

Department/School/Program SoTL Initiative Grant Reports (FY09)

An Empirical Investigation of the Mitigating and Aggravating Effects of Teacher Immediacy on Academic Dishonesty at a Large Midwestern University

The Department of Criminal Justice Sciences submitted a grant proposal for the SoTL Small Grant Award for departmental or school initiatives and was subsequently fortunate enough to be funded. The CJS SoTL initiative was a research project drawing on the contributions of a team of researchers comprising faculty, staff, and students in Criminal Justice Sciences to explore the relationship between teacher immediacy—favorable behavior cues exhibited by teachers that enhance closeness with students, bridging the psychological distance between the two producing positive outcomes (Allen, Witt, and Wheelless, 2006; Mehrabian, 1971) and academic dishonesty (cheating). The project was enhanced by a small ongoing pilot study that was implemented as part of an active learning exercise in CJS300, Research Methods. Further, we engaged students from disciplines across campus to voluntarily participate as research subjects in an anonymous self-report survey.

The study sought to explore the nexus between teacher immediacy and academic dishonesty specifically examining whether teacher immediacy had a mitigating effect on students' decisions to participate in academic dishonesty. It is important to note, we did *not* propose that immediacy causes academic dishonesty but rather sought to identify whether there

was a relationship between the two and if so, which immediacy behaviors could be characterized as inhibitors of cheating.

After IRB approval was granted we began our study during the summer with the query of the courses we planned to target for participation in the survey. Because we had already pilot tested our protocol and several of the questions on our survey instrument we were well positioned to move the project forward when the fall semester began. During the first few weeks of the semester we had several research team meetings and finalized our data collection strategy and made sure that everyone doing data collection was following the same protocol. We also wanted to collect data efficiently in the classrooms we visited since we were guests in the professors' classes. Data collection consumed much of the entire fall semester. We visited nearly 100 different classes with representation from all colleges and all student ranks (freshmen-senior) and administered our survey to approximately 2000 students. Given the data collection workload we enlisted the help of three undergraduate students to assist with administration of the survey. The experience was both helpful to the project and educational for the student participants who went on to present the project findings. All of the surveys were completed using op-scan forms which made electronic data recording possible and alleviated the need for manual data entry. It is worth noting that the survey instrument consisted of 100 questions and the time to administer and complete was not insignificant. We are extremely grateful to our research oriented colleagues for allowing us access to their classes, and to the student participants who made the study possible.

The findings of the study have been insightful and interesting and have shed new light on the problem being investigated. Our final sample of student respondents closely matched the ISU general population composition, with slightly more women (61% compared to 58%) and

whites (91% compared to 83%) in our sample (Illinois State University, 2008). The majority of respondents (68%) had a G.P.A. of 3.0 or above, with a fairly even split by academic class rank.

Most of the students (68%) were of the opinion that most college students at ISU engage in academic dishonesty though, only 25% of respondents report that they would ever cheat.

When examining self-report data on cheating we found that in fact, nearly 40% of students admit to cheating in a class while at ISU with only 2% of respondents indicating ever having been caught doing so. With regard to the immediacy aspects of the study most students felt that large courses are easier to cheat but their feeling/attitudes about their teacher reportedly do not impact their decision to cheat, in fact, nearly 80% reported that they would feel bad cheating if they liked their instructor. Also, courses deemed difficult by students were the ones most likely to elicit cheating behavior. We have a wealth of data to cull through and anticipate several yet to be realized outcomes from this project.

At this point in time we presented our SoTL sponsored project and the findings in five different venues and have published our work with another publication in-progress. We have presented at a Criminal Justice Sciences brown bag which was well attended by faculty, staff and students. We also presented our finding at the Midwestern Criminal Justice Association conference in Chicago and stimulated some really interesting discussion an interest in our topic and in interest of SoTL. We gave an oral presentation of the study at the CTLT Teaching and Learning Symposium in January 2010. We had both undergraduate and graduate students present the findings at the University Research Symposia. We most recently published our work as a book chapter in *Gausis*, published by Illinois State University in 2010. Currently, we have a manuscript for peer reviewed publication in the works and anticipate submission by the end of

summer 2010. We have been grateful for the opportunity, support and funding provided by SoTL.