

# MBA students found more likely to cheat

**By Stacey Burling**  
*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

PHILADELPHIA | When it comes to cheating in graduate school, a new study finds that MBA students are the champs.

A survey of 5,331 students at 32 graduate schools in the United States and Canada found an "alarming" amount of cheating across disciplines, but more among the nation's future business leaders. Fifty-six percent of graduate business students admitted they had cheated at least once in the last year, compared with 47 percent of non-business students.

The students, who were surveyed between 2002 and 2004, told researchers from Pennsylvania State, Rutgers and Washington State universities that the most important reason for cheating was that they thought that other students were doing it.

"People tend to do what they think other people are doing," said Linda Klebe Trevino, one of the researchers and a professor of organizational behavior at Penn State's Smeal College of Business. "The fact that other people are doing it creates an environment where this is normative."

The study asked about 13 different types of cheating, ranging from copying a classmate's test answers to lifting sentenc-

**Fifty-six percent of  
graduate business  
students admitted  
they had cheated at  
least once in the past  
year.**

es from the Internet without attribution.

The results come amid a growing list of corporate ethics scandals, including faulty accounting to boost earnings, and, more recently, the backdating of stock options grants, a tactic that makes executive pay even more lucrative. While there is no proof that students who would cheat on a test might later cheat stockholders, the researchers said it made sense that people who would bend one rule might bend another.

In light of the scandals, area business schools have been beefing up their ethics education.

Penn State is trying out a business school honors code this year as part of its attempt to foster a "community of honor and trust," Trevino said. "We're really trying to do a culture change and embed this."

## CHEAT

CONTINUED FROM 1E

To discourage cheating, Temple University's Fox School of Business makes cell phones and laptops off limits during tests. Students are also told that computer software will check their papers for plagiarism, said Debbie Campbell, assistant dean for undergraduate programs.

At St. Joseph's University, the Academic Honesty Board, which hears complaints about cheating, has proposed that the school form a commission whose sole job would be to promote academic integrity, said Bill McDevitt, a business law professor who is chairman of the board.

Several studies have found that undergraduate business students are more inclined to cheat than others, but this is the first to report on graduate students at multiple schools, Trevino said. The study, released Monday, has been accepted for publication by the Academy of Management Learning and Education, she said.

In the graduate-school survey, business students were more likely than students in different fields to work with others on written assignments when they had been told explicitly to work alone, and to use "cut and paste plagiarism," or snippets of uncredited information from the Internet.

Business students were also more likely to find out about a test from a fellow student who had taken it, a problem professors could remedy by giving different versions of the test, the authors said.

Why business students would cheat more than others is a matter of conjecture. Trevino said it might be that students who were drawn to business school were more self-interested or bottom-line-oriented. Some studies also suggest that business school, with its emphasis on the free market and maximization of shareholder value, changes student attitudes.

Donald McCabe, a management professor at Rutgers who led the study, said one reason business students might cheat more is that they were more likely to encounter questions they could answer with one word or number, not an essay. "Compared to many of the other disciplines, if you can glance over and see somebody else's test or exam, there's a high premium for that," he said.

The "more important and more discouraging" explanation he hears from students is that "they're just emulating the behavior they see out in the business world."

There, some may say, "it doesn't matter how you get it done. The key thing is to get it done."