The Prevalence of Fraudulent Excuses at UW – Stevens Point

Alex M. Wouters
Faculty Sponsor: Craig A. Wendorf

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to identify factors that influence why and when students give fraudulent excuses. Students completed a survey in which they recalled their own and peers’ use of fraudulent academic excuses. Students indicated their reasons for offering the fabricated excuses, their professors’ excuse policies, and the acceptance rates of the excuses. A majority of UWSP students surveyed reported being less likely to give a fraudulent excuse if the professor requires documentation. Students at UWSP tend to be looking for a deadline extension.

INTRODUCTION

According to Caron, Whitbourne, & Halgin (1992), “A fraudulent academic excuse is defined as one that the student fabricated specifically for the purpose of avoiding an academic responsibility.”

Prior research shows that fraudulent academic excuses are frequently used (Caron, Whitbourne, & Halgin, 1992; O’Dell & Hoyert, 2008; Roig & Caso, 2005). For example, Caron, Whitbourne, & Halgin showed that 68% of students admitted to providing a fraudulent academic excuse at least once.

In general, students who give fraudulent excuses may have the impression that giving the excuse can result in benefit to the student (such as a deadline extension, an opportunity to redo an assignment, etc.). However, past research has focused on this aspect.

The purpose of this study was to identify the prevalence of fraudulent academic excuses among UWSP students. Documentation requirements and acceptance rates were also examined. These rates were compared to those obtained from prior research.

METHOD

Participants

UWSP Psychology 110 students (N = 141) completed an online survey. Students reported a mean age of 19.70, with 64.5% being either freshmen or sophomores.

Procedure and Measures

Students indicated whether they had even given a fraudulent academic excuse, and described the excuse if they had. Students also stated their reasons for using the excuse, and were asked whether the professor’s excuse policy affected their decision to offer the excuse. Finally, the participants were asked to recall the most fraudulent excuse they had heard another student offer.

Coding Procedures

Fraudulent academic excuses given by students were coded using the same categories as O’Dell and Hoyert (2008); these categories are apparent in Figure 1. The question pertaining to the reason for offering the excuses was forced-choice, and the reasons were therefore automatically coded according to these choices (see Figure 2).

RESULTS

Fifty percent of students surveyed reported giving at least one fraudulent academic excuse while enrolled in college. Of these students, 86% reported that the excuses were accepted by the professor.

Figure 1 shows the different types of excuses given. Of students who have given at least one fraudulent academic excuse, illness is the most common false excuse. A substantial number of excuses did not fit the categorization system.

A majority of students surveyed (75%) admitted that they are less likely to give a fraudulent excuse if the professor requires documentation of the excuse. Only one student admitted to creating false documentation (the excuse was accepted).

Figure 2 displays the reasons why students say they offered the excuses. Though requesting a deadline was the most frequently offered reason, a large number of responses were listed as “other” by the students. The opportunity to re-do an assignment or to be completely excused from the assignment do not appear to weigh heavily on the students.

DISCUSSION

The number of fraudulent academic excuses offered by UWSP students was considerably lower than in previous research. It is unknown if this lower number represents sampling error, true population differences, or changes in excuse-giving over time.

The high number of excuses falling into the “other” category indicates a need to rethink O’Dell and Hoyert’s (2008) classification system. For example, technological issues were a common excuse given that have no category outside of “other”.

Similarly, a better classification system for the reasons that students give excuses appears to be in order. In particular, “other” became a catch-all category for students and clearly did not match students’ reasons.

Given that students frequently request a deadline extension, it is important to identify why this occurs. Though it could reflect student characteristics (e.g., poor time management, etc.), it is possible that it reflects a very heavy workload among students. This is an area for future research, perhaps by testing college students from a greater age range.

Also, more research should be conducted examine possible gender differences in fraudulent excuse making. Roig and Caso (2005) showed that women offered a greater variety of excuses compared to men. Even more broadly, this research could be extended to test GPA amongst the students to examine a correlation between GPA and amount of false excuses given by the student.

REFERENCES

