

Research Misconduct

As students we are all faced with the thought of it: “falsification”. We are confronted with some of the biggest challenges of our lives. My story as a student might not be all that unique, but my actions during my fourth year as an Undergraduate student in the Faculty of Psychology, has created an unravelling of events that will distinctly affect me for the rest of my life. I began my educational career with a sense of eagerness and pride, set forth to deliver my absolute best so that when set loose into the big world, I would be ready. At the time, I never quite understood what the term “integrity” really meant. Looking back now, I realize that integrity, as a student, a member of the community, and as a human being, is the foundation of one’s accomplishments.

During the Winter 2007 semester, I engaged in multiple offences relating to the submission of my Honours Thesis in Psychology. I **forged signatures on consent forms** for the participation in my research, I **falsified data** used in my honours thesis, and submitted my honours thesis containing such **false data and statements to the University**. My dishonest conduct was not discovered until after I had obtained my Bachelor of Arts with Honours from the University and began my Bachelor of Education degree in the University of Windsor’s Faculty of Education. I had completed my Bachelor of Education degree requirements before this matter reached the Judicial Panel. As a result, the University of Windsor **revoked my Bachelor of Arts with Honours** and did not confer my Bachelor of Education degree. Charges were laid for my offences under the provisions of University Senate Bylaw 31.

Going back to that year, I was faced with many life-interrupting circumstances that played a fundamental role in my **lack of honest decision making** during the completion of my honours thesis. I, like many other students, worked full time to afford my education, in addition to taking on extra-curricular activities to help advance my status and set me apart from other students. During my fourth year, I was given the diagnosis of stage one cancer from my physician. I turned away the advice to seek psychological counselling, despite having a family and personal history of psychological disorders. As a student, we try to come off unaffected; we act immune to the world around us, forging ahead despite sometimes needing help. I went into a deep depression, barely attending classes, sleeping excessively, only caring about getting through my day, because sometimes tomorrow seemed too hard to imagine. I cared about nothing and no one, including myself. I woke up and walked around in a fog, counting down the hours until I could return back to my bed to try and pass the time. Putting myself back into that state brings me to tears instantly. It is scary, numbing, and surreal to try to relive the experience when I wasn’t my “normal” self.

Time was passing, and the deadline for the completion of my honours thesis grew closer. Getting out of bed to brush my hair was a challenge; writing my honours thesis seemed impossible at the time. Instead of asking for help, or turning to those who were there through my honours thesis process, I did my best at pretending I had everything together, when really life was shattering from beneath me. The school system excels at teaching students the fundamentals of theories or how to write an outstanding essay, but doesn’t teach you how to admit personal weakness. The above played an essential role to committing my offences. However, regardless of situational circumstances, acts of academic dishonesty are done for self gain, by personal motives, and my experience is no different.

The word “wrong” does not even begin to define acts of academic dishonesty. **Being dishonest is unfair to those students who work hard to obtain their degree and accomplishments honestly**. Academic dishonesty undermines my true abilities and interferes with actual learning that could have taken place. Unfortunately, my actions did not occur in isolation; they impacted a number of other individuals involved. I took advantage of a professor who fostered a special learning environment designed for students to share and grow from one another. As a result, he suffered a loss of his time, resources, funded money, and trust. In addition, the falsification of my research data **impacted other students** who sought out to use my findings as apart of their research. Their findings would have lacked the validity needed, and I set an example of deception

and carelessness for future students to follow. My research became a part of a funded program of research. Professors and fellow students have dedicated their time to clean up the falsified data sets and separate them from pure data among many other processes. Psychological research plays a pivotal role in addressing human and societal needs and questions. **Strict ethical guidelines are imperative** to providing a framework to establish professional research. My **actions impact the entire scientific community** through hindering those who take leaps to bringing the recognition of mental health problems and treatment to the general public. If falsified data were to be entered into the scientific community, the subset of the population inflicted with mental problems that I researched would have not been receiving the treatment that was crucially sought after.

Everyday each student is faced with decisions of right and wrong. We are spoken to by name and are promised we can be anything that we want to be, if only we believe in it. Faster than we ever can see it coming, we are set loose into the world to shake hands with the millions of other people who were told the exact same thing. This experience made me take the biggest detour from myself over the past year. It pushed me to look at my own limits and how I preserve myself as a human being. I am not proud of my lack of academic integrity. Instead of putting on padding so I do not feel the negativity, I stripped my soul bare and **opened my eyes and mind to the learning experience that this has been**. I have witnessed how fast something valued can vanish from the direct result of my actions. Mistakes were made, and although I did not handle my academic career with complete honesty, I can now handle the process of moving forward from my mistakes with absolute integrity. **I have learned that if I can choose to be dishonest, then I can also choose to be honest**. I am using my experience to prepare myself for dilemmas in the future. Acts of honesty build upon one another; each day and each choice presents me with the opportunity to make the right one.

I aspire to be great teacher one day. Teachers who have the greatest amount of impact on their students are ones that encompass empathetic perceptions of what children are going through in their day-to-day interactions. My experience of falsifying data has made me better apt to deal with cheating situations in the future because I now realize the impact that dishonesty has on one's life. Everyone faces situations where they can choose to be dishonest, but **I now understand what integrity stands for**. At its very core, academic integrity requires honesty to the educational system and those involved in its foundation, and to oneself. **This process involves giving credit where it is due and acknowledging the contributions of actual intellectual efforts**. If a situation arises again in my future, whether it is in academia or in my professional career, **I will choose to act with integrity**. I have learned that without academic integrity, neither the genuine innovations of myself nor the progress of the field, such as psychology, is being assessed or moving forward.

To fellow students who may find themselves in a situation like I have, always remember that the values that underline the concept of academic integrity will push you beyond simply not cheating or plagiarizing. It is important to embrace these values, which emphasizes that **you are responsible for your own learning**. You have an obligation as a student to **be honest with yourself and others** apart of the learning community. Be committed to the academic process of honesty, fairness, trust, responsibility and respect and you will reap the rewards both instrumentally and intrinsically.

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