

Cheating Scenario Discussion Starters

Research shows that students cheat for three main reasons: first, they are under a great deal of pressure and feel that that without cheating they will not pass or achieve their grade objectives. Second, they may be asked by a peer to “help” them on an exam or assignment. Finally, if students perceive that others are cheating, they can feel the need to “level the playing field”.

Use the following to start an in-class or on-line discussion with your class about cheating. Help them see what cheating is, and help them understand strategies to avoid cheating.

Being Influenced by Peers

Ethics Exam Discussion

Ryan walked into his business ethics exam with a stomach full of butterflies. He took a seat at the back of the class and kept his head down. All he could think about was a conversation he had with Shauna, another ethics student before they walked in the door. “Be sure to look my way during the exam.” Shauna told him, “I might need help because I didn’t have time to study.” “What do I do?” Ryan wondered, as Shauna slipped into the seat beside him.

1. Is this an ethical decision?
2. What should Ryan do during the exam?
3. What should Ryan do after the exam?

Finance exam panic

Alex was in a panic. She had left studying for her finance exam to the last minute because of three back-to-back assignments. Working through the chapter questions she knew she was in big trouble. She had to get 75% on the on-line homework questions in order for the exam to “open”. So far, at 9:00 pm she had only achieved a 65% on the homework questions and the exam was only open until 11:00 pm. She texted her friend Sophie, a finance whiz: “can u help me answer these homework questions?”

1. Is this an ethical decision?
2. What should Sophie do?
3. What could Alex have done to avoid this situation?

Leveling the Playing Field

Exam Party

Matt texted Toni back “Sure, I’m in” he said. Toni had asked Matt if he wanted to participate in the Accounting Attack(AA) party. The AA group of five students would be online with each other during the Accounting final exam. They agreed to share answers and work on tough problems together. “It was only fair,” Matt reasoned. The accounting prof warned them that the exam would be harder than usual to account for all the resources they could use during an on-line exam. “Why not use each other?” He asked. Besides, if the group was working together and he didn’t participate, he would be at a disadvantage.

1. Is this an ethical decision?

2. What are Matt's options if he chooses not to participate in the AA party?
3. What risk is Matt taking by joining the AA party?

Hire a Writer

"I can't believe he got away with that." Maddy fumed. "I know he copied that essay from somewhere. He's a terrible writer. And now he's sitting with an A and I'm sitting at an A-. I have to do better on this next assignment. I'm getting outside help. Where's that link to the essay writing company...?"

1. Is this an ethical decision?
2. What is driving Maddy's behaviour?
3. What other options does Maddy have in this situation?

Unsigned Pledge/Declaration

Courtney dropped her exam on the pile at the front of the room and rushed out of the classroom. She had left the cover sheet unsigned and now she wondered what would happen. All Business students had to sign the front page of their exams to declare that they had not participated in or witnessed cheating in an exam. "I know what I saw" Courtney said to herself. I won't tell though, unless they ask me why I didn't sign my declaration. It is their policy, so they need to come find me and make sure I signed it."

1. Is this an ethical decision?
2. Is Courtney's method of reporting cheating the best solution to the problem?
3. What should the professor do when they find an unsigned declaration?

After students have discussed the prompts above, facilitate a large class discussion with the following questions:

1. What initiated the cheating situation? How can students avoid these kinds of situations?
2. What is the student's responsibility regarding cheating?
3. What should faculty members do about cheating?
4. What are the repercussions of cheating at university?

