

# The Tacit Acceptance of Cheating Through Mediocrity

## A response to an Editorial in The Gulf News – 06 January 2009

By: Stephen G. Wright – 07 January 2009

Having more than 20 years of experience teaching in higher education, I do not believe in the idea that there are degrees or levels of cheating. I do not believe there are mitigating variables either. If you cheat you cheat.

Recently a class gave me final research papers and more than half of the students had clearly plagiarized and paraphrased (by definition a form of plagiarism). My colleagues suggested it is best to just give them a low grade and everyone just walk away from the issue. After all, accusing students of wrong doing is a nasty morass of time, paperwork and the teacher having to defend the accusation. It is not so surprising then that the issue of cheating in the region is epidemic.

Students are **not** the customers of any school, college or university. They are students, and we are the teachers and / or administrators!! You can stretch things and call them stakeholders if it makes you feel good – but, they are now and always have been the product not the customer. The quality (level of real, applicable, knowledge upon graduation) of the student determines the reputation of the institution. However, institutions fear the students and their families because they have external business connections, wealth, and power, political or governmental relationships that they threaten institutions with. It won't do to have Mama and Papa mad at the school now would it? So, you yell and demand honesty in academics and fail to apply a 100% no tolerance approach. Sort of depends on WHO is doing the cheating and to what extent.

These are young, immature, impressionable, often irresponsible boys and girls. They are students – treat them as such. Any form of cheating no matter how it is done is punishable by expulsion, without appeal! Be certain that they clearly know how cheating is defined, give them a written guide, require a quiz on this each year, and then apply the law strictly! Such a statement as “this is what we've done with other teachers and they never complained” is not reasonable or logical. Do not make exceptions for degree of offense or mitigating circumstance! Ignorance of the law is no excuse. If you do not make the punishment fit the crime and if justice is not given out with consistency and continuity, they will continue to cheat! Dealing with cheating is a simple matter of addressing human behavior.....”All behavior depends on consequences”.....this known as the “Law of Effect”. ([http://wik.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/Law\\_of\\_Effect](http://wik.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/Law_of_Effect))