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Sixty-three per cent of faculty and 41 per cent of teaching assistants and tutor markers surveyed at Simon Fraser University have ignored suspected cheating cases, a report authored by university's Academic Integrity Task Force has found.

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The report, which will be released by the end of the spring term cites "lack of evidence" as the number one reason why cases of suspected cheating are not investigated.

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Susan Stevenson, senior lecturer in engineering and chair of the task force, reported that most students find it "too easy to cheat and too easy to get away with it."

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Of the 97 faculty respondents, 20 per cent felt that they lacked the time and 17 per cent lacked sufficient motivation to deal with cases of suspected cheating. Tutor markers and teaching assistants tended to ignore suspected cheating because they were told to ignore it by faculty, or because they assumed their faculty would be unsupportive of an investigation.

Types of academic dishonesty considered in the survey include falsifying lab data, "recycling" of labs, fabrication of bibliographies, extensive plagiarism in papers, homework copying, illegal group work, and copying on exams.

Students are aware that their peers are cheating, and that they are going largely unpunished. Out of 1,886 student responses to last fall's survey, 38 per cent were certain that they witnessed cheating on test or exam within the last year. According to Dean Mellow, professor of linguistics, most students are aware that the penalties for first-time offenders are lax.

Glenn Landry, graduate student in psychology agreed with that view. "I see the issue of academic dishonesty as being a cost-benefit issue. If the benefit for the student is that they are going to get a higher grade than they would normally, and if it is incredibly unlikely that they will get caught, and even if they do get caught, that they will get punished for it, the benefit is incredibly high."

An open workshop with limited space was held last Thursday in the Halpern Centre to discuss some of the implications of the survey results.

Some of the stories told were simply outrageous.

Mellow reported that he knew of "people actually stealing other people's student IDs to kick them out of courses, so they can register in full courses."

Greg Fung, Engineering Undergraduate Student Society president related how routine cheating is to some students. "Teams of people who regularly cheat together sit in the same area in an exam. I think the affectionate term is 'tag-teaming.' I hear rumours of discussions after exams: 'Oh, I'm so glad you got that. I would never have figured that out.'"

Silva Tenenbein, an instructor in the school of communication, shared perhaps the most shocking story of the session. "I was teaching a course a few years ago and a student of mine bought a paper

and wrote a note to his sister that said: 'Retype this and insert these three entries into the bibliography.' What I received was the original paper with the grade on it, the note, and the retyped paper all in the same package."

The room burst out laughing after this tale. When she explained that, because of administrative decisions based on other factors, the student eventually received a B+ for the course, the room sobered up.

Other topics broached included academic dishonesty among faculty, the possibility of allowing a later-term drop-date, student attitudes on the purpose of a university education, pressures that encourage students to cheat, and the possibility of employing remediation techniques to educate offenders. Towards the end of the discussion, the consensus appeared to be that consequences for cheating should be more severe.

"I'm aware of a university where you have a mark on your transcript if you fail a course for academic dishonesty. It's something permanent," Mellow said.

One point was repeatedly made concerning undergraduate academic dishonesty: faculty are too busy to teach, and too busy to police their students.

Krista Vogt, program development coordinator for Campus Community Services, finally noted that every envelope that leaves SFU mail is stamped "Research Matters," not "Teaching Matters."

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