



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Perceptions of acceptable conducts by university students



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KEYWORDS

Academic misconducts;
Professional misconducts;
Perceptions;
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Abstract

Objective: To determine perceptions of acceptable conducts amongst under and postgraduate optometry students and to compare them with students from other disciplines.

Methods: Students (under/postgraduate) of optometry ($n = 156$) and other courses ($n = 54$) from University of Minho participated in a voluntary online questionnaire about perception of conducts, classifying as acceptable or unacceptable 15 academic or professional scenarios.

Results: 210 questionnaires were analyzed. Differences in perceptions were found between optometry under and postgraduates in scenario 5, Chi-square(2,156) = 4.3, $p = 0.038$, and scenario 7, Chi-square(2,156) = 7.0, $p = 0.008$ (both with cheating more acceptable for postgrads). Differences between under and postgraduates from other courses were found in scenario 9 (taking supplies from classroom more acceptable for undergrads), Chi-square(1,54) = 5.0, $p = 0.025$, and scenario 14 (forging a signature more acceptable for postgrads), Chi-square(1,54) = 3.9, $p = 0.046$. Differences between optometry and other courses undergraduates were observed in scenario 2 (plagiarism more acceptable for optometry undergrads), Chi-square(1,154) = 8.3, $p = 0.004$ and scenario 9 (taking supplies from classroom more acceptable for other undergrads), chi-square(1,54) = 7.8, $p = 0.005$. Differences between optometry and other courses postgraduates were observed in scenario 7, Chi-square(1,56) = 5.8, $p = 0.016$, scenario 10 (both with cheating more acceptable for optometry postgrads), chi-square(1,54) = 8.1, $p = 0.004$ and scenario 14 (forging a signature more acceptable for other postgrads), Chi-square(1,54) = 6.1, $p = 0.026$.

Conclusion: Academic misconducts were mainly considered more acceptable than professional misconducts. Our results show that perceptions of acceptable conducts amongst optometry students are not very different from other students, and, against our initial prediction, do not show a general change in misconduct perception when students become more mature. Universities should pay more attention to this problem and take action.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Malas conductas académicas;
Malas conductas profesionales;
Percepciones;
Estudiantes de optometría

Percepciones sobre las conductas aceptables por los estudiantes universitarios**Resumen**

Objetivo: Determinar las percepciones sobre las conductas aceptables entre los estudiantes universitarios y los postgraduados en optometría, y compararlas con los estudiantes de otras disciplinas.

Métodos: Los estudiantes (universitarios/y postgraduados) de optometría (n=156) y de otras carreras (n=54) de la Universidad de Minho participaron en un cuestionario online voluntario acerca de la percepción de las conductas, calificando de aceptables o inaceptables a 15 escenarios académicos o profesionales.

Resultados: Se analizaron 210 cuestionarios. Se encontraron diferencias en las percepciones entre los estudiantes y los postgraduados en optometría en el escenario 5, $\chi^2(2,156) = 4,3, p = 0,038$, y el escenario 7, $\chi^2(2,156) = 7,0, p = 0,008$ (en ambos, hacer trampas es más aceptable para los postgraduados). Se encontraron diferencias entre los estudiantes y los postgraduados de otras carreras en el escenario 9 (coger suministros de la clase es más aceptable para los estudiantes), $\chi^2(1,54) = 5,0, p = 0,025$, y el escenario 14 (falsificar una firma es más aceptable para los postgraduados), $\chi^2(1,54) = 3,9, p = 0,046$. Se encontraron diferencias entre los estudiantes de optometría y de otras carreras en el escenario 2 (el plagio es más aceptable para los estudiantes de optometría), $\chi^2(1,154) = 8,3, p = 0,004$ y el escenario 9 (coger suministros de la clase es más aceptable para los estudiantes de otras carreras), $\chi^2(1,54) = 7,8, p = 0,005$. Se encontraron diferencias entre los postgraduados de optometría y de otras carreras en el escenario 7, $\chi^2(1,56) = 5,8, p = 0,016$, y el escenario 10 (en ambos, hacer trampas es más aceptable para los postgraduados en optometría), $\chi^2(1,54) = 8,1, p = 0,004$ y el escenario 14 (falsificar una firma es más aceptable para los postgraduados en otras carreras), $\chi^2(1,54) = 6,1, p = 0,026$.

Conclusión: Las malas conductas académicas se consideraron mucho más aceptables que las malas conductas profesionales. Nuestros resultados muestran que las percepciones sobre las conductas aceptables entre los estudiantes de optometría no son muy diferentes a las de otros estudiantes y, en contra de nuestra predicción inicial, no reflejan un cambio general de la percepción de mala conducta cuando los estudiantes son más maduros. Las universidades deberían prestar más atención a este problema, y tomar medidas al respecto.

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Introduction

Healthcare professionals, optometrists included, are expected to express essential ethical principles, values and integrity that best serve their patients' interests. Nevertheless, unlike work laws and regulations, moral standards or ethical principles are flexible and their application varies in each particular situation. Thus, moral standards place upon each professional two main obligations: the responsibility of developing his or her personal standards and the required self-discipline to practice in accordance with these standards.¹ Optometrists' professional development is mainly determined by their attitude towards the profession, by facing each clinical case as a potential learning experience and staying committed to a process of continuous improvement that started out as student at universities.² Academic misconduct has been defined as the misrepresentation of one's academic achievement, with cheating and plagiarism being its most common manifestations.³ Professional misconducts include: deliberate acts of disrespectful behaviour to faculty members, students and patients; failure to abide by standard clinical policies and procedures; theft of examination or examination

answers; forgery, alteration or misuse of patient records; and/or theft or destruction of college or others property.³ Some studies have shown that academic dishonest behaviours seem to be a common occurrence amongst students in general, including health care disciplines such as pharmacy⁴ and nursing.⁵

A positive relationship between students' academic misconducts and their future professional misconducts has been identified. Engineering students tend to use similar decision-making processes whether in college or in their workplace and that past deviant behaviour is an indicator of future dishonest behaviour, showing that academic dishonesty relates to unprofessional practice.⁶ A strong relation has been identified between business students' propensity to cheat in university and their attitude towards unethical behaviour in professional settings.⁷ Business students who find academic dishonest behaviours acceptable are more likely to engage in such behaviours, and those who engage in these behaviours during college are more likely to incur in dishonest behaviours in the workplace.⁸ As for health care students, pharmacy students' dishonest behaviours in professional programmes seems to relate to unprofessional behaviour.⁹ Also, dishonest behaviours seem to be

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