

*I cheat, You cheat, We all cheat: Patterns of Academic*

*Cheating at the Neighborhood Academy*

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## Introduction

“In a system that measures success by grades, how far is too far to get ahead?” In today's society, academic cheating has become more advanced and harder to catch. A survey conducted by *The Guardian* revealed that nearly 7,000 university students used AI to cheat on their assignments. This statistic shows a 4% increase in academic cheating using AI compared to the previous year. Even in this paper, the hook sentence that you read was produced with AI, and I bet you could not tell. All I had to do was type in my project topic and grade level, and in less than a minute, it produced an intriguing hook sentence. This action requires no critical thinking on my part, yet this quote could pass as a sufficient sentence in my paper. Although this is not my own work, it does make me wonder how far is too far when trying to get ahead in the academic world, where our grades measure student success. Over the years, cheating has become normalized to the point where students are saying, “It's not that serious, everybody is doing it.” In fact, Jensen et al. (2002) report from their experiment that 89% of high school students copy homework throughout the school year. With cheating becoming so normalized, it calls into question the future of academics and what the education system will look like in a couple of years with advancing technology.

Cheating harms students' academic lives across the board and is an expanding issue that will soon affect *all* students. There are many reasons students cheat, including social pressure from peers, fear, and a fear of failing. Academic cheating not only limits students' thinking processes but also creates a culture of dishonesty in academic environments (Park, Park, and Jang n.p). As a young student who expects to pursue higher education after high school, I understand the risks and consequences of cheating. To understand the impact of academic cheating, one has to understand how it is defined. Academic integrity is the notion of being honest, ethical, and trustworthy when conducting your academic work. Although academic

dishonesty and academic cheating are used interchangeably, academic dishonesty is used as a concept, while academic cheating is seen as a behavior (Park, Park, and Jang, p. 346). Academic cheating is driven by social pressure, fear of failure, and unclear boundaries around technology (Miles, Campbell, Ruxton, p. 151-152,2022). While students often understand what cheating is, the rise of artificial intelligence has made academic dishonesty both easier and more challenging to regulate. So, while academic cheating has become normalized due to social pressure and AI accessibility, schools must redefine policies and integrate AI responsibly to preserve both learning and academic integrity.

### **Why cheating matters**

Academic cheating affects more than just a student's grades; it impacts the learning process, honesty, and students' future success so as educators it's important to attack this issue now for the future of our education systems. Academic dishonesty undermines the process of critical and creative thinking, promotes laziness, and leads to a loss of decision-making. The rapid advancement of AI raises concerns about the future of students' teaching process (Harasanti, n.p, 2024.). In theory, if a student relies mostly on academic cheating throughout their academic career, they could pass, but they would not have learned anything from their years in school (Jensen et al., 2002). The more a student relies on an outside source for answers, the less they will be able to think for themselves. Therefore, if a student were to pursue a career that involved saving another human life, for example, as a doctor, it raises concerns about the student's ability to have the knowledge needed to save that person's life. It also raises the question of how cheating affects a person's honesty and future success as a worker. The belief is that if one cheats their way through school, they will cheat in their future work (Yee, Xu, Batool, et al.,2024). If shortcuts continue to be taken, a student will never be fully qualified to have a real

career. Academic cheating is not just something that can affect a student's academic career; it can also pose a risk to someone's life.

A study conducted in South Korea among nursing students examined their cheating patterns. This is a country where, for ages, grades have determined your moral character and have been made a virtue. This experiment revealed that 78% and 50% of nursing students cheat on their exams and assignments. This is a concerning discovery because nurses are trusted to care for their patients and protect their clients' health; they are appointed to save lives. Many of the nursing students believe that cheating behaviors are perceived as less serious in comparison to the population, and it was also revealed that in South Korea, cheating is becoming so prevalent that it is becoming a custom. In the medical field, medical providers need to be ethical, trustworthy, and fair. Academically dishonest students are most likely to manipulate clinical data in their future careers. Whereas students who have not used cheating to their advantage are less likely to become nurses. Students who have cheated have boosted their GPAs to the point where they have an advantage in getting a nursing job over students who genuinely worked for their grades. Not only does cheating create an unfair environment for students who have worked for their jobs, but it also puts future patients' lives at risk. In jobs that consist of being responsible for other human lives it's important that the people studying and training for these jobs have a clear understanding of the responsibilities and requirements for the job. This article is one of the instances where academic cheating can be a death sentence. Nurses are one of the most important providers in our society, so imagine a world without nurses, and then imagine a world with nurses that do not have the knowledge of being a nurse. It is assumed that the mortality rate would look similar. If students don't learn how to push through challenges in the academic world now then what will our future look like in 15 years?(Park, Park, Jang).

## **Rise of AI**

As society evolves, maintaining academic integrity is becoming more complex, especially with the rise of AI. AI stands for Artificial Intelligence, which is designed to think and act like a human (Lee, Pope, Miles, et al,2024). Some examples include solving complex problems in just under a minute, making complex decisions as a human would, such as advising teenagers who need someone to talk to. Many teens have admitted to using ChatGPT as a source for discussing their emotions (Efua, 2025). AI has also advanced to the point where it can drive cars. The development of AI makes it clear that it will change the way people think and live, so what does this mean for the academic world? Many people believe that students should be able to use AI because it allows them to learn in different ways and could be an essential tool for advancing the learning world, such as enhancing personalized learning, improving student-teacher interactions in online learning, lessening teachers' workload, and supporting students with special needs (Harasanti,2024). Many others strongly disagree; they believe that AI will be the downfall of the academic learning process;scholars believe that it will decline students' thinking abilities in both blunt and creative thinking (Harasanti,2024).

## **Forms of cheating**

Over the years, academic cheating has evolved from simply copying answers from a classmate to using an artificial intelligence bot for answers. There are many forms of academic dishonesty, consisting of plagiarism, unauthorized help from others, and fabrication. Although AI is a relatively new form of cheating, it is becoming the most popular. To better understand how students use these different forms of cheating, students at *The Neighborhood Academy* were surveyed. Some of these questions, along with the student responses, provide a more nuanced look at the rise of AI and its impact on education. More importantly, learning the latest statistics,

even for just one school, provides educators with the opportunity to understand how to both prevent cheating and implement proper protocols for this new hindrance in the learning process.

At TNA, student relationships are very important because of how small and intimate our school is; 88.9% of students report having a good relationship with their teachers, while 11.1% do not. When asked whether they had ever cheated on an assignment, 66.7% of students admitted to cheating, while 33.3% said they had not. Moreover, some of those reasons for cheating were: 22.2% fear failing, 30.6% feel pressure to get good grades, 16.6% lack understanding of the content, 13.9% feel they have too much work, and 16.7% do not care about succeeding. When asked how much their peers influence their cheating, 52.8% said they have little to no influence, 25% said their peers have little influence, 13.9% said they have some influence, and 2.8% said they have a lot of influence. Additionally, the poll revealed that 67.6% of students say they have cheated on 1-2 assignments this year, 14.7% said they have cheated on 3-4 assignments this year, 2.9% say they have cheated on about 5-6 assignments, and 14.7% say they have cheated on about 7+ assignments this school year alone. Coupled with 75% of students say they have a clear understanding of the academic policy while 25% say it's unclear. Lastly, 72.2% of students say that the use of AI should not be allowed in the school environment, while 27.8% feel it should.

A frequent trend that I've seen with this data was that many TNA students are against cheating and believe that AI has no need in being in the school environment. This was surprising because the expected result was for many students to say they don't have a strong relationship with their teachers as well as the use of AI should be implemented into the school environment. In correlation to research, the majority of students do have a clear understanding of their academic policy and know when they are cheating. Although my data is skewed because

students were anxious to tell the truth about their academic misconduct, these results show that TNA has a good understanding of the ethics behind academic dishonesty.

### **Teachers' Opinions**

According to the *Walton Family Foundation*, 51% of teachers use AI in classroom-related activities. With the rise of AI, there has been significant concern about how the classroom dynamic will change. Furthermore, there has been a split among teachers, with some encouraging AI and others discouraging it. Many teachers believe that there is value in using AI, specifically in teaching. Others believe that AI encourages academic cheating because it provides easy access. According to Wangaard and Stephens, 95% of students have admitted to at least one form of academic cheating in the past academic year. At The Neighborhood Academy, it is no different. There are many opinions about integrating AI into the school environment. For example, the head of the Math & Science Department, Jason Scott, has this to say about AI use: “I think that it can be a really useful learning tool. I actually think that it is very helpful in math, especially in higher math.” He explains that AI can be most helpful when a student does not understand a problem and has no teacher to help them; it can show you how to do the problem, ultimately helping the student learn how to do it. In comparison, English teacher Conor McAteer believes that AI is a dangerous tool to the academic system. He says, “We as humans rely on AI too much; soon, we are not going to be able to articulate our own ideas, which I believe is really dangerous.”

One thing that both teachers can agree on is that AI is and will be used wrongly by students. Scott expresses, “My class used to be mostly homework-based, but with the rise of the

proportion of people who cheat all the time with AI, I had to start doing mostly Exams.”

McAteer says, “Students use AI as the thing that gives them the answers, then put it into their work. I believe that often it is an inaccurate tool for writing, and AI writing is very soulless, flat, and boring.” Even though both teachers teach two different subjects, AI has affected their class environments. Scott chooses to have an optimistic outlook on AI, compared to McAteer, who believes that AI is slowly deteriorating human minds. They both agree that teachers should show their students how to use AI responsibly. McAteer says, “I think in the future we are going to be using this technology, but I am a bit scared of that future.”

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, AI is a new and emerging form of cheating, but in some people's opinions, it can be used as a new way to learn if used correctly. AI is a gray area that has not been figured out yet. Some teachers are strongly opposed to using AI: “I believe that students should be using their own brains instead of computers.” McAteer. Other teachers believe that “AI can be used as a learning tool for all students, for example, if a student does not know how to do a math problem and they cannot contact their teacher, AI can help break the problem down so that the student can actively ask the chat questions as a teacher assistant would.” Jason Although opinions differ on this topic, it is clear that AI is not going anywhere. One way to reduce cheating is for teachers to teach students to use AI responsibly.

### **Why Students Cheat**

The biggest reason TNA students say they cheat is the pressure to get good grades. This pressure can come from students' parents, their peers, or even from the students themselves. In academic culture, it is heavily emphasized that if students do not earn good enough grades, they will never get into their dream college and will not be as successful as they could have been if they had just worked harder. There is also a general pattern in cheating: if everyone else is doing

it, it is more acceptable, and they will not be punished (Miles et al.,2022). Studies have also linked the behavior of cheating to the lack of self-control and discipline a student has. The more a student is willing to condone academic misconduct, the more likely they are to cheat (Jensen et al., 2002).

At TNA, 75% of students feel that students should be able to use AI. I interviewed two TNA seniors, and one of them, Elijah Gray, states, “I believe that we should use AI to an extent; we should not use it in a way where it takes away from our thinking process, like copying and pasting, but we could use it to generate topic ideas.” When asked how he used AI outside of the classroom, he says, “I sometimes ask how I can solve a problem with a relationship; or even when sending a text message, I will ask how to express my feeling without coming off disrespectful but still getting my point across, shoot, I will even use it on smell goods; good combos. When using AI, it is all about intention. It can teach you how to solve a problem: if you genuinely want to learn it” (Gray).

In contrast, 25% of TNA students feel that AI should be allowed in the classroom, and senior Derick Hardeman is one of them. He says, “In theory, I think it could be beneficial, but ultimately, I do not believe that it is necessary. It could help students out, but a lot of students are already practicing cheating, so implementing AI would not promote ethical work.” When asked about how he felt about AI being used outside the classroom, he states, “People using AI as a therapist, it is cool to hear different suggestions, but honestly, I believe that you should ask other people for help. AI should not be your end goal” (Hardeman).

### **How to Reduce Cheating**

While the debate on whether AI should be used in the classroom is still controversial, it is prominent to see that this new and developing technology isn't going away. It's unclear what the

new academic future holds. Max Cookingham, the head of TNA's honor council, believes that AI could benefit students' learning if used responsibly. Cookinham was given the following scenario:

Max is a student who struggles in school. He is at home trying to complete his Algebra homework, and he just could not figure out one of his questions. He cannot understand his notes, and it is 9 pm on a Sunday. He turns to ChatGPT for help. He puts in the problem, takes notes, and learns from it so he can complete the other problems. His teacher notices that Max is getting the answers right, but he is doing it in a different way than taught. He says he used ChatGPT to help with his homework, and the teacher sent him to the honor council. Is this really cheating?

Cookinham's response was, "If he used AI to solve every problem, then yes, it is cheating. If he uses AI to understand one problem and then applies that knowledge to understand the rest of the problems, then I do not believe it is cheating." This is a prominent grey area in the rise of AI; it raises the question of whether cheating can be beneficial for students. It also raises the question of whether cheating is okay if the student learns from it. Senior Adia Wiley, who is also a part of Honor Council, had this to say when asked about the same scenario:

I believe that there is a grey area in AI and cheating; although, yes, technically, he is cheating, he is still learning from it, so it supports the answer of yes, there can be a benefit from cheating; but I believe that going to a teacher and having that in-person instruction is better. AI is not going away, and the ethics around academic dishonesty are disappearing, based on my two years on the honor council. For teachers to manage academic cheating, put everything on paper, and have the majority of class assignments accompanied by a test.

Many students at TNA say they have a clear understanding of the academic policy and that the fear of getting kicked out has led them to avoid cheating. Many researchers believe that if there are meaningful consequences for cheating, then cheating will decline. It also raises the question: “Are harsher punishments more effective than meaningful consequences?” Some people believe that kicking a student out is too harsh a punishment, especially if you are not teaching the student how to avoid cheating. Cheating is a learned behavior, and if students are not taught healthier ways to handle their assignments, they will never be able to stop cheating, especially with the evolution of technology (Miles, Campbell, Ruxton, p.154,2022).

In contrast to the belief that AI will increase academic cheating, research shows no increase in academic cheating (Lee, Pope, Miles, et al.,2024). Research shows that the majority of students' AI use was for researching topics and ideas for a paper, which is something that TNA teachers and students support. Many students believe that AI should not be allowed in academic settings. So it goes against the belief that AI will increase the amount of cheating that is happening in the school environment.

According to research, there are 3 ways to help control the amount of students cheating while also promoting AIED (Artificial Intelligence Education): “Authentic Learning Through Real-World problems and data-driven learning, critical learning through open-ended critical questions, and meaningful assessment such as performance - based, output-based, and action-driven assessments” (Harasanti,2024). Meaningful assessment creates an environment for students to find the value in learning. By allowing the students to explore what they really enjoy and what they find important; this pertains to projects, programs, designs. Data - driven learning allows students to examine the data they have obtained from a source whether it’s from Google or Ai and being able to explain it in their own words. This encourages students to be able to

create their own interpretation of information with there being no right or wrong answer. With this practice it's important for teachers to monitor their students and lead this discussion. Lastly, performance - based, output-based, and action-driven assessments (Harasanti,2024). Using real-world problems allows students to use their learning objectives in real life. It's a process that allows students to learn and apply to their lives. All three of these objectives are in place to promote a responsible and engaging learning environment while also implementing AI into the classroom, because AI is not going anywhere but is evolving. By following these steps, educators hope to enhance students' engagement in the classroom, mitigate students' academic misconduct, and benefit from the AIE to enrich the learning experience (Harasanti,2024).

## **Conclusion**

This analysis of academic dishonesty is to bring awareness that academic cheating isn't always a straightforward act; there is a lot of grey area. The importance of engagement and awareness in the classroom is presumed to make the class environment more manageable for students and teachers alike. Academic infractions have been a splinter for the academic community for a very long time and with the rise of AI it's only getting more ridged from here. As technology continues to evolve, the students do too; educators must learn and evolve with their students. Teachers need to create an engaging, encouraging learning environment where students can relate to and retain the information they are learning, and not default to the world of AI for the answers. Like stated before, technology will only continue to evolve, and it is important not to resist it but to use it in the best way possible. If a student is to resort to AI educators have to set guidelines and principles in the classroom so the student can practice outside of the classroom. This paper discusses the importance of evolving education and how

educators can improve their teaching practices, while also knowing the importance of academic integrity.

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