Letter to the Editor

I will start with a true story.

Two years ago, a student I will call Graduate X, graduated from NJIT with a degree in Computer Science. He apparently had a decent looking resume and was interviewed by a company interested in hiring him on its staff. He was hired as a programmer, instead of being elated at his "good fortune," he became panicked. He knew he was in trouble.

Graduate X realized that he now had to actually do what he was good at. What he had not learned was how to write programs, one of the basic expectations of a computer science graduate. He immediately began contacting current and former CS majors for help, since his job was to start in two weeks.

One of those current students that he contacted was both surprised and angry at him. He took the same classes that I am taking. You had the opportunity to learn this stuff just like me. I hope I'm fortunate enough to get such an opportunity in my field. I am not teaching you anything that you should know by now.

The graduate was fired two weeks after his start date. His last known employment was working the register at his local supermarket. True story.

This graduate readily admitted that he cheated his way through most of his courses and was found on several occasions during his four years. He was an important part of his family's job. That part was easy. He handed in assignments written by someone else.

So, one would quickly say that he cheated on every test, he cheated on every paper, and he only hurt himself with his cheating. That is not so. Let's start with his fellow classmates. Students who cheat on tests and major exams tend to affect the grading of all students enrolled in the course. The honest students lose respect for the cheater and also for the instructor for "allowing an atmosphere where it is so easy to cheat." That is what I hear over and over. But, I also hear from faculty who wonder why, if students see cheating going on all the time, don't they report it to them or to the Dean of Students?

This issue has probably existed throughout the history of classroom testing and is not unique to NJIT. That will be the subject of a future article...

But what about the reputation of the university, especially in the eyes of the employers who spend time and money recruiting and processing new employees, only to find out that he or she is not prepared for the challenges ahead?

For instance, future graduates may lose out on opportunities with the above-mentioned company because of the failure of just one NJIT applicant. They may be reluctant to take such a chance again, although NJIT graduates some very talented students.

And back to the university's reputation. Just like our country colleges are not all equal, we know that similar degree programs are not equal to each other. An engineering degree from NJIT may not equal that of an engineering degree at NJIT. However, if word gets out that we are graduating students who are "unprepared" for the workforce, the obvious question will be: "How can someone graduate with a degree in a particular discipline with basic knowledge that is expected of him or her?" "Is it the faculty that is giving these students a pass?" "Are the standards low?"

All it will take is for just a few such graduates as Graduate X and the damage is done. Human nature being what it is, people tend to remember the few negative stories more than the many successes.

And the damage to the individual does not stop with one job loss. The graduate may not even get hired if he or she has a disciplinary record with the university. The Dean of Students Office gets approximately 150-200 inquiries a year from employers doing background checks on job applicants. We receive signed waivers via fax, mail, and often by investigators coming in person. Most students are not aware of this until they apply for a job.

So, having a record of cheating can haunt a graduate for years to come. For instance, a graduate may be working at a company for awhile and think all is fine. However, if the company ever gets a government contract, the employer is obligated to go back and conduct background checks on everyone working on that contract. And the checks are done for everyone starting out working for any government entity.

The same goes for those seeking to go to law schools, med schools, graduate programs, or any type of law enforcement. If we have a record of a current or former student cheating on any assignment or exam, it has to be reported.

Now, for Graduate X the embarrassment and humiliation of having a college degree and having to work with high school kids to make ends meet is only the beginning of the continuing price he is paying. He will have to go back and take key courses all over again in order to learn the material he had a chance to learn the first time.

Therefore, the consequences of cheating are far-reaching, whether a student "gets away with it" or not. Graduate X thought he was taking the "easy way" out, but in hindsight he now knows that he only cheated himself.

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NJIT Police Blotter

For 02/23/2012 through 02/29/2012

Times Shown are Times of Occurrence

02/23/2012
8:30AM - A staff member reported a burglary occurred overnight in the basement of Eberhart Hall. Two laptops were reported missing.
5:30PM - A student reported the theft of his laptop from the second floor of Tierman Hall.

02/24/2012
2:45AM - Unknown person(s) broke the passenger side mirror of a parked car at Bleeker Street and MLK Jr. Drive.
9:30PM - A student reported that he was slapped in the face during the judging of a cricket game on the field at 80 Lock Street. He declined to press charges.

02/26/2012
2:30AM - A resident of 321 MLK Blvd. reported that sometime early Friday morning someone attempted to kick in the basement door.

02/27/2012
4:50PM - A student reported the theft of his laptop from Kuprian Hall.

02/28/2012
12:05AM - Officers arrested a non-affiliate outside of 155 University Ave. for aggravated assault against a civilian and a police officer.
6:25AM - Physical Plant reported someone had broken a stall in a bathroom in Facyr Hall.
11:27PM - Officers responded to the roof of the Parking Deck on a report of people spraying the wall.

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The Vector, NJIT's Student Newspaper

March 5, 2012

Page 3

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NJIT Technology and Society Forum

The Story That's Under Your Nose: Performance, Poetry and the Dialogue Arts Project

Speaker: Adam Falker
Executive Director, Dialogue Arts Project

Wednesday, March 21 2:30-4:00 P.M.
Campus Center Ballroom

Poetry and other forms of creative expression have the power to motivate thinking that addresses critical social issues such as race and identity in new and positive ways. In his Technology and Society Forum presentation, Adam Falker (tenth of a collection of this imaginative potential for better understanding and appreciation of our increasingly diverse culture.

Falker is a poet, performer, English teacher and the founder and executive director of the Dialogue Arts Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to incorporating creative writing, the performing arts, and interdisciplinary dialogue into teaching and learning processes. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including Norton's Poetics, The Other Journal and Literary Horizons, and has been featured in journals at the University of Michigan, the University of Washington and other schools. He regularly teaches and performs at colleges and universities throughout the country and has appeared on HBO, BET, and Michigan Public Radio.

Falker is also a national associate for the Praxis Creative Arts Project, a project awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts, that brings artists into schools throughout the country and has appeared on HBO, BET, and Michigan Public Radio.

For More Information: Contact Greg Kapp, kapp@njit.edu or 973-596-3480
Co-sponsored by NJIT Technology and Society Forum Committee, Albert Dorman Honors College, Sigma XI
NJIT welcomes an expert from East Reef College, Berkeley, and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.
Visit the NJIT Technology and Society Forum of the Web at http://njit.fjilt.edu

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