

Examining Influential Factors of Academic Dishonesty and Ethical Decision-making Among Community College Nursing Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between factors influencing academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making among nursing students in Maryland community colleges. Using a cross-sectional survey, data were collected from 234 associate degree nursing students across three institutions. Results revealed a significant correlation between attitudes toward academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making, with ethical patterns increasing alongside lenient attitudes toward dishonesty. Differences were observed in ethical decision-making based on gender, semester level, and employment in healthcare. Findings highlight the importance of exploring the influence of familiarity with the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics and faculty role modeling on ethical decision-making and dishonesty. The study underscores the need for further research to develop strategies for fostering ethical integrity among nursing students.

Keywords: academic dishonesty, ethical decision-making, nursing students, community colleges

INTRODUCTION

Academic dishonesty, encompassing a range of deceptive practices, remains a significant issue in higher education globally (Ali et al., 2024; Denisova-Schmidt, 2017; Salisbury, 2021). Common violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, falsifying records, and purchasing essays (Aaron & Roche, 2014; Cronan et al., 2017; Robinson & Glanzer, 2017). Addressing academic dishonesty is crucial, as it undermines the integrity of educational institutions and the value of academic credentials (Frenkel, 2016; Ismail & Omar, 2017). The prevalence of such behaviors has been extensively studied across various disciplines, including business, engineering, and health professions (McClung & Schneider, 2018; Smith et al., 2017).

Building upon these concerns, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has further complicated the landscape of academic dishonesty. While AI technologies offer significant benefits, such as enhancing learning outcomes and streamlining educational processes, they have also introduced new avenues for unethical practices, including automated plagiarism, misuse of generative AI tools, and unauthorized assistance during assessments (Nwozor, 2025; Anita, 2025; Adam, 2025). Addressing these emerging challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including the implementation of ethical AI policies, the promotion of academic integrity education, and the development of advanced tools to detect and prevent AI-related misconduct (Ganiyu, 2025).

Self-efficacy and personality traits play pivotal roles in academic dishonesty. Peasah et al. (2024) highlight that students with high self-efficacy and conscientiousness are less likely to engage in dishonest behaviors due to their thoughtful decision-making processes. Conversely, students with lower self-efficacy may resort to cheating as a coping mechanism for academic challenges. This dynamic is further explored in the context of Ghanaian tertiary education, where cultural and societal influences significantly impact students' ethical decisions (Peasah et al., 2024).

Recent studies have also examined the role of moral sensitivity and ethical awareness in combating academic dishonesty. Ko et al. (2024) found that medical and nursing students with higher moral sensitivity are better equipped to navigate ethical dilemmas, thereby upholding academic integrity. Similarly, the development of ethical decision-making skills through targeted educational interventions has been shown to reduce instances of academic misconduct (Rua et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2024).

In the digital age, the drivers of academic cheating have evolved. Perez et al. (2024) investigated online cheating behaviors among Filipino undergraduates, revealing that accessibility and anonymity significantly contribute to the prevalence of dishonesty in virtual learning environments. Effective policies and

ethical education are essential to mitigate these challenges and foster a culture of integrity.

Understanding the multifaceted nature of academic dishonesty and the factors that influence it is critical for developing comprehensive strategies to uphold academic integrity. Faculty leadership and institutional support play crucial roles in shaping students' ethical behaviors and ensuring the credibility of academic outcomes (Johnson et al., 2020; Pearson, 2019).

The purpose of this cross-sectional survey study was to examine relationships between influential factors of academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making patterns among students enrolled in community college nursing programs. An additional goal of this research was to determine the extent to which demographic variables predicted ethical decision-making patterns among students enrolled in community college nursing programs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the relationships between attitudes towards academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making patterns of nursing students at community colleges?
2. To what extent does the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics influence the attitudes and ethical decision-making patterns of nursing students at community colleges?
3. To what extent do demographic variables predict the ethical decision-making patterns of nursing students at community colleges?
4. How do nursing students report whether their peers or faculty influence ethical decision-making and dishonest behaviors at community colleges?

Theoretical Framework

This study examined influential factors of academic dishonesty participation and ethical decision-making patterns among community college nursing students using specific Social Learning Theory (SLT) constructs. Bandura (1986) posited that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context. According to this theory, learning occurs because of interactions that occur between cognitive and environmental factors, which influence one's conduct and actions. Social learning theorists have posited that moral and ethical behaviors are strongly influenced by cognitive and environmental factors that may become internalized learned behavior (Eberle, 2018; Madara et al., 2016).

Based on constructs of SLT, learned behavior involves observations, extraction from observations, and imitation of behaviors observed (Bandura, 1971). Bandura (1985) also theorized that within the interrelated dynamics of person, behavior, and environment, lasting experiences occur that affect value judgments. An important assumption of SLT is the significance of role models.

Bandura posited that role models influence the development of personal values and principles that may be internalized. If internalization of a desired action occurs, behavior modeling ensues. According to Bandura (1985), behavior modeling greatly impacts decision-making. Specifically, within the cognitive learning process, an individual thinks about a particular behavior, assigns value to the behavior, and sets a goal to perform the behavior. Bandura (1986) also argued that learned behaviors are neither motivated by inner influences nor automatically shaped and controlled by the external environment alone. Instead, human thoughts and actions can be better explained in terms of bidirectional relationships in which behavior, cognitive, and other personal factors all interact and contribute to decision-making.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Academic Dishonesty in Higher Education

For this study, academic dishonesty was defined as the intentional participation in a single behavior or set of behaviors that lead to the misrepresentation of scholarly work in which grades and academic privileges are awarded (Stein, 2018). Elmore et al. (2011) examined the notion of perceived active and passive academic dishonest behaviors among college students. Actions such as providing false excuses to delay taking an examination, purchasing online course test banks, and visiting professors to influence course grades were categorized as passive dishonest behaviors. Conversely, actions such as prohibited cell phone use during an examination, using unpermitted notes during an examination, and taking credit for an assignment completed by someone else were categorized as active dishonest behaviors.

According to the International Center for Academic Integrity [ICAI,2020], integrity within higher education consists of five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. These principles have been associated with personal and social accountability among learners and are essential in informing and improving ethical decision-making. Early accounts of academic dishonesty revealed that in response to reports of students cheating on college examinations, Parr (1936) began collecting and analyzing data in the university setting to determine why students engaged in dishonest behaviors and revealed relevant findings regarding the prevalence, frequency, and factors associated with academic dishonesty. The seminal work of Bowers (1964) found that 75% of his participants admitted to engaging in at least one form of cheating, while 50% reported taking part in cheating behaviors at least twice while attending college.

Fostering academic integrity has been considered an essential responsibility of faculty leaders from all sectors of higher education (Bertram-Gallant, 2018; Cronan et al., 2017). Morris (2018) posited that institutions of higher education are

responsible for embedding values and practices associated with integrity within learning experiences. Panther (2020) noted that contrary to the tenets of integrity, academic dishonesty.

In recent years, a new category of misconduct known as digital dishonesty, the use of electronic devices and internet-based resources, has evolved tremendously. Moore et al. (2017) revealed that the use of smartphones, smart watches, smart pens, Bluetooth devices, and the like, are utilized to facilitate academic dishonesty. Similarly, in a study that contrasted modes of content delivery, Friedman et al. (2016) and Chiang et al. (2022) reported that advanced technologies and easy internet access have expanded students' abilities to engage in digital plagiarism, contract cheating, and unauthorized peer-to-peer sharing more frequently. Furthermore, Krienert et al. (2021) posited that because of advanced technology and methods of academic dishonesty, an entire internet economy has evolved, particularly regarding the sale of written assignments. Academic dishonesty in any form can damage institutional reputations and the legitimacy of conferred academic credentials.

Academic Dishonesty Among Nursing Students

Nursing is a profession that should be guided by ethical standards (Eberle, 2018; Fein, 2019; McClung, 2017). Studies have suggested that academic dishonesty exists among nursing students (Beck, 2018; Devine & Chin, 2018; Suber, 2018). Hilbert (1985,1988) validated this claim in her seminal research conducted among senior-level nursing students enrolled in traditional four-year baccalaureate degree programs. Using a single campus sample (n=110) and a multi-campus sample (n=210), Hilbert (1985) revealed that 51.9 % of the participants acknowledged engaging in one form of classroom misconduct, while 35 % of the participants collectively acknowledged engaging in one of three acts of misconduct in actual healthcare settings. These two distinct behavioral categories are particularly significant when investigating nursing students. Suber (2018) revealed that in addition to 85% of undergraduate participants acknowledging dishonest academic behaviors, a positive correlation was found with misconduct in professional settings among the same participants.

In an early study exploring the attitudes of community college students towards misconduct, Smyth and Davis (2004) revealed that although nearly all respondents (92%) perceived dishonest behaviors as ethically wrong, 45% of the same respondents acknowledged dishonest behaviors as acceptable. In another study, Ferguson (2010) revealed between 84% and 90% of community college study participants reported not engaging in academic dishonesty. Nevertheless, the need for additional research within community colleges continues to be underscored. Hensley (2013) posited that although the dynamics of community colleges differ from four-year institutions, students enrolled in the former are still

subject to the demands of higher education achievement and may rely on dishonest means to attain success.

Factors Influencing Academic Dishonesty

Scholars agree that regardless of the motivation toward academic dishonesty, prolonged participation in dishonest behaviors could lead to desensitization and attitudes of acceptance (Bista, 2011; Barnhardt, 2016; Furutan, 2018). Stiles et al. (2017) revealed that students who preferred high grades over content mastery are more likely to engage in academic dishonesty. Denisova-Schmidt (2017) asserted that beyond acceptance, academic dishonesty is expected among certain peer groups. Maring et al. (2018) validated this assertion based on findings from research conducted among health professions students in the final semester of respective programs. The researchers reported that socially accepted academic dishonesty promotes camaraderie among peers rather than competition.

In addition to behaviors, Ismail and Omar (2017) argued that personal beliefs and values are cognitive influences of moral development and ethical decision-making that progress over time, and are shaped by cultural, familial, and social experiences. Smith et al. (2017) described ethics as a set of socially accepted principles that constitute which behaviors are understood to be good or bad. They asserted that occurrences of poor ethical decision-making within academia challenge the assumption that individuals seeking higher education at various levels automatically possess an inclination to adhere to standards of integrity.

Scholars have suggested that a variety of environmental factors play a role in students' academic conduct choices. Cronan et al. (2017) suggested that cultures of integrity, the presence or absence of institutional honor codes, integrity policies and procedures, and transcultural experiences all influence students' attitudes and decisions toward academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making. Hensley (2013) asserted that activities and interactions create social environments in which students share experiences that ultimately emphasize and strengthen decision-making. Robinson and Glanzer (2017) substantiated this claim and posited that of all contributing factors, academic environments created by administrators, faculty, and students are the most influential. Furthermore, the lack of an emphasis on the value of upholding academic integrity, and minimal reinforcement of policies for integrity infractions bolsters misconduct. Additionally, Clark and Soutter (2016) asserted that comprehensive academic cultures of integrity that extend beyond single honor codes are more effective in deterring academic dishonesty. Furthermore, researchers have suggested that if the importance and value of academic integrity are not thoroughly explained, ambiguity may ensue, thereby adding to the complicity and complacency that enable academic dishonesty (Maley, 2019; Smith et al., 2017; Stephens, 2019).

It has been suggested that role models are influential in the development of beliefs, values, and attitudes among observers, particularly regarding ethical decision-making (Chambers & Ransom, 2016; Smith et al., 2017). Eberle (2018) suggested that modeling can occur both formally and informally. Additionally, modeling can have both positive and negative outcomes. For example, student exposure to models who uphold integrity can beneficially influence behaviors among individuals and communal groups (Bertram-Gallant, 2018; Bluestein, 2015). On the other hand, Denisova-Schmidt (2017) and Stein (2018) revealed that student exposure to behaviors such as using prohibited resources during examinations, falsifying documents, and hiring others to complete assignments could adversely influence student behaviors. Keck et al. (2020) suggested that role models display attributes in their social roles that individuals perceive to be similar to self, and desire to imitate. Therefore, it is plausible that peers and faculty are influential in fostering academic integrity, as well as deterring academic dishonesty.

Of the few investigations that explored the impact of faculty modeling and ethical decision-making patterns, some findings challenged assertions that maintain the unequivocal impact of peer influences. For example, O'Keefe et al. (2017) underscored that faculty leaders are the single most important influencers in shaping environments and behavior. Keener et al. (2019) corroborated the claim. Further, they asserted that within academia, faculty leaders are the first responders to breaches of academic integrity and are positioned to uphold academic and professional standards. Nelson et al. (2018) posited that the influence of faculty could have long-standing effects on students that may translate into professional settings and within society at large.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a cross-sectional survey approach to explore attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in various contexts. Nursing students from three community colleges in Maryland (US) were invited to participate in this study. After the approval of the Institutional Review Board, an online survey invitation was sent out to nursing students enrolled in associate degree programs at three participating community colleges in Maryland. First Community College provided access to 388 nursing students, of whom 135 participated, yielding a response rate of 34.7%. Second Community College provided access to 150 nursing students, of whom 76 participated, yielding a response rate of 50.6%. Third Community College provided access to 175 students, of whom 23 participated, yielding a 13.1 % response rate. The total number of responses obtained for this study was (*N*) 234 students.

To collect data, items from the *Attitudes Towards Academic Misconduct Survey* developed by McCrink (2008) and adapted by Krueger (2013) as the

Academic Dishonesty Survey were used. Additionally, two items in the form of a vignette based on Krou's (2015) examination of academic dishonesty were used. The use of vignettes in survey research has been reported as beneficial in the data collection of sensitive topic areas, such as academic dishonesty (Evans et al., 2015). Vignettes are short scenarios about a person or social situation that contain precise details of what is thought to be important for the decision-making process. Permission to use select items was granted by the respective authors.

Using a five-point Likert scale (1= not dishonest, 5= extremely dishonest), the survey asked about attitudes towards academic dishonesty and attitudes toward the degree of the dishonesty of a peer's observed behavior. Participants had the option of selecting one of the following responses: perceptions of unethical behaviors, the likelihood of peer and faculty behaviors influencing the behavior of students, and an open-ended question that measured how students perceived peer and faculty role models as influencers of ethical decision-making patterns.

With Cronbach's alpha, the scoring of items of an instrument ranged between 0-1. Optimal Cronbach alpha scores ranged between 0.7 and 0.9 (Salkind, 2017). The section that was adapted from Krueger (2013) measuring attitudes towards academic dishonesty and unethical behaviors and included questions one and two, which are composed of specific behaviors, reported a Cronbach α at .72. The survey items that were adapted from McCrink (2008) reported a Cronbach α of .95.

RESULTS

Out of 234 community college nursing participants from three community colleges, 90% self-identified as female, 41% ranged in age from 25 to 34, and 27% were enrolled in their fourth semester. Eighty-one percent of the respondents reported never repeating any nursing courses, and 44% earned a GPA between 3.1 to 3.5. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic characteristics.

In terms of employment and the American Nurses Association's (ANA) Code of Ethics characteristics, 71% (166) of participants reported being employed in healthcare. Eighty-six percent (202) of participants were familiar with the ANA code of ethics, while 71% (166) said the ANA code of ethics has influenced their decision-making in academic and professional healthcare settings.

Attitudes Towards Academic Dishonesty and Ethical Decision-Making Patterns

Pearson product-moment correlation results indicated that attitudes towards academic dishonesty ($r(232) = .665, p < .01$) were correlated to ethical decision-making patterns. The correlation coefficient's relationship between attitudes towards academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making patterns (.665) was

moderate. The results suggested that as attitudes toward academic dishonesty improve, ethical decision-making patterns also improve.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

| Description | <i>N</i> | % |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 211 | 90.2 |
| Male | 19 | 8.1 |
| Other (Not in Analysis) | 4 | 1.7 |
| Total | 234 | 100.0 |
| Age | | |
| 18 to 24 | 61 | 26.1 |
| 25 to 34 | 95 | 40.6 |
| 35 to 44 | 51 | 21.8 |
| 45 years or older | 27 | 11.5 |
| Total | 234 | 100.0 |
| Semester Currently Enrolled | | |
| First semester | 55 | 23.5 |
| Second semester | 62 | 26.5 |
| Third semester | 53 | 22.6 |
| Fourth semester | 64 | 27.4 |
| Total | 234 | 100.0 |
| Repeated Nursing Courses | | |
| No | 189 | 80.8 |
| Yes | 45 | 19.2 |
| Total | 234 | 100.0 |
| GPA | | |
| 2.0 to 3.0 | 71 | 30.3 |
| 3.1 to 3.5 | 104 | 44.4 |
| 3.6 to 4.0 | 59 | 25.2 |
| Total | 234 | 100.0 |

A series of two-way ANOVA analyses were performed to determine whether attitudes towards ethical behaviors and ethical decision-making patterns are influenced by the American Nurses Association’s Code of Ethics. Familiarity with the American Nurses Association’s Code of Ethics includes two levels (no, yes), and the American Nurses Association’s Code of Ethics influences decision-making in academic and professional settings consisting of two levels (no, yes). The effect sizes for those research questions were calculated using partial eta squared (ηp^2). Creswell (2015) suggested effect sizes are small (.01), medium (.06), or large (.14).

Table 2
Two Way ANOVA of American Nurses Association’s Code of Ethics and Ethical Decision-Making Patterns

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | MS | F | p. | ηp^2 |
|--|-------------------------|----|-------|-------|-------------|------------|
| Dependent Variable: <i>Ethical Decision-Making Patterns</i> $R^2 = .027$ | | | | | | |
| Familiarity with ANA Code of Ethics | .984 | 1 | .984 | 2.825 | .094 | .012 |
| ANA Code of Ethics Influence on Decision-Making in Academic and Professional Healthcare Settings | 1.596 | 1 | 1.596 | 4.581 | .033 | .020 |
| Familiarity with ANA Code of Ethics x ANA Code of Ethics Influence on Decision-Making in Academic and Professional Healthcare Settings | 1.078 | 1 | 1.078 | 3.093 | .080 | .013 |

Ethical Decision-Making Patterns

Levene’s *F* tests of error variance revealed that the assumption of the homogeneity of equal variance was justifiable for ethical decision-making patterns ($p = .800$). There was a significant main effect of the American Nurses Association’s Code of Ethics influence on decision-making in academic and professional healthcare settings, ($F(1, 229) = 4.581, p < .05, \eta p^2=.02$). The effect

size was small (.02). The results showed that the mean scores of community college nursing students who said yes to the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics having influence on decision-making in academic and professional settings ($M = 3.61, SD = .595$) differed from those who said no ($M = 3.36, SD = .563$) in terms of their ethical decision-making patterns. Conversely, there was no significant main effect found of familiarity with the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics, ($F(1, 229) = 2.825, p \geq .05$) nor a two-way interaction of the two independent variables on ethical decision-making patterns, ($F(1, 229) = 3.093, p = .080$); the null hypothesis was retained (see Table 2)

Attitudes Towards Academic Dishonesty

Levene's F tests of error variance revealed that the assumption of the homogeneity of equal variance was justifiable for attitudes toward academic dishonesty ($p = .830$). There was no statistically significant effect of the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics influence on ethical decision-making patterns in academic and professional healthcare settings, ($F(1, 229) = .923, p = .338, \eta p^2 = .00$); no effect because of familiarity with the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics, ($F(1, 229) = 2.139, p = .145$) or a two-way interaction of the two independent variables on attitudes towards academic dishonesty, ($F(1, 229) = 1.464, p = .228$). The results suggested that familiarity with the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics and its influence on ethical decision-making among community college nursing students were not statistically significant; the null hypothesis was retained (see Table 3).

Predictors of Ethical Decision-Making Patterns

Multiple linear regression was run to examine whether demographic characteristics influenced ethical decision-making patterns. In this analysis, baseline reference categories (coded as 0) were male, ages 25 to 34, fourth semester, 2.0 to 3.0 GPA, not employed in healthcare, and did not repeat nursing courses. Multicollinearity was not a concern. The multiple linear regression model was statistically significant, $F(11, 217) = 2.127, p = .020, R^2 = .097$). The model accounted for only 10% of the variability in ethical decision-making patterns explained by the independent variables. Results indicated that female ($b = .291, p = .016, sr^2 = .03$), first-semester ($b = .311, p = .002, sr^2 = .04$), and employment in healthcare ($b = .150, p = .041, sr^2 = .02$) significantly predicted ethical decision-making patterns (see Table 4). Holding constant with other variables, the results suggested that for female community college nursing students, relative to male community college nursing students, ethical decision-making patterns increased by .291 units. Additionally, for first semester community college nursing students, relative to fourth-semester community college nursing students, ethical decision-

making patterns increased by .311 units, given that all variables are held constant. For community college nursing students employed in healthcare, relative to those who are not employed, ethical decision-making patterns increased by .150 units, given that all variables are held constant. The unique variance explained by each of the independent variables indexed by the squared semi-partial correlations was small. Results demonstrated that first-semester (4%), followed by females (3%), and employed in healthcare (2%) uniquely predicted a statistically significant proportion of variation of ethical decision-making patterns.

Table 3

Two Way ANOVA of American Nurses Association’s Code of Ethics and Attitudes Towards Academic Dishonesty

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | MS | F | p. | ηp^2 |
|---|-------------------------|----|------|-------|------|------------|
| Dependent Variable: <i>Attitudes Towards Academic Dishonesty</i> $R^2 = .014$ | | | | | | |
| Familiarity with ANA Code of Ethics | .313 | 1 | .313 | .923 | .338 | .004 |
| ANA Code of Ethics Influence on Ethical Decision-Making Patterns in Academic and Professional Settings | .724 | 1 | .724 | 2.139 | .145 | .009 |
| Familiarity with ANA Code of Ethics x ANA Code of Ethics Influence on Decision-Making in Academic and Professional Settings | .496 | 1 | .496 | 1.464 | .228 | .006 |

In other words, the results suggested that female community college nursing students were more likely to exhibit higher ethical decision-making patterns than their male counterparts. The results also suggested that first-semester community

college nursing students were more likely to exhibit higher ethical decision-making patterns than fourth-semester community college nursing students. Community college students employed in healthcare were more likely to exhibit higher ethical decision-making patterns than those who were not; the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 4
Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results of the Demographic Characteristics and Ethical Decision-Making Patterns

| | <i>b</i> | S. E. | <i>Beta</i> <i>a</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>sr</i> ² | 95 CI for <i>b</i> | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-------|-------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|--------------------|-----|
| Female | .29 | .1 | .16 | 2.42 | .0 | .03 | .05 | .52 |
| (<i>base = Male</i>) | 1 | 20 | 2 | 9 | 16 | | 5 | 6 |
| 18 to 24 | - | .0 | - | - | .9 | .00 | - | .15 |
| | .00 | .83 | .00 | .100 | 21 | | .17 | 5 |
| | 8 | | 7 | | | | 1 | |
| 35 to 44 | - | .0 | - | - | .5 | .00 | - | .12 |
| | .04 | .87 | .04 | .560 | 76 | | .21 | 2 |
| | 9 | | 1 | | | | 9 | |
| 45 years or older | .14 | .1 | .09 | 1.31 | .1 | .01 | - | .36 |
| | 6 | 11 | 2 | 6 | 90 | | .07 | 4 |
| | | | | | | | 2 | |
| (<i>base = 25 to 34</i>) | | | | | | | | |
| First Semester | .31 | .0 | .28 | 3.19 | .0 | .04 | .09 | .28 |
| | 1 | .97 | 0 | 2 | 02 | | .07 | 0 |
| Second Semester | - | .0 | - | - | .0 | .01 | .09 | - |
| | .17 | .94 | .15 | 1.85 | 65 | | .04 | .15 |
| | 5 | | 7 | 7 | | | | 7 |
| Third Semester | - | .1 | - | - | .0 | .01 | .10 | - |
| | .18 | .01 | .15 | 1.84 | 67 | | .01 | .15 |
| | 5 | | 8 | 0 | | | | 8 |
| (<i>base = Fourth Semester</i>) | | | | | | | | |
| 3.1 to 3.5 | .08 | .0 | .08 | 1.05 | .2 | .01 | - | .24 |
| | 4 | .79 | 4 | 8 | 91 | | .07 | 0 |
| | | | | | | | 2 | |
| 3.6 to 4.0 | - | .0 | - | - | .3 | .01 | - | .09 |
| | .08 | .90 | .07 | .979 | 29 | | .26 | 0 |
| | 8 | | 8 | | | | 6 | |

(base = 2.0 to 3.0)

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------------------|-----|----------|----------|
| Employed in Healthcare | .15 0 | .0 73 | .13 7 | 2.05 8 | .0 41 | .02 | .00 6 | .29 5 |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------------------|-----|----------|----------|

(base = Not Employed in Healthcare)

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----|---------------|----------|
| Repeated Nursing Courses | .09 4 | .0 87 | .07 6 | 1.08 0 | .2 81 | .01 | - .07 8 | .26 6 |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----|---------------|----------|

(base = Did Not Repeat Nursing Courses)

Note: Dependent Variable: Ethical decision-making patterns ($R^2 = .097$). Significant results at $**p < .01$ and $*p < .05$ level.

Peers and Faculty Influence on Ethical Decision-Making and Dishonest Behaviors

From open-ended responses, four themes were generated using the multiple response frequencies: Guidance; Encouragement, Support, and Collaboration; Provide Safety, Critical Thinking Skills, and Honesty; and Ethical Standards and Professionalism. Participants believed ethical standards and professionalism were very important to them (77 percent or 62 responses/81) in terms of peer and faculty influences on ethical decision-making patterns. They also believed guidance (37 percent or 30/81), encouragement, support, and collaboration (36 percent or 29/81), and providing safety, critical thinking, and honesty (13 percent or 11/81) were also beneficial (Table 13).

Similarly, 43% of students thought that ethical behaviors, professionalism, encouragement, support, and collaboration were the most important in terms of peer influences on ethical decision-making patterns. Student responses included: “My peers are valuable assistance to my study. My peers provide a community where I can collaborate and use teamwork.” Also, 47% of the respondents thought that ethical behaviors and professionalism were the most important in terms of faculty influence on ethical decision-making patterns. Student responses included: “I believe the role of faculty is more important than the role of peers in influencing decision-making.”

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study underscore a complex relationship between attitudes toward academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making patterns, particularly among nursing students. Previous research by Bezek (2014), Khalaila (2015), and Krueger (2013) indicated that positive attitudes towards academic dishonesty often correlate with increased participation in ethical decision-making patterns in professional healthcare settings. This finding is consistent with Balbuena and Lamela (2015), who observed similar trends among non-nursing students.

McCrink (2008) identified a significant relationship between nursing students' attitudes towards academic dishonesty and their engagement in behaviors reflecting ethical decision-making. This study aligns with Ismail and Omar (2017), who argued that students with a clear understanding of ethical values and principles tend to have negative attitudes towards academic dishonesty and are more likely to adhere to integrity in their decision-making processes.

Despite these insights, our study did not find a significant effect of familiarity with the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics on ethical decision-making patterns. This highlights the necessity for clearer delineations of ethical standards among community college nursing students. McNair and Oye (2018) and Keener et al. (2019) support this view, suggesting that a lack of understanding and clear communication of ethical guidelines can lead to problems in professional settings.

The study further revealed that female, first-semester students and those employed in healthcare were more likely to exhibit higher ethical decision-making patterns. Female community college nursing students demonstrated higher ethical decision-making than their male counterparts. Additionally, students employed in healthcare settings showed better ethical decision-making patterns compared to those who were not employed in healthcare. These findings echo the research of Krueger (2013), who found that GPA, gender, and employment status significantly influenced attitudes towards academic dishonesty among nursing students in community college programs.

Recent literature supports these findings. Peasah et al. (2024) examined the role of self-efficacy and personality in academic dishonesty, emphasizing the impact of individual traits on ethical behavior. Rua et al. (2024) developed the ethical student scale, further exploring factors influencing students' ethical decision-making. Additionally, Perez et al. (2024) investigated academic cheating in online learning environments, highlighting the role of technology in facilitating dishonesty and the need for robust integrity policies.

This study explored the cognitive and environmental influences on academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making among community college nursing students. While much research has focused on student characteristics and the frequency of dishonest behaviors, this study highlights the impact of professional

codes of ethics and faculty-modeled behavior as deterrents. Nurse educators have a responsibility to ensure nursing students are familiar with the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics. Understanding the factors that influence attitudes towards academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making can help develop better policies to promote academic integrity.

The study found that community college nursing students' attitudes towards academic dishonesty were linked to their ethical decision-making patterns. Students who believed the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics influenced their decision-making exhibited higher ethical standards. However, mere familiarity with the code did not significantly impact ethical decision-making or attitudes towards dishonesty.

Additionally, female nursing students were more likely to exhibit higher ethical decision-making patterns than males. First-semester students showed higher ethical decision-making patterns compared to those in their fourth semester. Finally, students employed in healthcare demonstrated higher ethical decision-making patterns than those who were not employed in the field.

Implications

Nurse educators should consider pairing experienced students with new ones to help them learn and uphold the standards set by the American Nurses Association (ANA). Educators need to intentionally incorporate meaningful learning experiences into curricula that clearly define and exemplify honesty and ethical judgments in both academic and professional healthcare settings. Faculty are in key positions to foster integrity and cultivate students' mindsets towards ethical behavior through modeled actions.

Promoting honesty and ethical behaviors should be an active learning process rather than managed solely with punitive responses. Providing clear, unambiguous definitions of dishonesty and guidelines for ethical behavior is essential for preventing and deterring academic and professional misconduct.

Peer-to-peer collaboration is crucial in academic settings. Faculty must clearly communicate when collaboration is acceptable and when it is not, as students often do not view unauthorized collaboration as dishonest. Clear definitions help prevent misunderstandings and foster a culture of integrity.

Academic cultures of integrity require purposeful collaboration and a multi-systems approach to help students become integrity-conscious and ethically sensitive. The overall academic climate plays a critical role in successful academic integrity strategies.

Finally, there is a concerning positive correlation between academic dishonesty and professional misconduct. Ethical concepts and principles should be integrated throughout nursing curricula from the first semester. Developing campus-wide cultures of academic integrity requires the support of administrators,

faculty, and staff. Recommendations include integrating ethical comportment in every course and using role-playing and simulation to address academic dishonesty and ethical decision-making patterns effectively

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