AHSO Overview of Activity

From: 08/21/2014 To: 01/01/2015

210 Number of Cases Processed
180 Number of Cases Handled by Faculty
29 Number of Cases Handled by the Honor Council
9 Number of Cases Turned into Event Files (No Responsibility/Case Withdrawn)
201 Number of Cases Where Responsibility Found and Sanctions Levied
84.29% Percentage of cases where allegation falls under either the definition of plagiarism or the definition of cheating as found in the Definitions of Academic Misconduct

Primary Sanctions Levied

5 Separation from University/Deferred Suspension
14 F* in the Course
5 Regular F Grade in the Course
47 Honor Violation Probation
13 Course Grade Reduction
96 Grade of '0' on Test/Assignment
15 Assignment Grade Reduction
4 Complete Remediation Course
1 Extra Assignments
0 Other Sanctions Applied
49 Number of Students Who Have Completed Remediation Program
0 Number of Students found responsible for a violation subsequent to their completion of the Remediation Program
AHSO Overview of Activity

From: 08/21/2015 To: 01/01/2016

288      Number of Cases Processed
228      Number of Cases Handled by Faculty
58       Number of Cases Handled by the Honor Council
15       Number of Cases Turned into Event Files (No Responsibility/Case Withdrawn)
273      Number of Cases Where Responsibility Found and Sanctions Levied
84.03%   Percentage of cases where allegation falls under either the definition of plagiarism or the definition of cheating as found in the Definitions of Academic Misconduct

Primary Sanctions Levied

0       Separation from University/Deferred Suspension
39      F* in the Course
7       Regular F Grade in the Course
55      Honor Violation Probation
15      Course Grade Reduction
93      Grade of '0' on Test/Assignment
15      Assignment Grade Reduction
0       Complete Remediation Course
1       Extra Assignments
5       Other Sanctions Applied
48      Number of Students Who Have Completed Remediation Program
0       Number of Students found responsible for a violation subsequent to their completion of the Remediation Program
In a Fake Online Class With Students Paid to Cheat, Could Professors Catch the Culprits?

By Brad Wolverton | DECEMBER 22, 2015

Alvin Malesky has taught online classes for at least seven years and, as a former law-enforcement officer and forensic psychologist, is trained to detect deception.

Last year he and a colleague at Western Carolina University, concerned about the growing threat of online cheating and the legitimacy of companies that purport to do students' work, set up an experiment to test the market. With the help of a research grant, they created a fake online course and paid several students to cheat, including one who hired a company to take the entire class for him. The professors concealed from themselves the identities of the students, then tried to catch the cheaters.

Their goal was to see how easily students could find a company that would assume their identity — participating in weekly discussion boards, writing papers, and taking exams — while passing off all of the work as their own. Such
a study, the professors figured, could help them assess the reliability of online-cheating companies and determine how serious a challenge they pose to online education.

Mr. Malesky and a colleague, Robert Crow, an assistant professor of educational research, created a phony 10-week introductory-psychology course, enrolling 12 undergraduates and three graduate students who had already taken such a class. The students enrolled to gain research experience, to earn honors credit, or to be part of an independent research project. (The research was approved by Western Carolina’s institutional review board as well as its chief counsel, registrar, and campus police.)

Working with the registrar’s office, the professors assigned the students fake names, student-identification numbers, and email addresses. Even the professor listed on the syllabus was made up. (A third instructor acted as a liaison between the students and the other faculty members.)

Before the course started, the professors dangled an incentive: If they failed to identify any of the students who had cheated, those students would be eligible for a $350 raffle. Could the instructors outsmart the impostor?

**Thousands of Online Cheaters**

Mr. Malesky, an associate professor and head of the psychology department at Western Carolina, which is near Asheville, N.C., was an early skeptic of online classes, viewing them as a watered-down version of education. But as he has taught more online courses — at least two every summer in recent years — he has come to see their value. Yet he wondered how easily they could be exploited.
Several years ago, after reading about the growth of essay mills and services that advertise taking online courses for a fee, he started asking his students about their experience with cheating. He says he was surprised at how prevalent they said cheating was, and how quickly the online-cheating market had grown.

"I got concerned," he says. "Are these services legitimate, or is it just a way to scam students?"

According to his and Mr. Crow's research, which is to be published next year in the journal *College Teaching*, some seven million students, or almost a third of all those attending college, were enrolled in at least one online course last year. If even a small percentage of those students cheated, the professors wrote in their paper — "Academic Dishonesty: Assessing the Threat of Cheating Companies to Online Education" — that translates into tens of thousands of online cheaters each year.

For their experiment, the researchers tapped John Baley, then a graduate student in clinical psychology, to contact various companies and determine which one could best help him cheat. He started by typing a few phrases into a search engine: "online class help"; "take my class for me"; "cheat in my online class."

Some 20 websites consistently came up, and he selected eight that appeared viable, contacting each by email. He eliminated sites for a number of reasons. Several, for example, offered to complete only single assignments, not entire courses. One site requested nearly $3,000, which he believed was too expensive for a typical college student.
Mr. Baley discovered that at least two sites shared a domain in India. The email responses from those businesses were so "elementary," Mr. Baley wrote in an account of his experience included in the paper, that "I was concerned that they could not adequately complete our course and earn an A."

Posing as ‘Joey Sanchez’

The company he went with, which the researchers do not identify in their paper, had a professional website and a staff that responded promptly to his requests.

Posing as "Joey Sanchez," Mr. Baley told the cheating company that he had taken on too much that semester and needed someone to complete an entire online class for him.

Someone from the site emailed back quickly: "Sure, what course options do you have? I would recommend one of the following: math, stats, accounting, etc ... but we can help with anything, so just let me know."

"Joey" emailed that he needed someone to take a 10-week accelerated course in introductory psychology, and inquired if the company was prepared to handle all aspects of the class. The company would not only take the whole course for Joey, its representative said, but promised to earn him an A.

After asking Joey for his contact information, which he submitted on the company’s website, and a copy of the course syllabus, the company sent him an invoice for $917. Joey asked to make the payments in two installments. He made the first using a prepaid credit card. Halfway through the course, he paid the second installment in the same way.
After receiving the first payment, the company took the first weekly quiz, earning a nearly perfect score. Soon afterward, it requested Joey's help in purchasing a required textbook (he provided electronic access). From that point on, the company completed all of Joey's work without any input, including quizzes, examinations, and discussion-board posts, receiving an A on every assignment. Throughout the course, while Mr. Baley knew who Joey Sanchez was, Mr. Malesky and Mr. Crow did not.

The one assignment that posed a problem was a live video presentation, which the company refused to do. Instead, the company agreed to send Joey a set of slides and a script that he could read from — but he would have to present the material himself. (Mr. Baley enlisted a fellow graduate student so he wouldn't blow his cover.)

The materials didn't show up until hours before the presentation, so Mr. Baley's colleague couldn't review them beforehand. But neither Mr. Malesky nor Mr. Crow identified the presentation as fraudulent.

"I was kind of blown away," Mr. Baley said in an interview. "I think it would've worked flawlessly for pretty much anyone capable of reading."

**Happening ‘Under Our Noses’**

Throughout the course, the professors used Turnitin and Googled students' work to check for plagiarism. They also monitored the time that students spent completing their tests to see if groups of students were taking exams at the same time.

In the end, the professors caught several students plagiarizing material. But they did not detect that Joey Sanchez was a fraud. Both instructors gave him an A in the class.
"I certainly did not feel that 'Joey' was being 'run' by a cheating company," Mr. Malesky wrote in the paper. "If anything, Joey struck me as a conscientious and motivated student who wanted to get as much out of the course as possible."

Mr. Crow wrote that, although the quality of Joey’s work appeared to be at a level "suspiciously higher" than that of an average freshman, the professor did not "red-flag" him for academic dishonesty.

"Instructors such as myself," Mr. Crow wrote, "may be ignorant to the fact that it is possible for an entire course to be completed covertly by a paid impostor."

The professors found the whole process unsettling, suggesting in their paper that, as demand continues to grow for online education, the number and quality of companies that supply cheating services are likely to expand — along with the number of students obtaining false grades, degrees, and credentials.

"If left unaddressed, this expansion has the potential to erode the value and credibility of the online component of higher education," they wrote.

Their paper mentions a handful of effective ways to detect cheating in virtual classes, including keystroke recognition and retinal scans. But the kind of cheating that happened in their study is hard to catch.

In an interview, Mr. Malesky said he was most surprised at how efficient and versatile the company was, which suggested to him that any discipline was vulnerable.

"They could do medicine or chemistry or English — it runs the gamut," he said. "All sides of the academic house are threatened by this."

If he could sound one note of caution to administrators, he said, it would be
that awareness is key.

"This is legitimate, and it's happening very effectively under our noses," he said. "As of now, there are no mechanisms in place to stop it."

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