Academic Integrity across Physician Assistant Programs in the United States

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Introduction
Introduction

- **Academic integrity**
  - Adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty \(^1\)
  - A commitment even in face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility \(^2\)
  - Universities and institutions should strive to uphold academic integrity especially when educating physician assistants who will eventually be responsible for the care of others
Introduction

- **Academic dishonesty/academic misconduct**
  - Used interchangeably
  - Unethical behaviors students may take part in during their academic studies
  - Faculty and students may both participate either knowingly or unknowingly
  - Takes on many forms
    - Traditional techniques
    - High tech techniques
    - Clinical setting techniques
• Students must develop their morals and uphold academic integrity otherwise there will be a disconnect between academic performance and real ability.
Introduction

- Honor code
  - A written document stating that students are expected to exhibit behaviors that epitomize academic, professional and personal integrity
Introduction

- What are the standards of academic integrity?
- How can educators instill academic integrity in students?
- How is academic integrity upheld?
- Are there universally accepted consequences of violations of academic integrity?
Objective

- The purpose of this study was to describe how academic integrity is addressed in physician assistant programs across the United States.
Methods
Methods

- Local IRB approval
- Descriptive survey developed dividing questions into demographic information and academic integrity information
- Survey tool was distributed via LimeSurvey© to all PA programs in the United States that were accredited and provisionally accredited
- LimeSurvey© was used for statistical analysis
- Microsoft Excel© was used for all charts
Results

- 171 surveys distributed
- 64.32% response rate
- Demographic data was consistent with 2010-2011 PAEA 27th Annual Report
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Does your institution have an honor code?

- Yes
- No
How long has the honor code been in place?

Length of Time Honor Code is in Place*

- >10 years
- 6-10 years
- 1-5 years
- <1 year

*13.86% of respondents did not answer
Academic Integrity at Institutions

Institution: clear consequences of violations of academic integrity

Wide recognition of academic integrity policies at institution

Institution has academic integrity policies

Institution: clear definitions of violations of academic integrity

Institution: clear definitions of academic integrity

Percent
Academic Integrity at PA Program

- Honor statement included in syllabi
- Professors do not use honor statements with examinations
- Students sign honor pledge prior to matriculating
- Program addresses academic integrity at interview
Is Academic Integrity a Problem at Institutions?

- Yes
- No
- No Answer

- Is Academic Integrity a Problem at Institution
- Is Academic Integrity Voiced as an Issue by Faculty
To what extent are you concerned about integrity in your program?

Scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all concerned and 5 is extremely concerned.
Discussion
Institution and Program

- Majority responded that at their institution:
  - Clear definitions of academic integrity
  - Clear definitions of violations of academic integrity
  - Academic integrity policies in place and recognized campus wide
- Majority of programs have honor code in place
Yet……

- Significant portion of programs do not address academic integrity prior to matriculation
- Significant portion of programs do not require students to sign honor statements
- Some programs do not use honor statements in their syllabi
- Significant portion of programs do not use honor statements as part of individual exams
In addition.....

- Faculty voice that academic integrity is an issue and problem at their institution
- Nearly 20% of respondents said they were greatly concerned about academic integrity at their program
Recommendations

- **Address academic integrity in the admissions process**
  - Question applicant about history of violations of academic integrity
  - Question applicant about disciplinary actions due to academic integrity
  - Case scenarios can be used in the interview process
    - Even if applicant is unsure how to answer, this can be used as a teachable moment
Recommendations

- **All programs should adopt an honor code**\(^7,8,9\)
  - Students agree to uphold honor and integrity in their didactic and clinical academic endeavors
  - Should include examples of violations of academic integrity
  - Many examples available in the literature

- **Course syllabi should have standard honor statements**
  - Continuity and standardization of statements will show a united position that the program faculty take against academic integrity
Recommendations

- Honor statements should be utilized on all examinations throughout the curriculum
- Clear policies on testing should be included in syllabi and reiterated to students prior to administering an exam\textsuperscript{9,10}
- Specific policies on use of technology, calculators, scratch paper, food, personal items, etc. should be delineated
Recommendations

- Faculty should act as role models\(^9\)
  - New faculty should be oriented to academic integrity, their institutions policies and procedures, as well as the program’s processes
- Students should be oriented to academic integrity
- Faculty should establish consequences of violations of academic integrity
Recommendations

- **Invest in technology**
  - Testing software
  - Antiplagiarism software

- **Creation of centrally located PA national integrity center**
  - Possibly housed within one of the national PA organizations
  - Could provide resources on academic integrity and professionalism
  - Could develop orientations/webinars on standards of academic integrity for students and faculty


