

## Cheaters Amok

### A Crisis in America's Schools — How It's Done and Why It's Happening

ABCNEWS.com

April 29— Angelo Angelis, a professor at Hunter College in New York City, was recently grading some student papers on the story of Paul Revere when he noticed something strange. A certain passage kept appearing in his students' work, he said

It went like this, Angelis told *Primetime's* Charles Gibson: "Paul Revere would never have said, 'The British are coming, the British are coming,' he was in fact himself British, he would have said something like, 'the Red Coats are coming.'"

Angelis typed the words into Google, and found the passage on one Web site by a fifth-grade class. Half a dozen of his college students had copied their work from a bunch of elementary school kids, he thought.

The Web site was very well done, Angelis said. For fifth graders, he would give them an "A." But his college students deserved an "F".

Lifting papers off the Internet is one of the newer trends in plagiarism — and technology is giving students even more ways to cheat nowadays. Authoritative numbers are hard to come by, but according to a 2002 confidential survey of 12,000 high school students, 74 percent admitted cheating on an examination at least once in the past year.

In a six-month investigation, *Primetime* traveled to colleges and high schools across the country to see how students are cheating, and why. The bottom line is not just that many students have more temptation — but they seem to have a whole new mindset.

### Get Real

Joe is a student at a top college in the Northeast who admits to cheating regularly. Like all of the college students who spoke to *Primetime*, he wanted his identity obscured.

In Joe's view, he's just doing what the rest of the world does.

"The real world is terrible," he told Gibson. "People will take other people's materials and pass it on as theirs. I'm numb to it already. I'll cheat to get by."

*Primetime* heard the same refrain from many other students who cheat: that cheating in school is a dress rehearsal for life. They mentioned President Clinton's Monica Lewinsky scandal and financial scandals like the Enron case, as well as the inconsistencies of the court system.

"Whether or not you did it or not, if you can get the jury to say that you're not guilty, you're free," said Will, a student at one of the top public high schools in the nation.

Mary, a student at a large university in the South, said, "A lot of people think it's like you're not really there to learn anything. You're just learning to learn the system."

Michael Josephson, founder of the Josephson Institute for Ethics, the Los Angeles-based organization that conducted the 2002 survey, said students take their lead from adults.

"They're basically decent kids whose values are being totally corrupted by a world which is sanctioning stuff that even they know is wrong. But they can't understand why everybody allows it."

### **An Issue of Expediency**

Even if the world were more ethical, students still have reasons for cheating. Some said they cheat because they're graded on a curve — so that their score is directly affected by how other students do.

"There's other people getting better grades than me and they're cheating. Why am I not going to cheat? It's kind of almost stupid if you don't," said Joe.

The pressure for good grades is high. "Grades can determine your future, and if you fail this then you're not going on to college, you're going to work at McDonald's and live out of a car," said high school student Spike.

A business student at a top state university, said, "Everything is about the grade that you got in the class. Nobody looks at how you got it." He graduates in a few weeks and will go on to a job with a top investment firm.

Others see it as a sort of moral relativity. Some students feel it is perfectly OK to cheat in some situations and in some courses.

"You'll have an engineer say, 'You know, what do I need to know about English literature? I shouldn't have to take this course,' " said Don McCabe, a professor who heads the center for academic integrity at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

For Mary's classmate Pam, it was a different sort of prioritizing. "You don't want to be a dork and study for eight hours a day. You want to go out and have fun."

And some professors make it easy, students said. They overlook even the most obvious instances.

In fact, McCabe says, a survey of more than 4,000 U.S. and Canadian schools revealed half of all faculty members admitted ignoring cheating at least once.

### **Tech War**

Still, one of the main elements of cheating is doing it in secret. There are the tried and true methods:

- Many sororities and fraternities maintain a file of term papers for reuse — take one, turn it in.
- The old rubber band trick — stretch one out and write everything you need on it, and when it shrinks back to shape, no one will be the wiser.

But students today also have more technologically sophisticated options open to them:

- A favorite device is the graphing calculator, which most professors allow students to bring into an exam ... and into which students can download all kinds of material.
- Another is an iPAQ — a handheld computer similar to a Palm Pilot — which can also download information.

- Cell phones — to take pictures of notes, or among the more wily, to text-message friends for answers.
- Even a two-way pager can be used to cheat. For one student whose campus has wireless Internet access, he used it as a mini-computer to access the entire Internet during his test.
- And then there are Internet-based clearing houses for term papers, such as Papers4Less, Cheathouse.com and Schoolsucks.com.

Fortunately, educators have technological options too. Schools have been subscribing to a service called Turnitin.com, which can help teachers compare students' papers to all the available literature in its database.

"It's typically 30 percent of all the papers submitted have significant levels of plagiarism," said John Barrie, founder of Turnitin.com.

### **Where Is the Tipping Point?**

"We are in a crisis," said Josephson. But he added, "I don't think it has to stay that way."

He said he was waiting for the tipping point, like Enron with business ethics, where there would be a sea change in attitudes towards cheating.

An ABCNEWS poll found hopeful signs — but worrying ones as well.

In a random sample of high school students aged 15 to 17, 36 percent admitted to having cheated themselves — fewer than in Josephson's survey.

But seven in 10 kids also say they have friends who cheat, and only one-third of students have ever had a serious talk with their parents about cheating.

"We need to promote integrity. We need to get students to understand why integrity is important — as opposed to policing dishonesty and then punishing that dishonesty. Because they can beat the system," McCabe said.

Josephson emphasized that college teaches students many things: how to learn, behave, overcome challenges, and succeed.

"And if they approach it honestly, they'll learn far more in college than they think they can," he said. "But more than that, they'll come out of it better, stronger people."