

Corruption in Higher Education: Global Challenges and Responses

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Volume 51, Number 2, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082025ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.189247>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education

ISSN

2293-6602 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Schuetze, H. (2021). Review of [Corruption in Higher Education: Global Challenges and Responses]. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education / Revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur*, 51(2), 85–86.
<https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.189247>

BOOK REVIEW

CORRUPTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

REVIEWED BY

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Denisova-Schmidt, Elena (Ed.) (2020). *Corruption in Higher Education: Global Challenges and Responses*. Leiden/Boston: Brill Sense. Pages: 182. Price: 54.00 CAD (paper), 111.02 CAD (hardcover).

Seeing the title of this publication, some people familiar with higher education will probably think primarily of student homework plagiarism and ways to discover it (for example with the help of online programs such as Turnitin or Grammarly), others of research data manipulation by faculty. One will be reminded of bribery at the base of the recent admission scandals at some top American universities which were widely reported, damaging the reputation of these institutions and the value of their degrees. Plagiarizing doctoral dissertations is another widely reported case of academic corruption, for example in Germany, where recently several politicians were found to be guilty of plagiarism of their theses. Two prominent federal ministers, one of them the Minister of Research and Science, had to step back when their degrees were revoked by the universities that had awarded them.

“Corruption” is a highly complex issue: It is an umbrella term for many different forms of dishonest behavior, and it occurs at several levels: state, institutional, and personal. What exactly it is and how it is defined, viewed and sanctioned depends to a great extent on the cultural context in which it occurs. Transparency International, the global NGO engaged in fighting corruption in more than one hundred countries, defines corruption as “abuse of entrusted power for private gain.” While this describes dishonest, unethical or criminal behavior by politicians, public officials, and corporations, corruption in higher education relates largely to the violation of academic integrity both on the personal and institutional level. Besides

cheating, plagiarism and fake qualifications, which are widespread problems, the term encompasses other activities such as bribery, nepotism, patronage and deceit.

This volume looks at academic corruption under five different perspectives, partly overlapping: students, faculty, institutions, countries and remedies. It has 26 short chapters. With the exception of the Introduction by the editor, none of these chapters were originally written for this book. They are short articles that have appeared over the last six years in three periodical publications: *International Higher Education*, the quarterly newsletter of the Boston College Center of International Higher Education; *University World News*, a weekly online newsletter published by a private company based in London, UK, with a network of international correspondents; and *Higher Education in Russia and Beyond*, a quarterly “informational journal” published by the Russian Higher School of Education in Moscow.

The primary geographical focus of this collection of essays is on Russia and Eastern European countries; a few chapters deal with the situation in South and Southeast Asia (India and Indonesia). An excellent brief overview about the academic culture in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan is provided by Rui Yang, who also addresses the situation in China where the higher education system has been growing faster than in any other part of the world and, therefore, the quality of education in new institutions has been a major problem.

There is no chapter on Latin America nor Africa,

where academic corruption is high, with the exception of an essay on Kenya, one of the hotspots of “contract cheating,”—i.e., the production of academic papers for the purpose of selling them to students in English speaking countries who are cheating on their assignments.

Only two essays deal with Western countries. One reports on the practice of nepotism in the way faculty members are hired by some universities in Sweden. Another report from Norway deals with ways of identifying and sanctioning the use of fake university degrees from “diploma mills” and publications from “predatory” journals and conferences. Reference is made in this chapter to international bodies and mechanisms that work on controlling ethical behavior and respecting academic integrity rules as well as trying to establish safeguards against fraud and nepotism. Examples are policies for ethical conduct as well as indexes of fraudulent universities and academic publications that are collected and published by UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Transparency International, and others.

As none of the chapters in this book is breaking new ground since they are reprints, updated and edited, of articles published in one of the three periodicals mentioned above, how useful is this collection?

There are three reasons why this volume is recommended. First, it raises awareness of the various forms which “corruption” takes—beyond the cheating and plagiarism that most people working in higher education are aware of. The book also discusses the reasons for the widespread occurrence of corruption in the higher education system and the need for teaching students academic ethics and informing them of the sanctions for infractions against the basic rules of academic ethics. The point is made strongly that the violation of these rules does not just result in fraudulent exams and fake degrees but can also have disastrous effects when individuals with fake qualifications are appointed to professional positions such as engineers or physicians who have to take decisions or perform acts for which they are not qualified, endangering life, health and safety of the population.

The third reason why the book is useful is that it concentrates largely on countries and higher education systems that most North American students of comparative education are unfamiliar with. Authors of various chapters show that, in spite of different systems and cultures, corruption in higher education has negative effects for

society and that the enforcement of basic ethical standards of academic honesty and integrity, transparency and quality control are central for higher education systems in all countries alike.

In spite of this overall positive assessment, a critical remark is in order. Since these 26 essays are written by authors from different countries with different language backgrounds, a carefully prepared index would have been important for readers looking for specific information and references. Instead, the one page long index contains just 30 entries, including “corruption” and “universities,” but makes no references to specific countries or to the institutions mentioned in the articles.