

THE CASE OF BUSINESS CASE COMPETITIONS: HOW DO STUDENTS' CHEATING BEHAVIORS APPLY IN A COMPETITION SETTING?

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CASE DESCRIPTION

International business case competitions are of great importance in terms of the personal and professional rewards they offer. As such, reducing the chances of cheating in these competitions is crucial. Research has proven that college students tend to cheat in times of pressure, especially when the benefits are high. The seriousness of this issue needs to be addressed, especially that the prevention of various unethical behaviors is achievable by taking the appropriate measures and considerations. For this end, this paper sheds light on the reasons behind a student's cheating behavior and looks into few case competition structures in order to present recommendations to limit cheating.

CASE SYNOPSIS

Research found that cheating has reached an epidemic proportion recently, with more than 70% of university students admitting that they have cheated at least once throughout their university years (Josien et al., 2015). Although there has been a growing interest in studying the prevalence and attitudes of students towards cheating, scholars have examined university students in either a classroom setting (Klein et al., 2007; Simkin & McLeaod, 2010; Eisenberg, 2004) or in online courses (Elias, 2017; Guyette et al., 2008) leaving a research gap in how this might extend to international case competitions.

Case competitions are the incarnation of real-life events into an educational setting whereby students employ skills that include decision-making, opportunity taking, problem-solving and working under pressure (Damnjanovic & Mijatovic, 2017). Case competitions proved to be of great importance to participating students, universities and companies. On one hand, it provides students with an opportunity for a practical experience that enhances their personal and professional growth and on the other hand, it exposes companies to high achieving students from across the globe that could be potential hires (Damnjanovic & Mijatovic, 2017).

Case competitions aim to shape the students as the next generation of practitioners and introduce the best practices and applications among university students. Although these competitions are governed by rules and guidelines, some of them enforce the assigned rules and regulations only loosely. As a result, the competition would lack a disciplined and effective setting, which in turn affects the outcome intended for the participants on a yearly basis. Most importantly, some competitions in their current form overlook the ethical component, which has been at the center of attention of business education in recent years. Such pitfall makes these competitions responsible, though unintentionally, for spreading unethical practices and encouraging cheating.

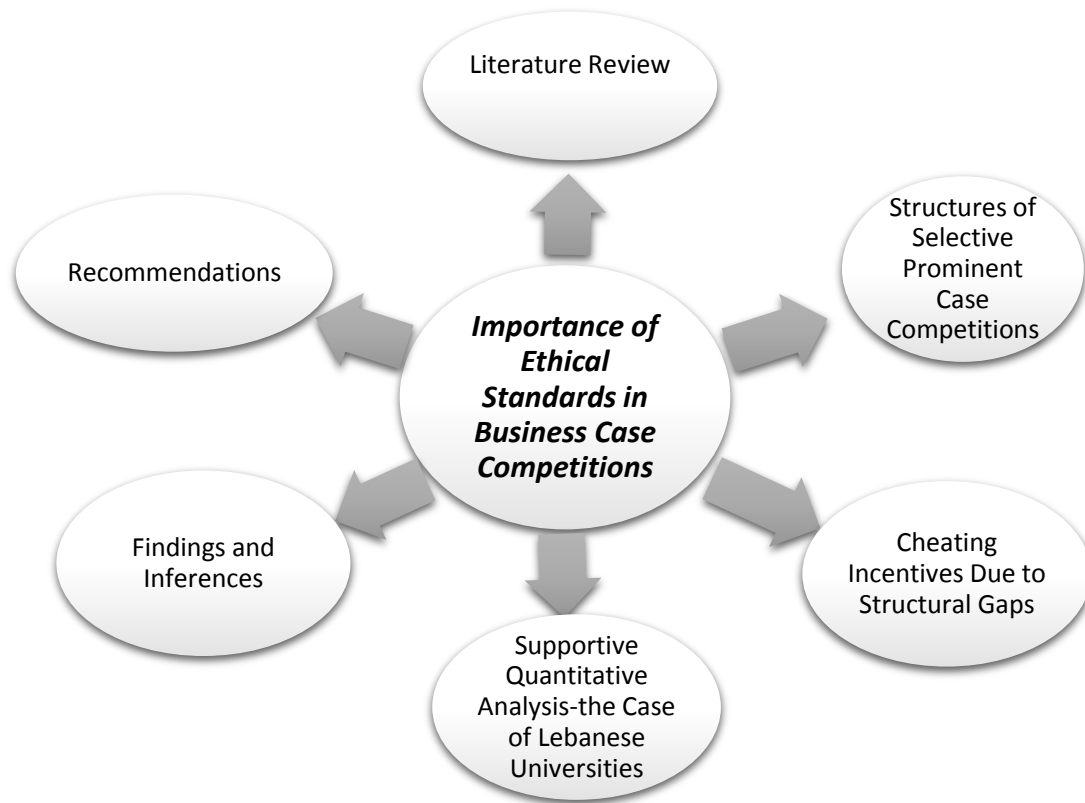
Each year, thousands of universities from across the globe participate in these competitions, hence the masses affected by this breach of ethics are considerably high. Therefore, the seriousness of this issue needs to be emphasized, especially that the encouraging

element, namely the lack of appropriate supervision in many of these competitions, is correctible and can be rectified by taking the appropriate measures.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine possible ethical breaches in an international case competition setting. For this, a survey was administered to confirm the ways and reasons for cheating among university students in Lebanon. Then the structures of selected yearly international business case competitions were examined to identify potential variables related to cheating. The findings support the idea that some case competitions are more likely to allow cheating than others. In view of that, a set of recommendations has been set forth.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design presented in Figure 1 aims at structuring the line of thought followed to extract the correct recommendations fit for ridding case competitions in the business domain from unethical practices, namely cheating that has severe repercussions on shaping the personalities of many ambitious students. The design starts with student's incentives to cheat, followed by breaches in the competition's structures, allowing for cheating to take place, next a quantitative case study is adopted on Lebanese Universities and is concluded with findings and recommendations. Thus, in order to investigate the different practices and studies done in the ethical and educational sectors with regard to cheating, a thorough review about the existing literature was done first. This exercise lead to the extraction of the student's hedonic as well as extrinsic motives to cheat. After which, the structures of a selection of prominent case competitions were explored, so as to determine the gaps and holes allowing for cheating to take place. The quantitative stage is the main contribution of this paper, whereby a survey was run on the top three Lebanese Universities which usually participate in business case competitions in the Middle East. Questionnaires were distributed online and filled voluntarily by a random sample of 139 students, all while preserving anonymity. The data analysis process through ratio analysis leads to a series of findings and recommendations, in line with the explored literature review. In sum the recommendation section, proposed a handful of suggestions that could deter students from cheating as a means to achieving their goals.



**FIGURE 1
RESEARCH DESIGN**

RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEW

International Case Competitions

Case competitions are simulated scenarios whereby teams compete in assessing and analyzing viable issues and attempt to find solutions to them in a set timeframe. The findings have to be justified and the thought process employed has to be explained. Later, results are presented orally, in writing, or using a mixture of both means to a panel of judges. Those judges are often industry experts or accomplished scholars who assess the skills of participants as well as their understanding of the inadequacies of their findings in order to choose the winning team. Teams are usually composed of three or more participants, depending on the size and complexity of the assigned simulation. The topics vary greatly and can range from business management and finance to just about any other academic subject. Though a case competition may resemble problem solving in terms of working through parts of a problem in order to solve it, they differ greatly. The reason is that problem solving implicates only the solver, who uses mathematical or systemic operations and manifests his critical thinking skills in order to find an answer, without the need to justify it. Case competitions can inflict an overwhelming degree of stress and pressure on competitors, but students agree that their outcomes are rewarding (Gardiner, 2005). On one hand, case competitions develop a real life structure to solve problems in an intensely competitive setting (Flynn & Klein, 2001). On the other hand, they offer monetary prizes,

networking opportunities, as well as the potential for securing internships or offers of employment. The winning team's school benefits too, as it enjoys bragging rights and recognition for its academic quality and excellence (Gardiner, 2005).

In past recent years, the academic world has witnessed a practical integration between the theoretical and corporate world. The engagement of students in real-life experiences has become a crucial mission, which formulates a positive learning curve, hence the case-study teaching method (Gamble & Jelley, 2014; Damnjanovic & Mijatovic, 2017). More recently, the redesigning of teaching tools extended beyond the classroom setting and become globally recognized as "*international case competitions*". Students benefit significantly by preparing and participating in international business case competitions. They acquire and develop functional, interpersonal, conceptual and leadership skills that range from learning how to work in teams, to problem solving, analytical argumentation, as well as market research abilities (Burke et al., 2013). Those business skills, identified as managerial competencies, are essential for any successful business career and would consequently increase student's chances in the job market by making them more attractive hires for employers (Ko & Chan, 2017). Thus, it is of great importance to enhance the student learning experience in international case competitions and reduce any possible chances of cheating or unethical behavior.

Prevalence and Reasons for Cheating

With the increased pressure on students to achieve results (Lewis, 1985), students are resorting to unethical behavior as a legitimate strategy to meet expectations (Klein et al., 2007). Various studies have tackled the prevalence of cheating among students to show that at least 50% of students have resorted to cheating in their college years on at least one exam or assignment (Eisenberg, 2004; Gallant, 2008). The common forms of cheating that students resort to include: plagiarism, which is copying or using someone else's work without giving them credit or claiming it as one's own work (Klein et al., 2007), accessing unauthorized sources during examination, having others do the work on their behalf, altering data to obtain significant results, or obtaining cheating material before the exam (Küçüktepe, 2014). Considering the study conducted by Simkin & McLeod (2010), results showed that the main reasons for which college students resort to cheating include the desire and the pressure to succeed, their justification or reasoning behind cheating and the available opportunity to cheat.

With the increasing competition between students for the same and most desired job opportunities and/or for the limited number of the same graduate school admissions (McCabe et al., 1999), the pressure to succeed has ranked number one on the list of reasons behind cheating (Simkin & McLeod, 2010; Cronan et al., 2018). In fact, studies have shown that despite the efforts employed by business schools to highlight the importance of moral conduct, unethical behavior still takes place and has even become more prevalent with the years especially among professionals and students (Graafland & Van, 2011; Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2014). Delving beyond student's desire to succeed, Scheiner et al. (2018) analyzed the effect of participating student's motives in idea competitions. The researchers found that extrinsic motives for participation such as monetary rewards, showed a positive relation with moral disengagement; the latter being defined as the disconnection from the auto-regulation mechanism which generally prevents students from behaving in a manner that is inconsistent with their common moral standards. The findings supported the researcher's views that moral disengagement and student's tendency to have unethical behaviors were positively related. On the other end, hedonic motives or benefits we proven to show a negative relation to moral disengagement. Due to the similarities between

idea competitions and business case competitions, we could extend those findings and apply them to the latter. Since business case competitions offer lucrative rewards for winners, ranging from direct monetary rewards to promises of future financial benefits, one could predict that participants in case competitions would show a similar moral disengagement and hence display an unethical behavior such as cheating.

The next reason for which students might resort to cheating is the level of supervision and available opportunities. Students generally perform their risk-benefit analysis, building upon the level of supervision or the possibility of being caught as a considerable factor to decide whether cheating is “*right enough*” or “*less right*” in such situations. According to Bolin (2004), cheating takes place in response to a perceived opportunity, where detection is unlikely and norms favor cheating. Such behavior is not restricted to class work only. Students with lenient and lax behaviors towards one type of unethical behavior might carry them along to the workplace and become a potential problem for future employers (Klein et al., 2007). Furthermore, research went on to analyze the underlying connection between the results of a competition and post-competition behaviors, especially at the work place and revealed that after the end of a competition, winners tend to behave in more dishonest ways than losers in those competitions, even in a completely unrelated future task. Case competitions are no exception. Thus, monitoring student’s behaviors is highly important since these competitions would serve to set the ethical mindset of tomorrow’s leaders (McCabe et al., 2001; Stiles et al., 2018).

Some international case competitions ignore the fact that the lack of appropriate supervision is a factor that encourages unethical practices, which contradicts with the mission of business schools in the first place. Based on the social learning theory (Bandura,1986), if teams notice that the rules are not enforced, regulations are not properly implemented and supervision is not available, then they could easily conclude that many competing groups would cheat and thus resort themselves to cheating in order not to be at a disadvantage. Stone et al. (2009) found that peer’s behavior might encourage non-cheaters to cheat in order not to be left at a disadvantage. Consequently, groups could feed their guilty conscious by the excuse that since others are probably cheating then it would be legitimate to do the same (Dobson, 2003). In other words, if students find a rational explanation to their behavior, then they will proceed with it without questioning its ethical nature.

Moreover, Pulfrey et al. (2018) studied bias theory in groups and found that the adherence of students to the values of group loyalty positively affected their acceptance of cheating as a group alongside peers, when faced with a competitive task such as a year-end exam. These results build upon previous studies that have examined the role of peers and their effect on student’s cheating at university level. Mainly, the study conducted by Owunwanne et al. (2010), which investigated whether university team leader’s conduct reflected on the group conduct, showed that team leader’s views did in fact reflect on the views of the overall student body. Those findings expose the important role of peers on general group behavior, even among large groups of students; hence we can infer the weight that peer pressure could have on student’s cheating when translated in a smaller group setting, such as the ones participating in international case competitions.

Even though academic misconduct has been the subject of abundant research in Western contexts, much less has been studied regarding cheating patterns of university students in the Middle East, besides certain conceptual papers or articles in newspapers which aimed to spread a general understanding about the issue. Furthermore, barely any research exists which covers the topic of cheating on international case competitions displayed by participating university level

students. Hence, the importance of this paper is its analysis of Lebanese university student's behavior, as well as its findings.

Selected International Case Competition Structures

The main purpose of this paper is to study what could influence an unethical behavior in the different case competitions in an attempt to recommend a set of practices that could prevent cheating in a competition setting. In order to achieve the aforementioned purpose, this paper focuses on the structures of five international business case competitions that Lebanese students from the selected universities participate in. The structure and process of each case competition was noted down (Table 1).

The process of a case competition is generally as follows; each business school selects a team of students from the different fields of business; fields include, but are not limited to, accounting, economics, finance, marketing and international business. In the competition, students are presented with either a single case or multiple cases of which the structure varies between short and long cases. Short cases contain all the information needed in order to solve the case and are limited to 3-5 hrs per case. Whereas long cases are either limited to 24 to 36 hrs, or allow for few months to be solved. In the long case structure, students are given real-life cases that companies and firms are facing or have faced. In all competitions, students need to assess the given cases and propose solutions based on their knowledge and analysis of the market and the case. Students then present their propositions to a jury that consists of people from the industry, in order to be evaluated on their reasoning, the content of the presentation and their performance, all facing questions asked by the jury.

| Table 1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIVE CASE COMPETITIONS | |
|--|--|
| Case Competition Name | Structure |
| BBICC-Belgrade Business International Case Competition | Students have to tackle one short and one long case study. The short case is 5 hrs long followed by a 15 mins presentation. Whereas the long case is 24 hrs long. Advisors can join the teams to the competition but cannot communicate with team members during problem-solving times. Phones or other communication devices are not allowed. Access to the internet is permitted but certain communication software/apps are not allowed. Participants cannot watch the presentations of other participants. |
| Peeptrade University Challenge | Students are expected to create and manage a virtual portfolio using an online trading system. An investment policy statement followed by a review of the fund results, 2 months later, are expected to be delivered. Finally, the top 10 teams present their work to a panel of professionals. The winning teams receive financial prizes as well as possible job opportunities at leading companies. |
| HSBC HKU Business Case Competition | Students should address different short cases and are given 3 hrs to solve each case. The teams are then expected to give a 20 mins presentation to a panel of four senior business executives. The use of PowerPoint, electronic devices and any reference material is strictly prohibited. Participants are not allowed to contact any person not on their team throughout any round of the competition. |
| CFA Research Challenge | Students are required to conduct a research on a regional traded company using publicly available information. The teams are expected to prepare a report and then present it to a panel of judges. |

| Table 1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIVE CASE COMPETITIONS | |
|--|---|
| | The preparation time of the report goes up to 3 months. The teams have a faculty advisor and an industry mentor who help them throughout the process. The winning teams on the local levels compete on the regional level and then on the global one. |
| JMUCC-John Molson Undergraduate Case Competition | Students face three short live cases and are given 3 hrs to solve each case followed by a 24 hrs live case. Only in the long case, students are allowed to use the internet and textbooks to prepare a detailed presentation about the case. |

CHEATING BEHAVIOR IN LEBANESE UNIVERSITIES: A SURVEY

Sampling

The questionnaire employed in this study was designed based on primary data collection to understand and gain insight into Lebanese student's perceptions and attitudes in regards to cheating. The first part of the survey captured demographic information about the respondents (gender, age, major and GPA). The second part constituted of three questions about the perception of cheating, ways of cheating and reasons to cheat. In the first question, respondents were asked to indicate their view about cheating on a continuum that ranged between "Very Negative" to "Very Positive". Respondents were also asked to choose if they ever cheated, what were their reasons and what were the behaviors that they had engaged in; multiple options could apply in each question. The reasons and activities listed were selected from the literature. The questionnaires were sent through email and respondents were ensured anonymity.

The sample for this study was a representative sample of business major students enrolled in the following universities in Lebanon: American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese American University (LAU) and University of Saint Joseph (USJ). The universities chosen are ones that participate in international business case competitions. The sample might not be statistically representative of the whole population of students, but nonetheless, for the general understanding of Lebanese student's attitudes towards cheating, the chosen sample is convenient and takes into account the different backgrounds of students. The sample consisted of 193 students and participation in the survey was voluntary.

Survey Findings

The survey responses showed a mean GPA of 3.25 on a scale of 4.00 and an average age of 20.8, with 57.69% being males and 42.31% being females. Among the respondents, 36.78% were from AUB (71/193), 35.23% were from LAU (68/193) and 27.97% were from USJ (54/193).

The first question in the survey reported an estimate of cheating prevalence by adding the percentage of students who perceive cheating as negative and those who are lenient about it. Results show that an estimate of 35.75% of students view cheating as a reinforcing positive behavior. Whereas an estimate of 46.63% of students view cheating as a negative behavior. Results for the first question are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
THE PREVALENCE OF CHEATING AMONG LEBANESE BUSINESS STUDENTS

| View on Cheating | Response |
|---|-----------------|
| Very negative: Cheating hurts me, hurts others and disrespects authority. | 16.58% (32) |
| Somewhat negative: Cheating hurts me yet harms no one else. | 30.05% (58) |
| Neither positive nor negative: Cheating is just a fact of life. | 17.61% (34) |
| Somewhat positive: If I can get away with it, then why not? | 30.57% (59) |
| Very positive: Cheating is an advantage I have over others. | 5.18% (10) |

On the second question concerning the reasons why students cheat, multiple answers could apply. Results showed that students reported cheating the most when “*The environment and level of surveillance were permissive and I did not perceive repercussions*” (61.65%), “*The exam or assignment was so important to me or my future career and I had the fear of failure*” (52.84%) and due to the “*Lack of confidence in the ability to answer correctly*” (48.18%).

Finally, the last question asked, “*If you ever cheated what are the behaviors that you engaged in*”. Results showed that students mostly engaged in “*Obtaining a previous test version, test answer key, or other unauthorized material without teacher consent*” (136/193 students), “*Using a cheat card or obtaining test answers during an exam or trying to copy from another student’s work*” (124/193 students) and “*Paying someone to write your assignments or papers*” (66/193 students). Results for the survey questions are shown in Tables 3 & 4.

Table 3
THE REASONS FOR WHICH STUDENTS CHEAT

| Reasons Behind Cheating | Responses |
|--|------------------|
| Lack of confidence in the ability to answer correctly. | 48.18% (93) |
| The environment and level of surveillance were permissive and I did not perceive repercussions. | 61.65% (119) |
| Everyone was doing it and I would have been disadvantaged if I had not cheated. | 26.94% (52) |
| The material was too hard and I was desperate. | 44.04% (85) |
| To maintain or boost my GPA. | 37.30% (72) |
| I did not have time to prepare and I thought I could risk it. | 29.01% (56) |
| The exam or assignment was so important to me or my future career and I had the fear of failure. | 52.84% (102) |

Table 4
THE CHEATING BEHAVIORS THAT STUDENTS ENGAGE IN

| Cheating Behaviors | Responses |
|---|------------------|
| Copying or summarizing information from the Internet or from a publication without giving credit to the original author or citing its original source (i.e. plagiarizing), or falsifying the list of cited sources. | 29.53% (57) |
| Presenting falsified or fabricated data in a research paper as though it were factual. | 35.23 % (68) |
| Taking a test for another student or having a student take it for you. | 0% (0) |
| Paying someone to write your assignments or papers. | 34.19% (66) |
| Submitting previously prepared work in an exam as though it was written during class time | 31.08% (60) |
| Using a cheat card or obtaining test answers during an exam or trying to copy from another student’s work. | 64.24% (124) |
| Having a teacher change your final grade after it has been issued. | 17.61% (34) |
| Obtaining a previous test version, test answer key, or other unauthorized material without teacher consent. | 70.46% (136) |

INTERNATIONAL CASE COMPETITION STRUCTURES: INFERENCES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Inferences

From the survey results, it is evident that students tend to cheat the most when the work required is important to their future in terms of growth and career (52.84% of the students reported cheating when this condition applies). This wholly applies in the international business case competitions setting, whereby winning a case competition increases the opportunities of a student to be employed by highly ranked companies in competitive industries. The significance of the survey results lies in the importance of the level of surveillance. Almost 61% of the students cheat due to the low levels of surveillance. In assessing the ways that students cheat, the top 3 reported ways of cheating (obtaining previous or unauthorized material, copying someone else's work and paying someone to do their work) are all applicable when the levels of surveillance are low.

In an attempt to link this to the case competition structures, it is evident that there are discrepancies of time limits given to solve the cases; hence varying the levels of surveillance imposed in each competition is of the essence depending on the type of the competition, as well as its requirements and the feasibility of imposing and maintaining a certain degree of supervision on students while they work on the case. For instance, in the Peeprade University Challenge and the CFA Research Challenge, students are given months to study and evaluate companies. In such a case where the amount of time dedicated to the case varies, where direct supervision is limited and in an atmosphere of pressure of achieving good results, students might resort to people other than their mentors or advisors without the knowledge of the jury. Whereas in the other competitions where students are given limited hours, the probability of going through any unethical behavior schemes in order to achieve results drops down. In this case, high surveillance levels are easily maintained and the chances of obtaining “*unauthorized material*” or “*help from outside*” are low.

This also brings up the question of whether having open and unlimited access to the internet as well as databases shake the ethicality of the competition or not. In cases where open internet access is provided, coupled with limited supervision, students might be using emails to connect with people who are seniors in terms of market knowledge and case cracking. On the other hand, in short case competitions, where students are all given equal information about the case, without any access to research or outside material, students have to rely solely on their knowledge and intuition to come up with highly innovative and strategic business solutions. Here students do depend on their own efforts and are judged accordingly.

Recommendations

As the survey indicates, students tend to see low surveillance levels as an opportunity to perform better through seeking the help of others, accessing unauthorized material either during or before the assessment, or using previously and exhaustively prepared work as their own. Consequently, in a case competition setting where the time frame of the competition exceeds a month, surveillance levels are typically low and access to the internet, social networks and databases is unlimited, the top 3 reported ways of cheating used by students are applicable. For this reason, the structuring of case competitions should take into account the supervision entailed

to the competition, the time scale given to students and the degree of access to information that is granted to participants.

Supervision: As we discussed earlier, students base their risk-benefit analysis mainly on the probability of being caught in an unethical behavior (Bolin, 2004). Under high supervision, attitudes toward cheating become “*less worthy*” (Eisenberg, 2004). Consequently, enhancing full and timely supervision in case competitions prevents students from resorting to any unethical behavior (Simkin & Mcleod, 2010). Thus, one way of doing so is for students to be given all the needed resources and information, with no contact with the external environment and asked to solve the case. On another end, if usage of the internet is necessary, limiting web access to certain sites becomes a necessity. Increasing the level of supervision would inevitably reduce any opportunity for unethicality in the competition setting and students would then be assessed on their actual work,

Time scale: Limiting the time given to solve each case to few hrs or to one or two fully supervised days decreases the chances of attempting any unethical behavior.

Access to data: The issue of equal access to commercial databases can easily be achieved by providing all teams with comparable tools under the supervised setting. On another end, providing students with all the information needed to solve a case equalizes their possession of data. Moreover, giving students cases that are not yet solved by their respective companies increases the level of fairness put forth to assess the students.

CONCLUSION

Case Competitions are of great value to every participant. They are the bridging line between theory and practice. Case competitions expose students to various learning opportunities and open the doors for professional and personal growth. For this reason, it is of great importance to sustain the utmost just and ethical environment in the competition setting. This research surveyed students in order to confirm and provide a comprehension of the reasons for which student’s cheat, the most common cheating behaviors that they engage in, as well as to find its relation to the settings of case competitions.

Students identified surveillance, the importance of the assessment to their future and being unconfident of their answers as the top three reasons to cheat. As for the behaviors they engage in, they reported using unauthorized material, trying to cheat within the assessment and having someone do their work as the top three behaviors. With the importance set forth by the case competitions to a student’s future, the odds of engaging in any of the cheating behaviors in relation to the varying levels of surveillance differ per competition. Thus, it is crucial to structure case competitions in a way that reduces any possible cheating behavior that a student might opt for.

This paper recommends practices that help align case competition goals with the structuring. Recommendations include enforcing supervision, limiting the competition time-scale and giving equal access to data. Following the recommended practices would create a more fair and just environment for students to compete in and would enhance the benefit-acquisition experience for all participating members.

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