Academic Integrity in Health Science Education

Nicole Macko and Camille Hondromaras
Faculty Advisor: Sheryl Goss, MS, R.T.(ARRT), RDMS, RDCS, RVS, RVT, FSDMS

**MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY®**

Introduction

- Academic integrity is defined as "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. From these values flow principles of behavior that enable academic communities to translate ideals into action". On the other hand, cheating is defined on a continuum based on intent, ranging from negligent or accidental, to dishonest. Academic misconduct has persisted in postsecondary education, with rates of serious cheating in the United States increasing from 75% to 82% among students, over a thirty-year time frame. Individuals who engage in academic misconduct and who admit to cheating are more likely to engage in misconduct in their employment.
- The most prevalent types of cheating are collaborating on homework assignments when not allowed and getting exam questions or answers from another student who has already taken the exam. While academic integrity is a core tenet in higher education, colleges and universities continuously find themselves having to educate students on academic ethics and working to remediate their transgression.
- Employability is defined as the "possession of basic "core-skills", or an extended set of generic attributes, or attributes that a type of employer specifies". Employability hinges largely on skill development and employers are increasingly expecting graduates to be job ready. Of all the skills that graduates are expected to have, oral and written communication are ranked amongst the highest.
  - A significant and rising percentage of students with a university degree that do not have employment in their area of study within 12 months of graduation has been related back to academic misconduct in the sense that students are not retaining the information that is required of them at their desired place of employment.
- A major problem in tertiary education that has been affecting work-readiness is a frequently reported gap between teaching in formal environments, face-to-face, or online. These education standards do not align with the real world of work. To address the gap between working and learning, work integrated learning is being incorporated. A bigger focus on authentic learning activities and authentic assessment has been placed, so that students develop the skills and practices that they will need in their future careers.
- Students are allowed to demonstrate their critical thinking skills and prove to employers that they are in fact ready for the real world. Authenticity of assessment may hold the key to reducing academic misconduct (Medina).
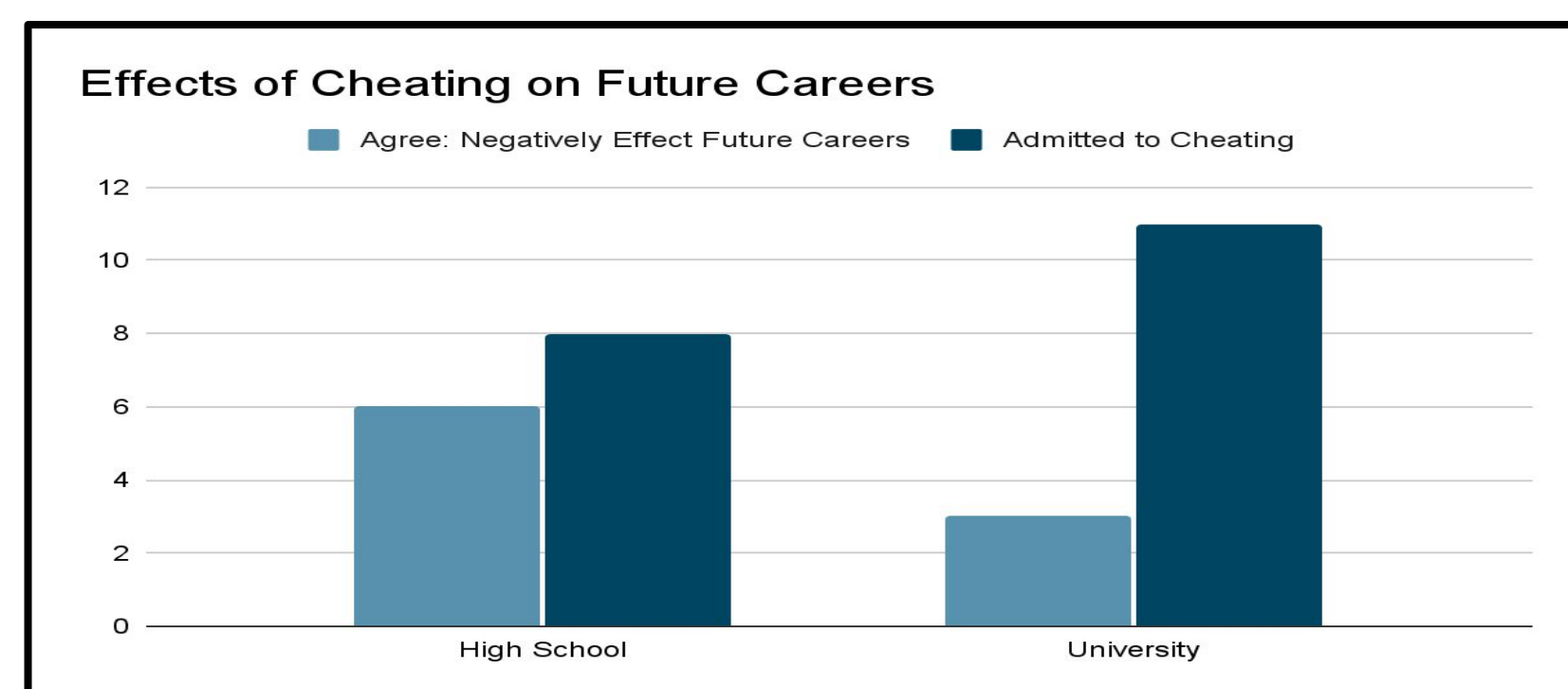
Methods

- A qualitative approach was used for this study.
- A survey was created by student researchers with questions that were pertaining to academic integrity and factors that would influence the participants decisions.
- The participants were given clear instructions to answer the questions truthfully while remaining anonymous.
- The known population consisted of Diagnostic Medical Sonography students, Health Science students enrolled at Misericordia University, as well as high school students.
- The population selected was via contacts to the researchers and expanded through the request of those contacts to share with other students who they were acquainted with.

Data and Results
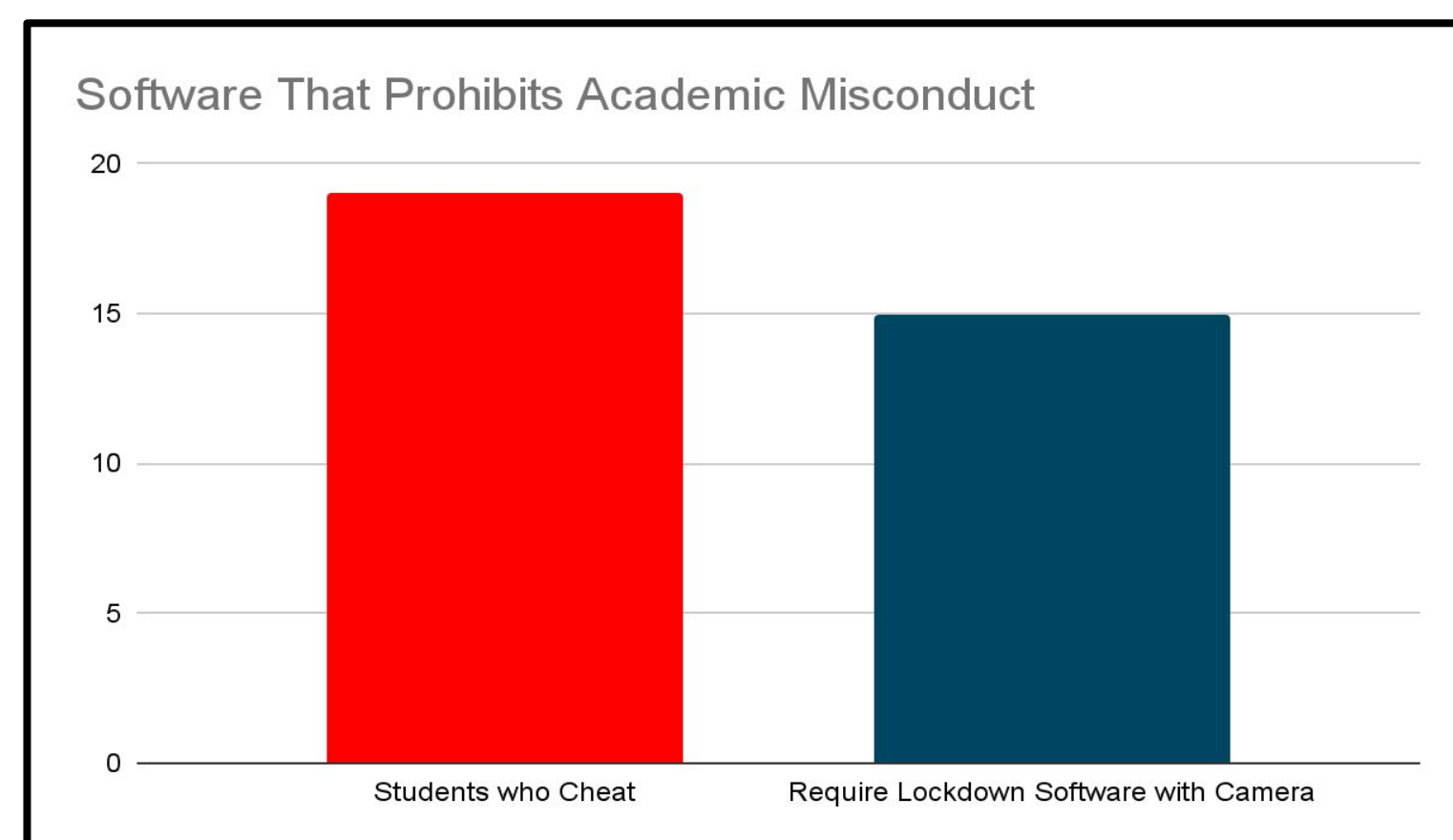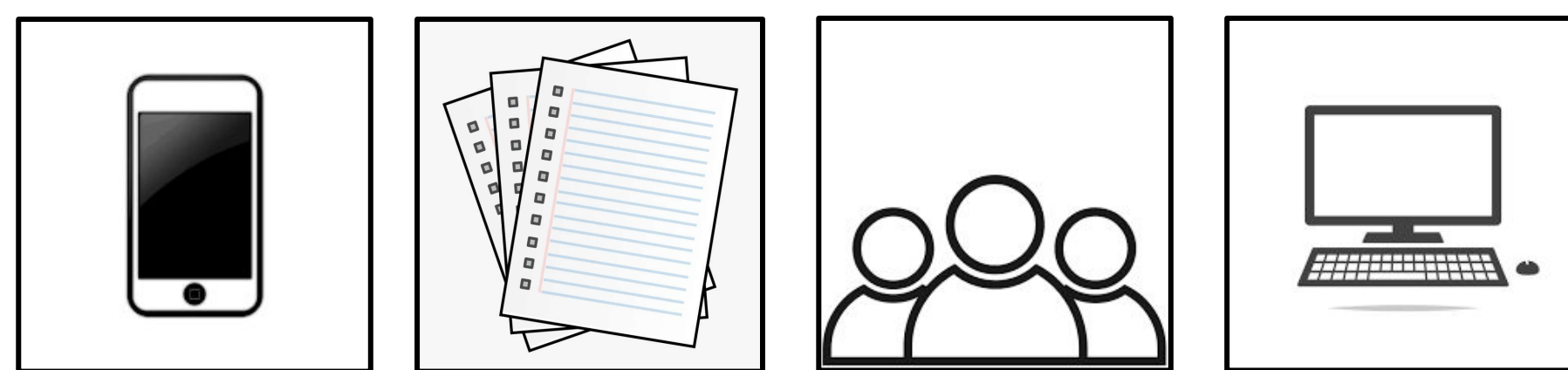
- **A total of 39 responses were recorded from the survey.**

Students that Admitted to Academic Misconduct

■ Students who Cheat ■ Students who Do Not Cheat
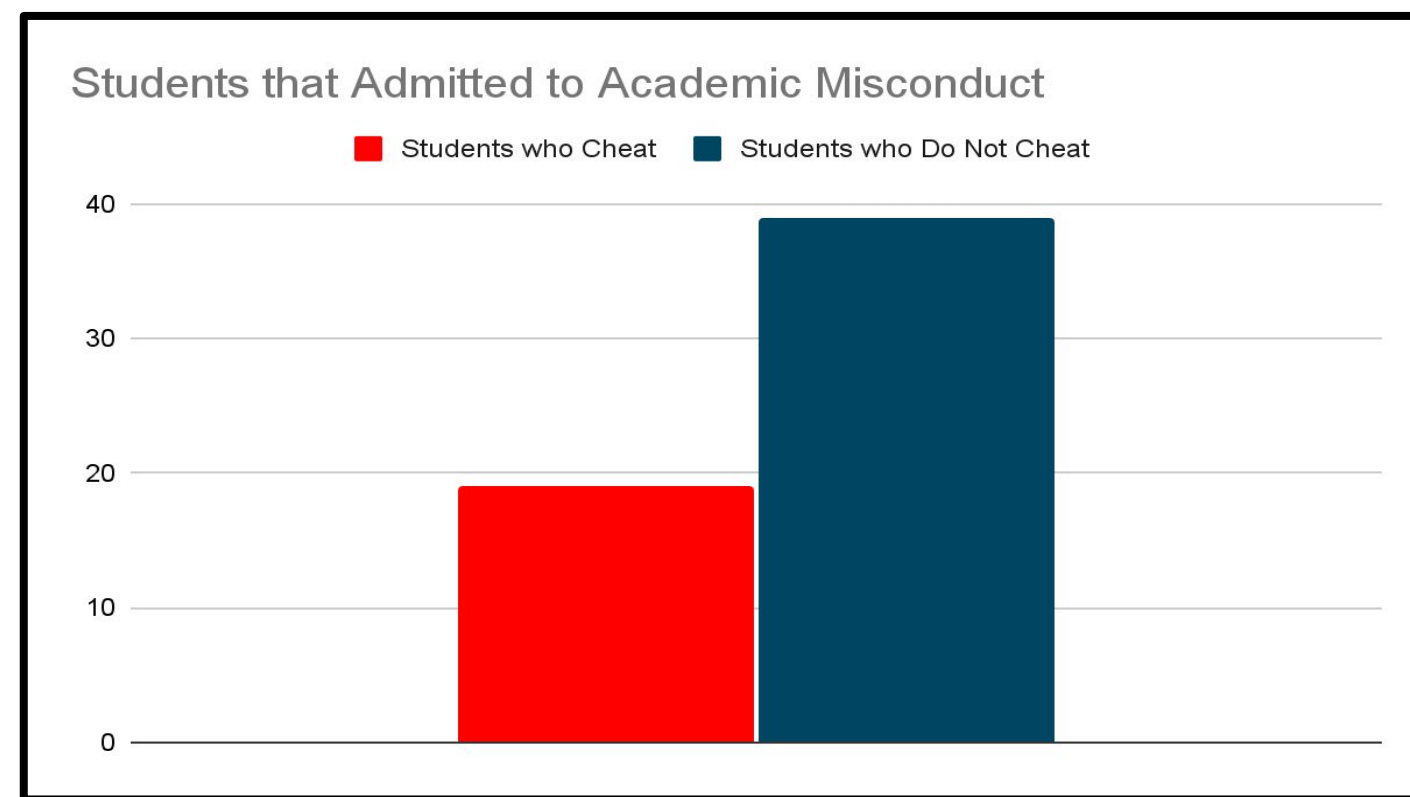
- **Of the 39 Students who participated in the survey:**
  - **19 Students admitted to Cheating**
  - **20 Students claimed they have never cheated**

Effects of Cheating on Future Careers

■ Agree: Negatively Effect Future Careers ■ Admitted to Cheating
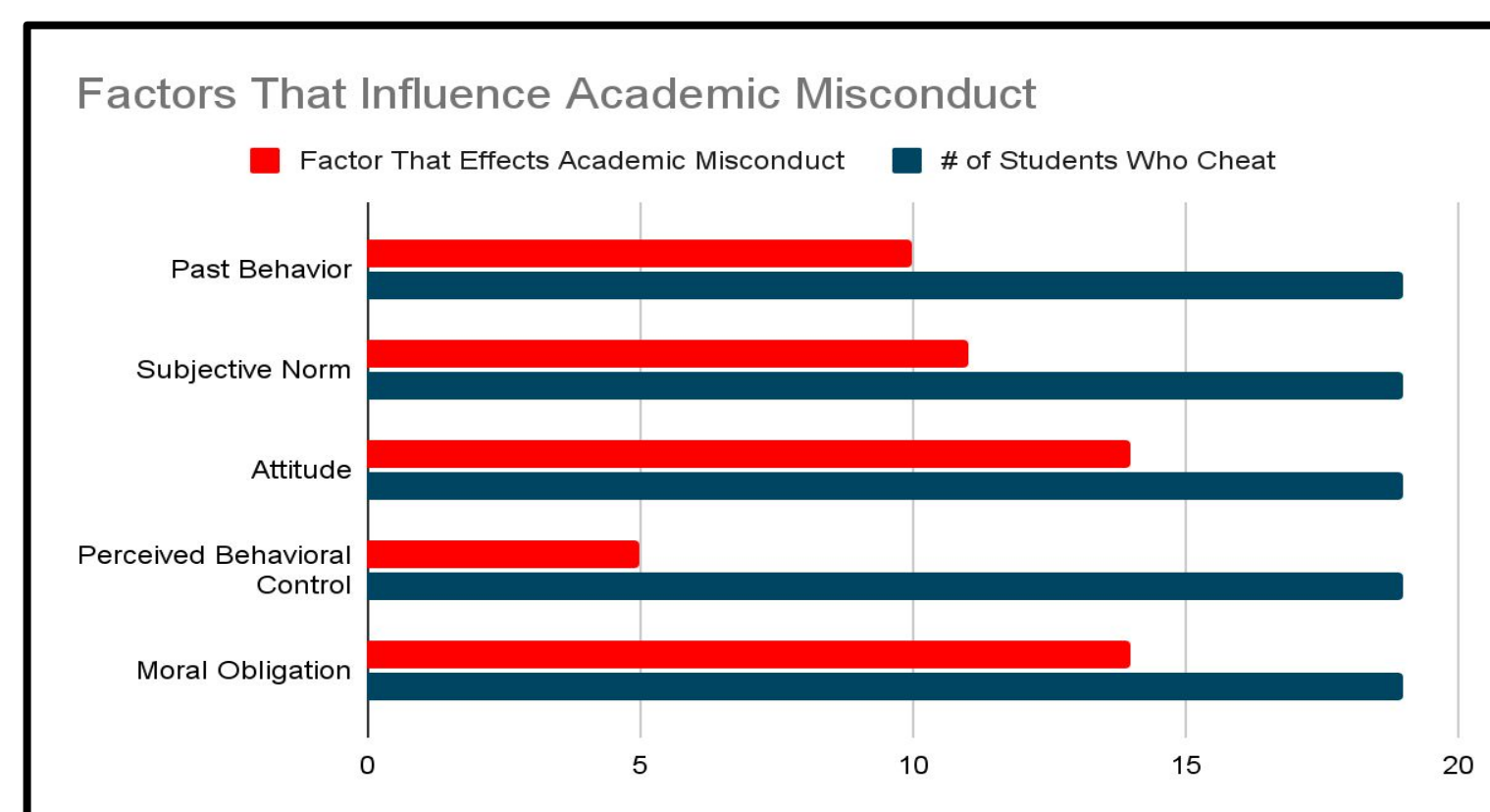
High School | University

- Out of the 19 students who admitted to cheating:
  - **8 were high school students**
    - Out of the 8 students 6 believed academic dishonesty had the potential to negatively affect their future career
  - **11 were college students**
    - Out of the 11 students 3 believed academic dishonesty had the potential to negatively affect their future career

What means did you use to cheat?

Software That Prohibits Academic Misconduct

Students who Cheat | Require Lockdown Software with Camera

- Of the 19 students who admitted to academic misconduct, 17 of those students were required to use a lockdown software that is enforced to enhance integrity.

Factors That Influence Academic Misconduct

■ Factor That Effects Academic Misconduct ■ # of Students Who Cheat

Past Behavior
Subjective Norm
Attitude
Perceived Behavioral Control
Moral Obligation

- **10 students** claimed their past behavior of academic dishonesty has led them to cheat in the present
- **11 students** believe that their academic misconduct is justified since their peers do it also
- **14 students** believe that cheating is wrong
- **5 students** believe if they have the ability to cheat on an assignment then they should take it
- **14 students** believe it would be morally wrong to cheat on assignments

Discussion

Goal

The goal of this research was to determine the prevalence of academic misconduct, the variety of modes used to break academic integrity, the rationale behind it per individual, and how these answers could influence future careers.

Influential Factors of Academic Misconduct

- **Past Behavior**
  - Cheating habits are more likely to develop in high school. Individuals with higher incidences of past academic integrity violation behavior will exhibit higher intentions to commit these violations in the future.
  - Of the 19 students who admitted to cheating, 10 of them felt their past behavior contributed to their continuation of cheating.
- **Subjective Norm**
  - Subjective norms are a "function of the normative beliefs that people relevant to an individual are perceived as having toward the behavior of that individual, coupled with the motivation of that individual to comply with the expected norms of these relevant persons" (Yang).
  - Peers are powerful influencers as is a strong ethical environment.
  - Of the 19 students who admitted to cheating, 11 of them believe that the normalized academic misconduct from their peers has played a role in their academic dishonesty.
- **Attitude**
  - If a student holds the belief that cheating is not wrong, or that the consequences are not severe, it is more likely that intention to cheat will be higher. Conversely, if a student holds the belief that cheating is wrong, or that the consequences are severe, it is more likely that the intention to cheat will be lower.
  - Of the 19 students who admitted to cheating, 14 of them believe cheating is wrong.
- **Perceived Behavioral Control**
  - Perceived behavioral control is the "perceived ease or difficulty in performing the behavior" (Yang).
  - Some students may cheat, for the fact that they have easy access to the materials needed.
  - High levels of perceived behavioral control may reflect weaker preventive measures and/or artifacts of a "culture" of cheating, such as lax monitoring, test and paper banks, and access to instructor resources.
  - Of the 19 students who admitted to cheating, 5 students believe that if they have the opportunity to cheat on an assignment then they should take it.
- **Moral Obligation**
  - Moral obligation "refers to the feeling of guilt or personal obligation to perform or not to perform a behavior" (Yang).
  - Thus, the greater the individual perceives an anticipated sense of guilt or the lower the perceived obligation to perform the behavior, the less likely the intention to commit academic violations.
  - Of the 19 students who admitted to cheating, 14 of them believe it is morally wrong to cheat.
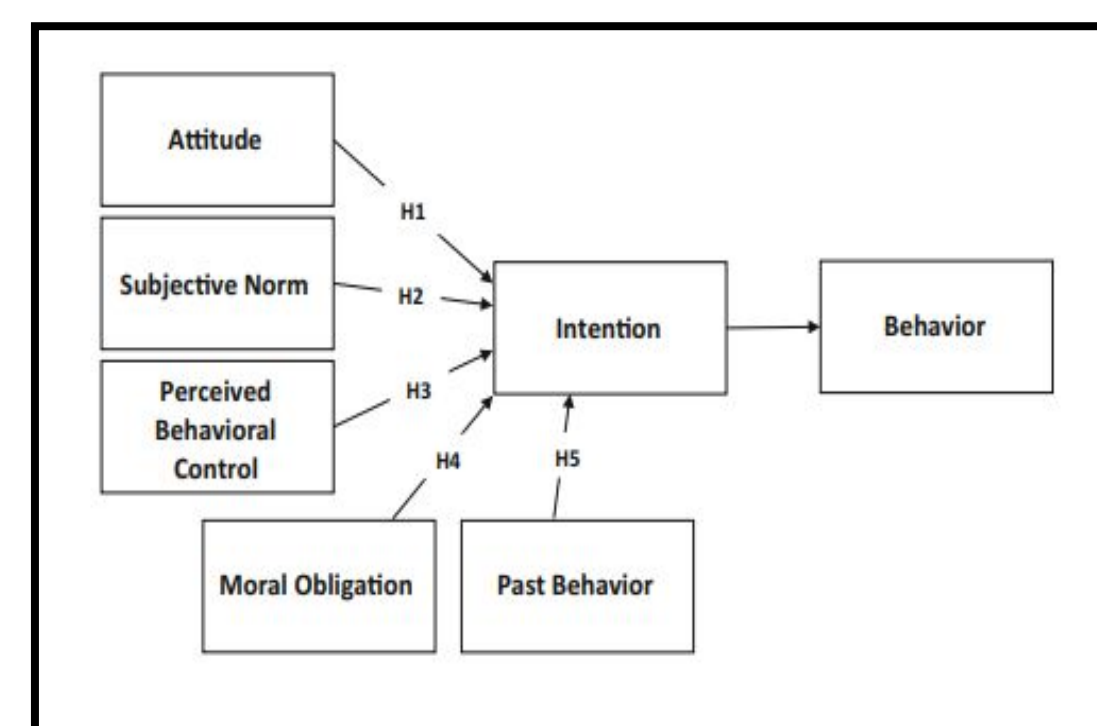
Authentic Assessment

- Employability hinges largely on skill development and employers are increasingly expecting graduates to be job ready.
- University educators have responded by placing a bigger focus on authentic learning activities and authentic assessment, so that students develop the skills and practices that they will need in their future careers.
- Authentic assessment focuses on learners using and applying knowledge and skills in real-life settings. This contrasts more traditional forms of assessment, such as essays and examinations, which have no specific application in most real-world settings that have been known to have higher rates of academic violations.
- Well-designed authentic assessments help "learners contextualize their learning and see how real-life situations, in all their unpredictability, ambiguity and complexity, complement their theoretical knowledge".
- As students are required to personally engage in the collection of evidence and information in support of their assessment, authenticity of assessment may hold the key to reducing academic misconduct and, in particular, outsourcing assignments to third parties.

Prevention

- Faculty and preceptors play a vital role in maintaining academic integrity.
- The prevention and identification of cheating are valuable beyond the academic setting due to the fact that studies have found that "students who demonstrate academic misconduct in school are more likely to demonstrate future professional misconduct, such as committing or failing to report fraudulent or illegal activity, and to deliver a reduced quality of patient care" (AJHP).
- The goal of raising faculty and preceptors' awareness of cheating is to encourage them to be proactive instead of reactive.
- Despite best efforts of discouraging cheating through use of lockdown browser, 17 students found ways to cheat while having their computer in lockdown software.

Limitations

As with many studies, the design of the current study is subject to limitations. This research was done with a small sample size of high school and college students. A sample size that is too small reduces the power of the study and increases the margin of error, which can render the study meaningless. The studies population of college students were found to only attend Misericordia University, with more than half of the participants studying health sciences. Misericordia University programs and professors can have different views on academic misconduct than other institutions; therefore, the way academic misconduct is portrayed can influence the findings of the study. In future research this could be improved by including a larger participant population with varying educational levels, academic institutions, and majors. The integrity of each participant was also known to be a limitation. Although there was reassurance that answers would remain anonymous, the fear of consequences for answering honestly could persuade their answer.

1. **The need for honesty**

2. **Small sample size**

3. **College students were all from Misericordia University**
   - **Programs at this facility can express their views on academic misconduct differently than others**

4. **Majority of participants are college students**

Conclusion

- Academic misconduct is on the rise and has increased from 75%-82% in the past thirty years.
- The study conducted demonstrated that although there is software that prohibits students from cheating, students are still finding new ways to take part in academic misconduct.
  - Cell phones, class notes, online websites, peers
- One's idea of past behavior, subjective norm, attitude, perceived behavioral control, and moral obligation play a role in academic integrity, as well as faculty and preceptors.
  - Subjective Norm and Past Behavior were ranked to be the greatest influences on academic misconduct amongst the students surveyed.
- Authentic assessment is proving to be a promising idea to prevent academic misconduct and ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge they need.
  - The role of authentic assessment is showing to be a promising new learning strategy that tests students on information that has no probability of academic misconduct.
- This research also portrayed that students are still committing academic violations although they believe it can have a negative impact on their future career.
  - Students who demonstrate academic misconduct in school are more likely to demonstrate future professional misconduct, such as committing or failing to report fraudulent or illegal activity, and to deliver a reduced quality of patient care.
- Of the 39 students who partook in this study, only 5 students claimed that they intend to cheat in the future showing that there may be some progress in the field of academic integrity.

References

- Logan, Danielle. (November 1, 2020). *The role of authentic assessment to preserve academic integrity and promote skill development and employability.* Routledge. Volume. 45, NO. 11, 2132–2148
- Sotiriadou, P. (November 1, 2020). *The role of authentic assessment to preserve academic integrity and promote skill development and employability.* Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group. Volume 45, NO. 11, 2132–2148
- Medina, M. S., & Wei C. Yuet. (2013). Promoting academic integrity among health care students. *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy, 70*(9), 754–757.
- AJHP. (May 1, 2013). *Promoting academic integrity among health care students.* American Journal of Health System Pharmacy. Volume 70, pg 755-757
- JG, Bloomfield. (May 5, 2021). *Registered Nurses Understanding of Academic Honesty and The Perceived Relationship to Professional Conduct.* Volume 100, pg 104794