheating may not be the best way to measure its extent, though. In McCabe's Web-based surveys, students are asked to report their own cheating behavior, which likely makes his numbers imprecise. Yet McCabe believes that, if anything, his survey results understate the number of students who cheat. Many technically savvy students, for example, won't report cheating for fear that they will be identified through their computer's unique and traceable IP address.

In fact, most cheaters get away with their misconduct. That may allow them to move on, but the consequences of not getting caught are significant. The real danger is that students who cheat successfully will leave Brown knowing that, in a pinch, cheating works.

"The people who plagiarize papers or [computer] programs graduate," says Vice President of Research Andries van Dam, a computer science professor who for decades has been one of Brown's most respected teachers. "They take responsible positions. And they very often are people who are crafty and who promote themselves and get promoted into positions of power. If we can't trust their integrity when they are students, how are we to trust their integrity when they are government advisers and bank advisers and are in responsible positions in all kinds of organizations?"

BROWN ARTICULATES ITS POLICY ON

student cheating in "Principles of the Brown University Community: The Academic Code and Non-Academic Conduct," a document known more simply as the Academic Code, which each freshman is told to read and sign before arriving at Brown. The Code is the University's cornerstone of academic integrity. It exhaustively addresses all aspects of student life, both inside and outside the classroom, and it explicitly forbids students from using "the services of commercial 'research' companies." It also forbids the use of previous years' papers, thus addressing the longstanding phenomenon of "fraternity files," in which frat members, for example, archive and reuse one another's work. The Code also defines honest scholarship in broad terms, as work based on students' own thoughts and research and as stated in their own words except as properly acknowledged. One paragraph addressing computer use could be broadly interpreted to include online plagiarism, but the Code does not offer much specific guidance or acknowledge that this technology might require a different kind of vigilance.

Which leaves the burden of detection on faculty members. Their response to cheating varies from near indifference to aggressive and sophisticated policing. Associate Professor of History Karl Jacoby, like most faculty members at Brown, takes few extraordinary steps to ferret out cheating. With 115 students in his class, checking all papers for plagiarism or more overt forms of cheating is daunting. Jacoby says he would rather devote his time and energy to "improving the educational experience for the countless students that aren't cheating."

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Jacoby addresses academic honesty at the beginning of each semester, quoting from the Academic Code on his syllabus and providing a link to it from his course Web sites. He reviews in class the way to write proper citations and develops assignments unique enough to thwart attempts at borrowing a paper from another course or from a paper mill.

"Ultimately," he says, "when people are cheating, they are not fooling me; they are fooling themselves. I feel

that quite profoundly. If you are going to hand in something that you didn't even do and put no thought into the class—I do think being at Brown is such a rare opportunity—you really are cheating yourself. I'm not going to spend my life trying to stop you. If I catch you, I'm not going to let you go. But I'm not going to run around and waste a lot of energy trying to figure out who is cheating."

Jacoby says his first experience of students cheating in his class "hit him over the head." Two students in one of his sections turned in nearly identical papers. As luck would have it, his TA read the papers back to back. "To be honest," Jacoby admits, "professors are such geeks when they are in school. It would never ever have occurred to me to cheat the way that these guys are doing. I feel like we're all here to learn, and so I guess I romantically assumed students wouldn't cheat because they have no reason to cheat. But I'm obviously quite wrong."

Jacoby realizes that catching cheaters is largely a matter of luck. Had his first two cheaters been in different sections of his course, with different teaching assistants, they would not have been detected. "Frankly," he says, "even if you've got a TA who has forty students and one is paper number one and one is paper forty, the TA might not pick up on it. They're all writing about the same topic. It's late at night. You are blurry-eyed. You might not figure out what's going on."

In 1965, during his first semester teaching at Brown, Andy van Dam, then a professor of applied math, caught three students cheating in his introductory computer science course. He can still recall their names. "Isn't it unfortunate that I still remember those people?" he says, frowning *Star Wars* and other popular films. On the first day of CS15, Introduction to Object-Oriented Programming, van Dam enters the classroom disguised as Darth Vader. Dressed head to toe in black, his cape flowing, he strides through a packed lecture hall as students cheer and music pounds.

The message is clear: this is a man who is hip to the Dark Side. In the wake of his first cheating bust and many that followed, van Dam evolved a zero-tolerance classroom in which he spares no effort in preventing or detecting cheating. He considers this type of vigilance necessary because his courses have no exams. His grading relies solely on written work. To register for one of van Dam's courses, students read and sign a two-page contract based on, but more specific than, the Academic Code. The contract provides specific examples of work that is collaborative and work that is plagiarized, and it reminds students they are "honor-bound to preserve independence of thinking." Should students still have doubts about a particular action, the contract advises them not to take it or to check with a teaching assistant. "When we confront a student with a case of suspected violation," the contract declares, "an answer of 'I didn't know that this is wrong' will not find sympathy."
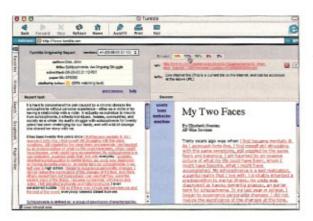
After Darth Vader presents the contract to students, van Dam shows a video of his teaching assistants performing a skit based on the TV show *Cops*, in which the TAs catch students copying each other's computer code. A discussion of cheating follows. Van Dam could hardly make the ground rules more explicit. And for those who do cross over to the Dark Side, he wields a light saber called Moss. Developed

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ing. Van Dam describes the experience as "traumatic," revealing the deep sense of betrayal that many professors describe when they talk about student cheating. "Teaching is a relationship," another professor says. "It is based on trust." When that trust is violated, professors are shaken.

Although now primarily an administrator, van Dam, who helped launch the computer science department in 1979, is still renowned for his multimedia classes incorporating rock videos of his teaching assistants lampoon at UC Berkeley, Measures of Software Similarity is plagiarism-prevention software that uses artificial intelligence to detect copied computer code. When Moss, which is distributed free of charge, finds suspicious similarities between student programs, van Dam and his teaching assistants hand-check the programs to figure out just what's going on. Despite all this scrutiny, most years Moss and van Dam still detect up to three or four cheaters a semester.

Other technological tools are available for faculty

members less technically advanced than van Dam, although few at Brown use them. The best-known is plagiarism-prevention software developed and sold by a for-profit company called Turnitin. Software "reads" a student's submitted work and then compares it to what the company claims are billions of documents available on the Web, in published books, or in proprietary databases, which, among other things, include previously submitted student papers or programs. The software then produces an "originality report" (see above) that highlights text in different colors, matching the information in a student paper with similar language in a source document and rating the degree of a match by percentage. Turnitin boasts that its customers include Georgetown, Dartmouth, and all colleges and universities in the United Kingdom. The company also claims that its software protects more than five million students, with that number growing by one new user every twenty seconds.

Even when anti-plagiarism software detects cheating, a faculty member must still confront the suspected cheaters and decide on a course of discipline. When van Dam detects a potential plagiarizer, he tells him or her, "If you maintain your innocence and a panel of experts finds that the odds are highly against such a coincidence, they will be much harder on you. So you are much better off saying 'OK, OK! I screwed up.' But of course, if you really are innocent, maintain your innocence."

Some students, he says, confess immediately, but, he adds, "I unfortunately have forty years of experience with people lying through their teeth." In his worst case, van Dam says, he confronted a group of three students every day for ten days until they finally admitted cheating.

"People," he says, "will lie to me with a totally straight face, be totally believable, and if I hadn't seen it over and over again, I'd be so prepared to believe that people couldn't lie like that—that they couldn't keep their cool under pressure. They can!" With his class sizes through the years ranging from sixty to two hundred, van Dam figures that on average he prosecutes cases about two out of every three years, and that in some of those years he prosecutes more than one. Each case can involve one or more students, and a single case can take from several to more than a hundred hours to prosecute.

Following University protocol, van Dam sends suspected cheaters to the deans, where they may face a disciplinary hearing and strict penalties. Depending on the particulars of the case, Brown's customary punishment could include withholding credit for the particular assignment or the entire course, notifying parents, noting the infraction either temporarily or permanently on a student's transcript record, and suspension from the University.

HOW ASSIDUOUSLY SHOULD FACULTY BE

sniffing out cheaters? Should the administration urge them to be more aggressive? The answers to questions like these reflect basic assumptions about the role of faculty and the integrity of academic study. An argument could be made that Brown owes it to its students (as well as to their parents and future employers) to police classrooms more forcefully, giving more teeth to the Academic Code. Not using the tools now available is in effect turning a blind eye to bad ethics.

Unlike some universities, Brown has not purchased a

site license for Turnitin; professors who want to use its software must buy individual licenses and ask their departments to cover the cost. According to Turnitin officials, a campus license—covering all undergraduate, graduate, and medical students, and including full help-desk support—would cost about $8,250 a year.

Putting aside questions about the number of cheaters the software would catch and the amount of time faculty members would have to spend using it, for many Brown administrators and faculty members the real issue behind plagiarism-detection software is one of trust. "An academic community cannot do its work of inquiry if we can't just take for granted—just assume—that we can trust each other," says Dean of the College Paul Armstrong. "Academic discourse cannot continue unless we're able to say, 'This is what has been said so far and this is how I'm adding to it'—and be clear about that."

Armstrong says he has nothing against Turnitin, and he encourages faculty discussion of it. But he fears that checking every paper with such software would send a message that students can't be trusted unless they prove otherwise. He is concerned about creating a climate of suspicion that could undermine the very environment Turnitin is intended to protect.

Associate Dean of the College Carol Cohen, who is in charge of evaluating and disciplining students violating the Academic Code, says that her office sometimes uses Turnitin to check papers that professors find suspicious. But she is opposed to its global use. "When necessary, you catch and punish," she says. "But to be running every student paper through a check system gets the emphasis off base." Cohen, who handles twelve or fifteen cheating cases a year, believes cheating is best fought with peda-

leges and universities must do a better job of "creating a campus climate of integrity" to discourage cheating before it happens. One problem at Brown is that the Academic Code, which fills eleven single-spaced pages when it's printed off the Brown Web site, is read by few incoming students, as Cohen readily admits. Faculty members are encouraged to address the topic on their syllabi and in class, and Cohen sends out a reminder memo to students each year about halfway through fall term. "Is it enough?" Paul Armstrong asks. "No. Should we be doing more? Yes."

According to Armstrong, there is growing sentiment among many elite schools that more has to be done on this issue. The deans of the Ivy Plus group, which includes the Ivies plus Stanford, Chicago, and MIT, addressed the topic at length in their annual meeting this spring. All agreed, Armstrong says, that academic dishonesty is "a real concern" and that their schools need to educate students better about proper scholarship in an online world. Armstrong reports that some faculty members have urged the Faculty Executive Committee to create a new group to study this issue. He also says that his office, as well as Campus Life administrators, are looking into more effective ways of addressing cheating during freshman orientation.

But Carol Cohen wonders if that's too early. "They haven't done college-level work before," she says. "They don't know what they are going to run up against in terms of pressures and confusions." Plus, during orientation students' minds are on other things. "There they are meeting new people," Cohen says, "trying to find their way socially, and we're trying to get them to understand about citations."

Cohen is particularly impressed by a pilot program that was launched last fall at the University of Chicago, during which administrators distributed to entering fresh-

FOR MANY THE REAL ISSUE **IS ONE OF TRUST.** "AN ACADEMIC COMMUNITY CANNOT DO ITS **WORK OF INQUIRY** IF WE CAN'T TAKE FOR GRANTED— JUST ASSUME—THAT WE CAN **TRUST EACH OTHER,"** SAYS PAUL ARMSTRONG.

gogy, not policing. "Policing has its place," she says. "But I don't think we can be preoccupied with that. And I don't think that's the interesting way to go about it. It's like closing the barn door after the cows are out. You really need to do preemptive, up-front, deeper work."

Rutgers researcher Donald McCabe, whose surveys have raised the alarm on cheating, also believes that col-

men a new book by Charles Lipson, a political scientist at the school, called *Doing Honest Work in College—How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success*. The book was due to be published in mid-October 2004, but when Chicago officials heard rumors of its impending release, they managed to get advance copies.

Lipson's book is a readable, informal, and practical

guide to the essence and principles of ethical scholarship, as well as a handy reference guide to writing citations. The first part of the book articulates three principles that sum up the spirit of integrity that underlies the rules, and it addresses how these principles apply to each aspect of academic life, "from your first class to your final exam." One section is specifically devoted to Internet research. A chapter on plagiarism illustrates with concrete examples how to paraphrase correctly, a common point of confusion for students. The second part of the book details how to write a proper citation for everything from a journal to an Internet site in the accepted style for particular fields.

Chicago's incoming students read the book in a core humanities course required of all freshmen. Section leaders were then available to address any doubts and answer any questions. The goal was to make sure all entering students know the ground rules and have the same reference book to use throughout their college years. Lipson emphasizes the importance of letting students know explicitly what is expected of them. "Whenever a student is caught doing something wrong, the first thing he or she says is 'I didn't know the rules.' And sometimes that is actually true and sometimes it's not. But going over these materials in advance eliminates that response—whether or not it is true. You want the students who didn't know actually to know. And you want the ones that are just fibbing about it to have that excuse off the table."

Dean Cohen says the book's combination of general principles and concrete rules offers what students seem to be missing. "I don't think in the end that this is just an ethical question." she says. "It is an ethical as well as a 'what does this world mean?' kind of question. 'What is the world of scholarship I have just entered?'" Lipson agrees,

perceive the material out there in the ether as being somehow different from the material that is between the covers of a book. Everybody knows that if you take something that is between the covers of a book that you need to cite it, and if you use the exact words that you need to quote it. But not everybody thinks that you need to do that with Internet material, even though you do."

If you look up a fact in a book, your search is discrete and linear. You pick up one book; then you pick up another. You can't miss the source; the book in your hand is tangible. You enter through the front cover. But in cyberspace you often enter through a side door. An online research trail proceeds associatively, via hypertext links connecting content in one site to content in another. Have you ever discovered an interesting fact on a Web site with no idea what site you were on or how you got there? That's what research is like for today's undergraduates.

In addition, many products or services are free in cyberspace: news, telephone calls, mail, some music and videos. The Internet appears to be in the public domain, as though its contents are there for the taking. As a result, plagiarizers sometimes don't think that by taking someone else's work they are stealing. "You can't steal something that is free and available to everybody," Lipson says. "You're not stealing, any more than I'm stealing the air. Unless someone is asking to be paid and I'm taking it without paying, then I haven't stolen it." What students are doing, he says, is presenting someone else's work as their own, which is fraud.

What faculty members should do, says Brown Professor of Biology Peter Heywood, is to keep reinforcing the ethics in their particular fields. In his classes, Heywood discusses integrity in scientific research and points

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saying that he wrote the book because he found that many of his students wanted to do honest work but weren't sure what that meant. In addition, he says, "the Internet has changed everything." Not only does the Internet make it easier than ever before to access and copy information; it actually allows a completely new mode of engaging with information. "Anyone who uses the Net regularly begins to

out what happens when scientists cheat. "It holds science up," he says. "It wastes a lot of time. It creates a suspicion of the practice of science to the general public." A report in *Science* in April of this year described the case of Eric Poehlman, once a well-respected researcher on aging based at the University of Vermont, who admitted using fabricated data in fifteen federal grant applications

THE CODE

WHAT'S CHEATING AND WHAT'S NOT

All Brown students—undergraduate, graduate, and medical—receive a booklet called "Principles of the Brown University Community: The Academic Code and Non-Academic Conduct" and must sign a statement agreeing they will abide by its tenets. The Academic Code walks a fine line, emphasizing the cooperative nature of education while making clear that "Cheating undermines the value of a Brown education for everyone, and especially for the person who cheats."

The Code outlines a laundry list of forbidden strategies for improving one's grade, some of which are decidedly low-tech and even time-honored: peeking at a neighbor's exam or sneaking notes into the exam room. Addressing past instances of athletic teams and fraternities bequeathing course materials to younger members from year to year, the Code reads: "Students are not allowed to base their course work on papers, reports, or other course exercises that have been saved or kept on file from earlier years."

The Code also addresses the complexities and ease of Internet cheating and is particularly clear about the sale of research papers online: "The use of services of commercial 'research' companies is cheating and a punishable offense," the document specifies. But things get fuzzier from there. The document puts the onus on students to learn "the principles that govern each new area of computer operations to which they are introduced. Unauthorized collaboration, unauthorized borrowing of someone else's data or programs, and use of the Brown computer for unethical purposes are subject to disciplinary or legal action."

The Code urges faculty to review in their classes "the procedures by which they evaluate student work, and to avoid situations and processes that may make it easy for a student to cut corners or get unauthorized assistance." It also urges students to report cheating, "anonymously, if they wish."

—CHARLOTTE BRUCE HARVEY '78

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and ten published papers. "This is probably one of the biggest misconduct cases ever," one expert told the journal. "Very often it's a young investigator, under pressure, who needs funding. This guy was a very successful scientist." In cases like this, Heywood says, "the message is that, first of all, this is very wrong and it harms science. And second of all, people will find out, because science has all of these checks and balances. They will find out sooner or later. If it is sooner, your lifetime career is finished. If it is later, then there is this permanent stain over you and your research."

COHEN AND OTHERS BELIEVE ANY STRAT-

egy to prevent cheating must address the reasons students cheat in the first place. A lack of information may be one important reason, but Cohen also points out that the stress of studying in a highly competitive, high-pressure Ivy League environment can also lead to desperate measures. "It's four o'clock in the morning," she explains, "the paper is due the next day, and they can't imagine that their professor will give them an incomplete. Their partner called and broke up with them and they didn't know how to reach the professor. It's almost always embedded in that kind of stuff."

Learning to deal honestly with this kind of pressure must be an important part of what the University teaches. "The really hard principle they have to learn," Cohen says, "is that it doesn't matter. You just take an NC [no credit]. You don't cheat. You just step away from it." Cohen points out that many of the students who get caught cheating are straight-A students who choose a shortcut over a drop in their grade.

In the end, Cohen says, to deal with cheating's temptations the University has to do a better job of reinforcing the lessons of integrity and honesty—no matter how many cheaters are being exposed in the newspapers. Rather than assume that students will cheat if they have the chance, she says, professors, without turning a blind eye to cheating, should emphasize an environment of trust and personal integrity. It's an approach that tends to bring out the best in students. "What is most useful to college campuses," she says, "is operating on an assumption that everyone wishes to operate morally and ethically, and let's give you the information and the skills and the tools to do that." **B**

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