Is students’ knowledge of the student conduct code associated with their conduct code-breaking behaviors on campus?

Joy D. Bonner

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Knowledge of the Student Conduct Code

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Introduction

Annually, about 20.5 million students attend the college or university of their choice seeking an education and the forever sought out freedom from their parents (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Campuses nationwide anticipate the arrival of these students throughout the summer break with the update of their campus student conduct codes. Yet, are the hours spent on including the latest status offense for these new adults worth it if students continue to break the code? A 2008 study reported 100% of students in an undergraduate level business class reported cheating, and in a national survey 54% of students reported internet plagiarism while 76% reported acts of cheating in the past year (Jones, 2011). Despite the urge to cover and stress the importance of abiding by school, state, and federal statutory laws for students, colleges and universities still experience a wide range petty crimes committed on their campuses.

Moreover, crimes and conduct code violations committed by students at universities may correlate to their respect or even acknowledgement of the student conduct code. Many universities offer a strike or referral-based system to evaluate a student’s knowledge of the code. Many campuses may also take the route of ordering fines for students that actively break a code. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the prevalence of code breaking behaviors that occur within a school year. This study will examine the use of conduct code examinations and knowledge of a student code of conduct in the relation to conduct violations within a college or university’s campus.

In addition to a college or university system’s issuance of a strike and/or fine to punish student conduct violations, other disciplinary actions are also used to enforce such instances. Acknowledgement of the codes’ existence is evaluated in relation to the conduct
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codes followed by students in the present study. If students are unaware of the content within the conduct code, they may be unaware that they as students are participating in illegal behaviors. A student’s behavior and knowledge of the expectations written within a college or university’s code of conduct may, in fact, affect whether or not a penalty is given. Ignorance of these codes could result in consequence that could potentially cause the overall student population to be at risk of possible punishments.

The research question addressed in this study is, *Is students’ knowledge of the student conduct code associated with their conduct code-breaking behaviors on campus?* Again, the purpose of this study is to examine the effects of a student’s knowledge of a university’s code of conduct on the frequency of code-breaking behaviors committed on an institution’s campus. This evaluation will strive in essence to apply its findings in assisting universities in ways to market and/or edit their codes of conduct to its students via a quantitative and comprehensive survey. To examine the correlation between student knowledge of the conduct code and the infractions committed amongst a college or university’s population, survey data on plagiarism and its definition was collected from students that attend a university in the southeast region of the United States. The surveys enabled the analysis of students and their knowledge of the university’s code of conduct, and their self-reported infractions.
Literature Review

Nearly every educational institution in America publishes a student conduct code. These documents, whether they are two pages or twenty, set the standard of ethical norms and practices for an institution’s, faculty, and students (Ely et. al., 2014). The existence of codes within schools has shown several patterns in studies, such as frequent clauses concerning teacher-student relationships (Braxton, Min, Lyken-Segosebe, 2012). Student codes of conduct address the use and possession of alcohol on campuses, harassment and hazing, and even university housing regulations just to name a few (Georgia Southern University, 2016). Codes strive in essence to provide students guidelines in abiding by local, state, and national laws in ensuring an overall safe campus community.

Social norms seem to have a strong impact on the use and writing of codes in higher education institutions. Universities and colleges create formal and informal codes to assist in protecting all collegiate parties (Braxton and Bray, 2012). Conduct codes set restrictions on the actions performed by both students and faculty, thus setting social and systematic roles for both parties (Braxton and Bray, 2012). With the establishment of various codes comes opposition and backlash, however. For example, individuals at Antioch College in Ohio implemented a code of conduct for dating on campus in the early 1990s (Muehlenhard, 1994). The students who took steps to require explicit verbal consent for any form of sexual interaction on campus were then mocked nationally and even noted for being too harsh by several sources (Muehlenhard, 1994).

Moreover, several studies have explored the actual impact that such codes have on campuses. Professors at Costal Carolina University examined students’ knowledge of the university’s honor code and their chances of cheating on assignments. The researchers
found that students who were given an honor code to read directly before attempting a survey were less likely to commit any form of cheating or breaking of the university’s strict code of conduct (Ely, Henderson, and Wachsman, 2014). Ely et al. (2014) concluded that the more knowledge business administration students had of the code, measured as reading and signing to it in some simulations, the more students were cautious of actions prohibited within the code of scholarly conduct.

In addition to the effectiveness of regulations within educational systems comes the enforcement tactics of various conduct codes. A professor’s age, gender, employment rank, and even academic department affect one’s enforcement of any code or behavior (Burrus, Graham, and Walker, 2011). Professors at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington reported that professors who are female are generally more likely to be tougher on the punishments associated with cheating. Similarly, professors with tenure approach matters of misconduct more frequently (Burrus, Graham, and Walker, 2011). Furthermore, Joetta L. Carr (2005) explored the amounts of violence on college campuses in 2005. In all, Carr found that 5% of college students fail to report victimizations on campus because students are unaware that a crime was actually committed (Carr, 2005). The use of codes and its effectiveness in institutions around the nation has shown both positive and negative ways of its impact based on both knowledge and implementation.

**The Legality of the Conduct Code**

Dating back to the early 1500’s the term “*Ignorantia juris non excusant,* ”meaning ignorance of the law excuses no one, has influenced both criminal and civil disputes nationwide (Keedy, 1908). Whether a student understands or not, they are expected to
withhold and understand both the awards and limitations provided within an institution’s code of conduct.

Researcher Jill S. Ehling (1999), in her dissertation, noted that as certain actions or violations of code are specifically serious to a certain campus, institutions also create a sense of judicial order in processing such violations. In the Supreme Court case Hamilton v. Regents of the University of California (1934), justices confirmed higher education institution’s’ right to terminate the attendance of any student based on the guidelines and or violations placed by the institution. In the 1934 decision, it was noted that the opportunity to attend such institutions was a privilege in itself, which could legally be taken away in an event of misconduct. As the case was brought in efforts to settle student protest over military science courses required by the institution, it is clear to see the legality provided to institutions. However, Ehling (1999) shares that the institution may in all create a better environment for handling code infractions, as institution’s can give greater insight to the measures that ensure a student’s punishment and understanding in a learning environment as such. Giving universities the authority to handle such infractions can allow a student to receive greater due process rights, than those possibly presented within a superior court (Ehling, 1999).

Likewise, similar issues in due process occur in hearing practices within university review boards. As criminal courts and proceedings often come into contact with issues of legal hearsay, often students can experience the weight of the word of faculty or staff over their own in institutional hearings. Instances in which only witnesses’ testimony are presented, as opposed to real or tangible evidence, can occur even within university review panels. However, like the US or even state constitutions, conduct codes are established to
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protect community residents; in the cases of institutions of higher education, that is, an academic community and setting. In order to protect all involved parties, many institutions have allowed students the right to counsel in conduct board hearings (Ehling, 1999).

Georgia Southern University’s conduct code shares that both complainant and accused parties have the right to counsel to assist only in advice and recommendations to clients within proceedings (Georgia Southern University, 2016). Hired counsel are furthermore not granted the right to speak on behalf or address a review board in any way during scheduled hearings and proceedings (Georgia Southern University, 2016). In Ehling’s (1999) research on perceptions of the code, it was shared that the simple presence of counsel could possibly suggest the idea of criminal procedures. Ehling honors the fact that attorneys are viewed in a lens of politics and industry builders, which could in turn erode the mutual trust between an institution of higher education and its students (Ehling, 1999).

Plagiarism

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty have consistently proven to be one of the largest conduct breaking behaviors at universities nation-wide (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). In a focus group study exploring the perceptions of plagiarism by students, researchers defined plagiarism as a form of academic dishonesty that becomes fraudulent in destroying the intellectual property of a work’s original author for individual reward or pleasure (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). Plagiarism in turn becomes unethical when a plagiarist fails to give credit for the dedication and hard work an original author established in their property. Plagiarism is noted to lack ideas of morality, ethics, and honesty in action.
One reason allotted to the presence of plagiarism and academic dishonesty on campuses is the time and dedication it takes to catch and act upon instances for professors. Gullifer (2010) notes that investigating acts of plagiarism requires hours of time and investigation in cross-referencing the work submitted by students. To add, professors must also process paper work and set availability for proceedings after filing to a university’s review board. The Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment at Georgia Southern University provides a possible eighteen step process for reporting and settling academic dishonesty within a course (Georgia Southern University, 2016). The code and its adjudication for acts such as plagiarism or cheating range from the faculty member and students handling the occurrence individually to both faculty, student, and the University Student Conduct Board facilitating an official hearing. As described, such processing can incur much time and energy, which may attribute to the discussion of lack of reporting as suggested by Professor Judith Gullifer.

Many researchers note that there can be several reasons as to why university students plagiarize in course work and writings. In 1993, researchers Donald McCabe and Linda Trevino found a correlation in levels of dishonesty and knowledge and understanding of an institution’s conduct policies. McCabe and Trevino concluded that higher levels of dishonesty matched lower levels of knowledge in a universities code of conduct by both students and school faculty (1993). Likewise, in a multi-campus study, it was discovered that plagiarism may also occur within contextual circumstances (McCabe & Trevino, 1997). These circumstances include an individual’s commitment to social groups, the approval of cheating by interacting peers, as well as the presence or amount of cheating occurring in a setting. Professor William J. Bowers (1964) found that institutions’
must create and maintain a worthy relationship between students in efforts to create honesty and reduce dishonesty in academic writing and work.

As universities continuously strive to include sanctions for such violations in student conduct, studies share that this approach lacks effectiveness in the advancement of students and any decrease in plagiarism rates (Gullifer & Tyson, 2010). Gullifer and Tyson (2010) suggest hands-on instruction may be the only method to reducing such an issue. Requiring students to gain knowledge of plagiarism and ways to effectively complete course work without the act of academic dishonesty may become necessary of institutions nationwide. Such classes, the authors suggest, must be holistic in requiring all students to participate while strongly encouraging and highlighting the necessity of integrity and acknowledgement in an academic setting and beyond.

In a study done at Georgia Southern University, students shared that a more aggressive method of highlighting the student code of conduct should be introduced at the university’s orientation (Ehling, 1999). The study exploring students’ perception of the code found that many students reported never reading or giving the slightest care as to what is established and mentioned within the code. Ehling (1999) suggests that even with exposure to the document online, more exposure of the code to students could assist in the university’s perception and even use.

**Understanding Plagiarism**

“A good code educates, not confuses, the students and may also encourage student involvement” (Ehling, 1999, p. 9). Studies have found that many students entering higher education institutions lack any knowledge of academic writing and dishonesty (Choo &
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Paull, 2013). Therefore, it has been encouraged that codes also incorporate opportunities for students to gain knowledge and further their understanding of academic dishonesty early within their collegiate careers. Choo and Paull (2013) argue that plagiarism should be understood as a concept to students attending higher education institutions. The professors announce that most students’ first understanding and briefing of plagiarism occur after they have been caught in act (Choo & Paull, 2013).

In efforts to assist students in the presence and understanding of plagiarism in academic course work, author Curtis Newbold (2014) published a chart (Figure 1) that weights the severity of plagiarism with common violations. The flow chart diagram aims to assist any individual in gaining quick knowledge of the acts commonly described as plagiarism. The chart begins as a scenario based question of act, then proceeds to assess the severity of plagiarized writing using the Plagiarism Severity Meter. The severity of plagiarism is ranked with intensity from “Identity Theft” or a piece is “Insanely” plagiarized, to “Half-hearted” or “Mildly” plagiarized (Newbold, 2014). Choo and Paull (2014) urge that education of the definitions and the types of plagiarism in academia are crucial to its journey of exclusion in academic work. Not only providing the tools for understanding and effective writing, but educating students on effectively using citing tools and methods in order to effectively reduce the occurrence of dishonesty. Choo and Paull reference a study group that expressed that examples and active participation in anti-plagiarism literature helped students in understanding and preventing the act of plagiarism, even when they understood its definition before. As ignorance to the statute placed within a university’s code of conduct doesn’t suffice as an excuse in academic dishonesty,
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institutions of higher education should aim to educate and inform their students of the possible dangers and ways of reducing plagiarism in academic dishonesty and beyond.

Theoretical Perspective

In this study, a general deterrence theory will be explored in its relation to a student’s breaking and/or knowledge of an institution’s conduct code. General deterrence assumes that a body of goals or rules are placed on individuals in the assumption that these individuals will respect them and therefore make the decision not to break them. Deterrence theories suggest that individuals weigh all benefits and consequences before committing any actions, such evaluation of risks determine an individuals’ decision in committing such crimes (Tomlinson, 2016). The study proposes that students of higher education institutions will weigh the true consequences that arise with the breaking of conduct codes. As the enforcement of the codes weigh heavily on the discretion of faculty and staff of a university, students may preclude to the breaking of codes due to low instances of reporting.

Formerly known as classical theory, in efforts to deter crimes committed, punishments should be structured in ways that are swift, certain, and proportionate to the crime committed (Tomlinson, 2016). Italian philosopher, Cesare Beccaria, known for developments in this theory concluded that in deterrence, laws and consequent punishment must be clearly written and known to the public. Moreover, Beccaria noted that populations should be strictly educated and understanding of any consequences resulting from law-breaking behaviors (Tomlinson, 2016). In effectively relaying the theory into modern use within the formation of legislation, criminologists expanded on the theory in the 1970s. Theorists created assumptions in using a general deterrence method: a target is used in
relaying a message of punishment, the selected target group understands and receives the message as a threat and deterrent, and the targeted population uses messages and supporting details to make decisions in not committing crimes (Tomlinson, 2016). In congruence with punishment’s recognizable targets and consequences that deter such crimes, theorists recognize that the risk of getting “caught”, or administrative seriousness in punishing acts must also become present. This relates, in this study in the idea that both staff and administration must be transparent in the seriousness and commitment to punishing acts against an institution’s code of conduct. Tomlinson (2016) shares that when the likelihood of being caught is low, the general deterrence of the breaking of codes or laws is very low in an individual’s perception of an actual punishment. Research concludes that a certainty of punishment must always become present in the general deterrence of an act. An example is provided in the deterrence presented in the punishment of several of society’s deadly sins. Murder and homicide are a notable offense, in that many populations understand and are educated on the severity, swiftness, and proportionality of such crimes as described by Beccaria.

Likewise, in a 2015 study comparing the act of texting and driving, the author found that even with the known laws against the act 96% of survey respondents admitted to still committing the act of distracted driving (Quisenberry, 2015). Quisenberry (2015) also suggests in addition to the acknowledgement of risk in punishment, general deterrence also weighs heavily on the use of self-control in impulsive situations. Easily viewed in acting as a distracted driver, but essentially in acts including the use of illegal drugs and the even academic dishonesty, individual self-control play major roles in deterrence. As concluded by McCabe & Trevino (1997), social influences in university level students can influence
perceptions and acts against an institution’s code of conduct. Lack of self-control of peer-pressure and societal strains could even influence the general deterrence in situations alike.

As many states use punishments as threats to a targeted group of potential offenders, researchers found that the credibility and capability of these common deterrence methods determine the effectiveness of measures (Johnson, Leeds, & Wu, 2015). Even in an international view of deterrence practices, the researchers recognized the components of credibility and capability in threats are essential in preventing crimes. Furthermore, general deterrence theories and practices weigh heavily on the policy making and implications between lawmakers and university administration. As Beccaria argued in his original essay, threats must be known and educated to the public in order for probable threat to occur. Ensuring that sentencing, rehabilitation, and student conduct codes are transparent and understandable in their drafting, would be essential in their use of general deterrence.
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Methodology

Data and Sample

The research sampled students from Georgia Southern University, in Statesboro, Georgia during the Spring 2017 semester. Data were collected via electronically administered surveys distributed to professors within various colleges within the university. A sampling frame of all courses taught at the university during the selected semester was created, and then tailored to exclude online and graduate courses. Professors were then asked to share the online survey link with their students via the course’s news function on their course management software website. Courses were sampled using a convenience sampling methodology. Consisting of twenty questions, the survey was entirely confidential and voluntary.

There were a total of 130 participants in this study who were all students at the university. Data collected included several demographics including: institution classification, gender, race/ethnicity, transfer status, and major.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable analyzed in this study are the infractions of students on a college campus. This variable is measured based on a contingent survey question, “Have you ever broken a clause within the student code of conduct?” The responses to this initial question is coded as, 0= No and 1= Not sure and 2= Yes (See Figure 3). Contingent on the above survey question, if the student answered yes, they were directed to a second question that asked, “If YES, on how many instances have you initiated the above acts?” This secondary question is coded as 1= once, 2= twice, 3= three times, and 4= four or more
instances (See Figure 4). This study aimed in surveying whether a student’s knowledge of a university’s code of conduct affects their conduct breaking practices on campus.

**Independent Variables**

The primary independent variables examined in this study are an individual’s personal knowledge and understanding of the institution’s conduct code. In addition, the survey examined the knowledge of sanctions and the administering of exams evaluating students’ understanding of the code. The questionnaire asked, “Have you ever been given access to Georgia Sothern’s Student Conduct Code (e.g. via email or mail)?” coded as 0= No and 1= Yes. The administered survey also asked, “Have you read the student conduct code,” with responses coded 0= No and 1= Yes. Moreover the survey questioned participants’ understanding of the student code by asking, “Have you ever been administered a test or quiz based on your knowledge of the university’s conduct code?” The preceding is coded as 0 = No and 1 = Yes. To test the variables pertaining to a student’s knowledge of the codes disciplinary actions, the survey asked, “Are you aware of the university’s procedures for academic dishonesty?” and “To your knowledge, does the university implement any sanctions for breaking the institution’s conduct code?” The latter variable was coded as binary, thus 0= No and 1 = Yes, whereas the second was coded as 0= No, 1= Not sure, and 2= Yes.

To add, the survey also asked a series of plagiarism ‘severity’ questions in efforts to analyze students’ knowledge of plagiarism in correlation to their knowledge of the code, using severity measures presented in **Figure 1**. The five severity questions asked participants to rank each academic dishonest scenario using numbers 1-5. A ranking of 1= Not Severe, 2= Slightly Severe, 3= Neutral, 4= Moderately Severe, and 5= Most Severe.
The severity scenarios were questioned as followed: (1) A classmate of yours shared that she was going to steal, copy, or purchase someone else's paper and submit it as her own term paper, (2) You realized that the mid-term assignment that your professor has assigned has the same requirements as an assignment from one of last semester’s course. Instead of wasting your time re-doing the assignment, you simply turn in the assignment again without citing yourself, (3) The deadline for a paper was quickly approaching and your paper is for the most part done, however you have run out of time to cite your last five sources, but correctly cited everything else so you submit the assignment, (4) You cited everything in your term paper, but your professor shares that your paper still looks similar to someone else's work, and (5) You made a few mistakes within your citations. E.g. wrong words, author, page numbers, and publishers.

Lastly, the questionnaire examined several demographic variables. Participants were asked their classification measured as 0= Freshman, 1= Sophmore, 2= Junior, 3= Senior or Higher (e.g. “super senior”). Students were also asked if they were transfer students coded as 0= No and 1= Yes, in addition to gender which was measured as 0= Male and 1= Female. Race and ethnicity were measured through a check all that apply, and were subsequently coded as 0= White, 1= Black, 2= Other. Likewise, university major was obtained via an open ended question and coded as 0= Criminal Justice/ Justice Studies, 1= Psychology, 2= Other. This study examined the effects of the independent variable or the knowledge of a university’s conduct code, on the rate of misconduct on campus.

Hypotheses

The researcher hypothesized that a requirement of an exam testing a student’s knowledge of a conduct code would positively affect a student’s conduct-breaking on
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campus (thus meaning status offenses at a university). Students that comprehend guidelines will know how to accurately follow its restrictions (Ely, Henderson, & Wachsman, 2014). Students that are given the opportunity to expand their knowledge will do so in efforts to comply with the faculty and/or staff of an institution.

Likewise, following the theory of general deterrence, students would in act recognize the punishments of academic dishonesty and in weighing the consequences wouldn’t commit such acts (Tomlinson, 2016). Moreover, the knowledge of sanctions presented for non-compliance, the researchers hypothesized would also have a negative correlation to a student’s misbehavior on campus.

Lastly, the study aimed to hypothesize that the understanding of the severity placed within academic honesty infractions would have a positive correlation in the lack of plagiarism committed by participants. Administration, faculty, and/or staff have the discretion of claiming an individual in violation of a code, therefore many students are lead to believe that the risk is acceptable to take (Burrus, Graham, & Walker, 2011).

Analytic Strategy

To determine the relationship between a student’s examinations on a conduct code, the knowledge of the code, the familiarity with an institution’s guidelines and the effect it has on an individual’s breaking of a given code, a cross-tabs with a chi-square test was used to conduct a bivariate analysis. The prevalence of conduct breaking behaviors based on: reading of the student conduct code, administration of a test or quiz based on the code, awareness of the procedures associated with the student code of conduct, and familiarity
with the sanctions presented for the codes breaking are compared using a chi-square test to compare such factors to a student’s response to ever breaking a clause within the code.

**Table 1 and 2** below displays the descriptive statistics for all variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuous Variables: Severity Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min - Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steal, Copy, Purchase Paper</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1.0-5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Plagiarism</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.0-5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Citations</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.0-5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar Papers</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.0-5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few Citation Mistakes</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.0-5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dichotomous Variables</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice/Justice Studies</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses were not mutually exclusive, so scores do not sum to 100%
Table 2. Sample Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plagiarism Sanction Variables</th>
<th>Percent*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student receives a zero on assignment</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University hearing, referrals with academic affairs</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Judicial Affairs</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student fails course</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is blacklisted</td>
<td>.001%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is referred to jury of peers</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student subject 50 lashings</td>
<td>.001%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student loses one letter grade</td>
<td>.001%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student receives warning</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter is sent to students parents</td>
<td>.001%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanction at professors request</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses were not mutually exclusive, so scores do not sum to 100%
Figure 1.

Source: (Newbold, 2014).
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Figure 2.

About what percentage of Georgia Southern students plagiarize?

Figure 3.

Have you ever broken a clause within Georgia Southern's Conduct Code?
Figure 4.
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Results

Table 3 displays the percentage of plagiarism and code breaking behaviors presented based on a participants reading of the code and the administration of a test by a participants instructor. In review, 89.2% of students reported being aware of the procedures for academic dishonesty, however 44.7% of students shared that had never read the code, while 83.5% reported never taking an exam over the text. Likewise, 64.6% of students shared that to their knowledge the university does implement sanctions for the breaking of the code, while 29.2% of participants reported not being sure.

In questions involving students understanding the severity associated with scenarios of academic dishonesty, participants generally accurately ranked scenarios with the appropriate severity. In a scenario sharing “A classmate of yours shared that she was going to steal, copy, or purchase someone else’s paper, and submit it as her own term paper,” students accurately ranked this situation as being most severe with a median of 4.64 (See Table 1). However, in some instances students’ ranked severity scenarios higher than its ranking displayed in Figure 1. In stating, “You cited everything in your term paper, but your professor shares that your paper still looks similar to someone else’s work,” on average participants ranked this scenario as neutral with a median of 2.90, despite the scenario being viewed only as slightly severe (2.0) (See Table 1).

The majority of the factors examined lacked statistical significance with a student’s breaking of the conduct code. Students’ reading of the code of conduct and their subsequent breaking of the code shared a p-value = .010 (p < .05). This value indicating that the two measures are statistically significantly related. Students who read the student conduct code were less likely to have broken the code. In fact, 74% of students who read the code did
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not break it, compared with only 46% of the students who did not read the code. Interestingly, 43% of students who did not read the code were unsure whether they violated it, because they did not know what was in it. Only 17% of students who read the code were unsure whether they had broken it. Likewise, students’ access to the code was also significant with p= 0.48. All other characteristics shared values that were above a .05, eluding to their lack of statistical significance.
### Table 3. Sample Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>No % (N)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (N)</th>
<th>Yes % (N)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Given access to the code</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27 (20.8%)</td>
<td>85% (23)</td>
<td>7.5% (2)</td>
<td>7.5% (2)</td>
<td>p = .048*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>103 (79.2%)</td>
<td>61% (63)</td>
<td>29% (30)</td>
<td>10% (10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Read the conduct code</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46 (44.7%)</td>
<td>46% (21)</td>
<td>43% (20)</td>
<td>11% (5)</td>
<td>p = .010*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57 (55.3%)</td>
<td>74% (42)</td>
<td>17% (10)</td>
<td>9% (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administered a test or quiz on code</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>86 (83.5%)</td>
<td>57% (49)</td>
<td>34% (29)</td>
<td>9% (8)</td>
<td>p = .069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17 (16.5%)</td>
<td>82% (14)</td>
<td>6% (1)</td>
<td>12% (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aware of procedures for academic dishonesty</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14 (10.8%)</td>
<td>65% (9)</td>
<td>21% (3)</td>
<td>14% (2)</td>
<td>p = .776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>116 (89.2%)</td>
<td>66% (77)</td>
<td>25% (29)</td>
<td>9% (10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are there sanctions for breaking code</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8 (6.2%)</td>
<td>87.5% (7)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>p = .392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>38 (29.2%)</td>
<td>71% (27)</td>
<td>24% (9)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>84 (64.6%)</td>
<td>62% (52)</td>
<td>27% (23)</td>
<td>11% (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Variables are statistically significant, p<.05
Knowledge of the Student Conduct Code

Discussion

History supports an abundance of literature and research on conduct breaking behaviors and acts alike. Research even dating back to the groundbreaking days of many of this nation's universities, cite the use of student codes of conduct and sanctions in keeping students accountable in their actions. This research utilized a sample of college students currently attending Georgia Southern University. The study aimed in gaining knowledge of students’ understanding of the institution’s code of conduct and their subsequent behaviors according to the code. Analyzing student perceptions of university sanctions for dishonesty, the amount of plagiarism appeared to be on campus, and a participants understanding of the code was the goal in this research.

Findings support that many (79.2%) students are aware of the code’s existence and even credit the university in providing access to the document (Table 3). However, only 55.3% of students participating in the study reported ever reading the code, leaving nearly half of the participants without reading and analyzing the important document. Despite a lack in reading, 89.2% of students shared that they are aware of the procedures the university may take in instances of academic dishonesty. To further explore students’ knowledge of such procedures, the participants were asked, “What is the university’s punishment for plagiarism?” As responses varied, 37% of students responded in the institution’s use of expulsion in any occurrence of plagiarism (See Table 2). As displayed in Figures 2 and 3, although only 12 students reported ever breaking a clause with the code of conduct, 73 (56.2%) students perceived that between 0-30 percent of students commit some form of plagiarism on campus in which eluding to a possible higher percentage of misconduct in which was not self-reported. Alike, of those that shared of having broken
the code, eight students had committed academic dishonesty once, while four had committed two or more times (See Figure 4).

Conversely, the Student Conduct Code published by the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at Georgia Southern University share that in many instances first offense acts should be handled between student and professor (2016). Expulsion is only mentioned within a violating student’s second offense of dishonesty and referral to the Office of Student Conduct, and in addition under the discretion of a designated sanction officer. Likewise, even in second offense violations within academic dishonesty, the code preludes that the conduct board will aim to present the best sanction that assists the student, professor, and the university’s overall learning community. So as many students share a sense of understanding of the code and its sanctions, it is quite clear that a divide serves in the lack of understanding and possibly the retention of what the code details. As shown in Table 3, breaking of the conduct code appeared to be statistically significant to those whom did or did not read the university’s code. With a p-value = .010, we can suggest that students’ reading and furthermore understanding of the code does influence their decision in breaking and or violating this document. Likewise, students’ knowledge in the personal accessibility of the document showed statistical significance with a p-value= .048. Thus eluding to in addition to a student’s reading of the code, the perceptions of their personal ability to obtain such a document influence the breaking of the code of conduct (See Table 3).

Severity and the use the “Did I plagiarize?” chart (Figure 1) also play a strong role in understanding student’s perceptions of cheating. As mentioned earlier, students appeared to have a great understanding in the risks and seriousness associated with forms
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of academic dishonesty. In the scenario of a student stealing, copying, or purchasing a paper as a form of plagiarism, 44.7% of participants who responded appropriately as the scenario being most severe responded to never have reading the code of conduct. In the methods of general deterrence in academic dishonesty, other factors weigh into the act of plagiarism or cheating. As Kelli Tomlinson (2016) concludes in her research, a lack of credibility in sanctions in code violations affect an individual’s deterrence in such acts. So as the university strives to create a code that is centered to protect all those within the campus community, a lack of implementation of guidelines can in return reduce the use of deterrence in the guidelines written within the document.

Left better said, the implementation for guidelines written within a conduct code tend to fall mainly on the reporting of faculty and staff. Authors Judith Gullifer and Graham Tyson (2010) share that the time it tends to take instructors to catch and refer a student for academic dishonesty tends to become a great burden. The enforcement, catching, and reporting of academic dishonesty could also vary with a professor’s seniority within the university, age, and even experience (Burrus, Graham, and Walker, 2011). To add, research even supports the fact that gender may be a factor, in female professor being stricter in their plagiarism adjudications (Burrus, Graham, and Walker, 2011).

In all, as the research within this study indicates the original hypothesis is not supported. Students’ examination of code has little to no effect on their breaking of a code, as shown in Table 3. Providing a p-value = .069 when comparing the factor of code testing with breaking a clause within the conduct code, these two variables are not statistically significantly or related. A lack of examination, with 83.5% of students never being provided an exam covering the content within the code, may account for the disparity in
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significance. However, as the university strives to be inclusive in the accessibility of the code by publishing a copy online and sending students a copy via email annually, 20.8% of the participants reported not ever given access to the document. Which subsequently led a statistically significant value in comparison to ever breaking the code (Table 3).
Limitations & Conclusion

As this study strived to take a comprehensive look at the prevalence and perceptions a university’s code of conduct, further research is necessary. Academic dishonesty serves as one of most commonly broken clauses within a code of conduct, however it is not the only violation. The survey was unable to capture faculty and staff perception of such a particular issue of dishonesty. As Gullifer and Tyson (2010) suggest, that the strain placed on instructors to catch and challenge instances of academic dishonesty within the classroom, can become extremely difficult. Further research comparing a professor’s perceptions of acting and preventing code breaking behaviors, could assist in comparing whether Kelli Tomlinson’s (2016) notation of credibility in the deterrence of such violations weigh in students conduct breaking behaviors.

Additionally, the sample and its size presented within the study may have affected its results. In comparing or analyzing the perceptions seen by students within the university, a sample size greater than n = 130, may assist in producing more valid and robust findings. Future research should strive to increase the response rate of students. With such a small sample group, data could possibly lack representation of a larger university and their own perceptions. Yielding a greater number of students accurately reporting their code infractions, a sample size larger than 12 as shown in Figure 4. In addition, convenience sampling was employed. Future research should use random sampling methodologies to enable researchers to draw inferences about larger populations of students with various majors and backgrounds. Thus allowing data to subsequently cover greater and more diverse populations.
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In recommendation subsequent to this research, we agree with authors Teh Eng Choo and Megan Paull (2013) in expanding the learning experience within universities by providing literature and lecture on the effects, importance, and way to prevent academic dishonesty within the classroom. We suggest that Georgia Southern University takes on the challenge of educating students on the code and what it entails. Without limiting these methods just to academic dishonesty, educating students about the conduct code may assist in reducing the use of conduct boards and even provide a leading example of the expectations required within a world post-graduation. Also, attacking the issue of faculty and staff reporting on the issue research addressing a professor standpoint could become beneficial in understanding reasons in which students’ don’t engage within the code. As testing of the code was not statistically significant to the breaking of the code, there was also a lack of testing among students whom participated within the study. Implementing such measures may assist students in gaining more knowledge of its contents and further sanctions. Ely et. al. (2014) concluded within their research that students whom read and understood an honor code before taking an examination were less likely to cheat or attempt break the code compared to those that did not engage in its reading. Creating a system in which such students are taught and encouraged to retain what is displayed within the code of conduct, preceded with exit exams during first-year experience courses stands as a recommendation for increasing the awareness of the code amongst students.

As Choo and Paull mention, universities serve as learning institution’s, which should be the outlook in providing additional measure to assist students of the code of conduct. Ignorance of the law or of the student code of conduct is never an excuse in
violation, however in an academic as such we recommend that the university take curriculum adding measures that assist in creating:

“A student-centered University [committed] to developing and establishing programs designed to enhance lifelong learning opportunities, foster a climate for personal growth and development, set high expectations for personal integrity, and assist students in the development of an informed set of values, ethics, and beliefs” (Georgia Southern University, 2016, p. 1).
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References


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Georgia Southern University. (2016). Student conduct code. Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management.


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https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372


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Appendix I

Please read the following carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to ask students of this university to share their knowledge and understanding of the student code of conduct and their perceptions of academic dishonesty.

Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to answer questions related to your knowledge of the student conduct code and the presence of academic dishonesty on campus. This questionnaire will be completely anonymous and confidential and will not ask for your name or any similar identifiers. Non-faculty researchers are required to archive all collected data sets for a minimum of 3 years. After 3 years, subjects’ responses in their entirety will be destroyed and deleted by all researchers.

Discomforts and Risks: The topics covered in this survey may be considered sensitive in nature. If at any time during the survey you experience any emotional distress, please stop your participation and contact the Georgia Southern University Counseling Center at 912-478-5541.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, the benefits to society include increased knowledge of academic dishonesty and the potential role of the student conduct code in reducing dishonest behavior.

Time required: 5-15 minutes

Confidentiality: Your identity will not be identified in this survey, so the information you provide will be anonymous and kept confidential. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

Right to Ask Questions: If you have questions about this study, please contact one of the researchers named below whose contact information is located at the end of this informed consent document. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-5465.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You can choose to skip any question on the survey at any time.

This project has been reviewed and assigned by the Georgia Southern University's IRB with tracking number H17137.
1. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please select "I agree to the above terms."
   Mark only one oval.
   ☐ I agree to the above terms
   ☐ I do not agree to the terms above, and wish to discontinue my participation.

2. Have you ever been given access to Georgia Southern's Student Conduct Code (e.g., via email or mail)?
   Mark only one oval.
   ☐ NO  Skip to question 5.
   ☐ YES  Skip to question 3.

3. Have you read the university's student code of conduct?
   Mark only one oval.
   ☐ NO
   ☐ YES

4. Have you ever been administered a test or quiz based on your knowledge of the university's conduct code?
   Mark only one oval.
   ☐ NO  Skip to question 5.
   ☐ YES  Skip to question 5.

5. Are you aware of the university's procedures for academic dishonesty?
   Mark only one oval.
   ☐ NO
   ☐ YES

6. To your knowledge, does the university implement any sanctions for breaking the institution's conduct code?
   Mark only one oval.
   ☐ NO
   ☐ YES
   ☐ NOT SURE
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7. What is the university’s punishment for plagiarism?

8. Based on your own knowledge, about what percentage of Georgia Southern students plagiarize?
   Mark only one oval.
   - 0-30%
   - 31-40%
   - 41-50%
   - 50-74%
   - 75% or more students

9. Have you ever broken a clause within Georgia Southern’s Student Conduct Code?
   Mark only one oval.
   - NO
   - YES Skip to question 13.
   - NOT SURE

Severity
Rat the following scenarios 1-5, 1 being less severe and 5 being highly severe.

10. A classmate of yours shared that she was going to steal, copy, or purchase someone else’s paper and submit it as her own term paper.
    Mark only one oval.
    
    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
    |---|---|---|---|---|
    | Not Severe | | | | Highly Severe |

11. You realized that the mid-term assignment that your professor has assigned has the same requirements as an assignment from one of last semester’s course. Instead of wasting your time re-doing the assignment, you simply turn in the assignment again without citing yourself.
    Mark only one oval.
    
    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
    |---|---|---|---|---|
    | Not Severe | | | | Highly Severe |
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12. The deadline for a paper was quickly approaching and your paper is for the most part is done, however you have run out of time to cite your last five sources, but correctly cited everything else so you submit the assignment.
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Severe Highly Severe

13. You cited everything in your term paper, but your professor shares that your paper still looks similar to someone else’s work.
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Severe Highly Severe

14. You made a few mistakes within your citations, e.g. wrong words, author, page numbers, publishers.
Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Severe Highly Severe

Skip to question 16.

15. About how many times have you plagiarized, while attending Georgia Southern University?
Mark only one oval.

□ Once Skip to question 10.
□ Twice Skip to question 10.
□ Three times Skip to question 10.
□ Four or more instances Skip to question 10.

Demographics

16. What is your classification?
Mark only one oval.

□ Freshman
□ Sophomore
□ Junior
□ Senior or higher (e.g. “super senior”)
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17. What is your gender?
   Mark only one oval.
   [ ] Female
   [ ] Male
   [ ] Other:

18. Are you a transfer student?
   Mark only one oval.
   [ ] YES
   [ ] NO

19. What is your race/ethnicity? Please check all that apply.
   Check all that apply:
   [ ] Alaskan Native/ Native American
   [ ] Asian/ Pacific Islander
   [ ] Black/ African American
   [ ] Hispanic/ Latino/a
   [ ] White/ Caucasian

20. What is your major?