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Do Our Schools Invite Cheating?

To the Editor:

In "Digging Out Roots of Cheating in High School" (Editorial Observer, Oct. 12), Maura J. Casey writes that experts believe that near-universal cheating is a bad habit and a challenge. Nonsense. Cheating is corrupt and should not be tolerated in any form.

Entering law students are told outright that cheating will result in expulsion. The school must report such behavior to the state board, and the student will not be certified to practice. The penalty for cheating is catastrophe.

How much greater, then, is the reward of knowing one mastered the subject matter honorably and is competent in the profession. If business schools had such standards, Wall Street wouldn't be in the mess it's in today.

JOSEPH CHINESE
Oakland, Calif., Oct. 13, 2008

multiple offenses to try to change the few students who do have a real problem. The final step was to present teachers with solutions to prevent simple yet common forms of cheating.

JEREMY ROSE
St. Louis, Oct. 13, 2008

To the Editor:

It is not surprising that cheating has "become part of the acceptable status quo." In the school district where I live, mathematics teachers encourage fraudulent practices by allowing students to bring "cheat sheets" to exams. Some teachers give extra points for compiling and using these sheets.

ARLENE GREENBERG
Tiburon, Calif., Oct. 13, 2008
The writer is a math specialist.



ERIC JANSSEN

To the Editor:

If grades were abolished, or at least grade point averages were not such an important factor in college and graduate admissions, the problem of cheating might be eliminated.

The unfortunate fact is that grades do not necessarily reflect intelligence, academic ability, talent, knowledge or original thinking and creativity, but often only how many correct answers a student was able to memorize. In courses where there is not mere rote memorization, grading is often highly subjective and arbitrary.

Thus a student who is mediocre or worse can end up with a much higher grade point average than one who is bright, talented, hardworking, motivated and knowledgeable. The premise that the harder a student works, the higher the grades is false.

Is this a fair system of determining merit?
New Rochelle, N.Y., Oct. 14, 2008

To the Editor:

With or without honor codes, teachers must be trained to detect cheating. Given a chance to cheat, some students will do so and others will feel pressured to do so to remain competitive.

Efforts to discourage cheating are generally appreciated by students who don't want to cheat. But college administrators have become timid because of "we studied together" lawsuits. Few cheating incidents result in disciplinary action.

Using tips from veteran teachers at Hunter College, I learned to arrange chairs in columns so the only thing visible to the test taker was the back of another student.

When there was an anomaly that arose when I graded a test, suspect students were asked to take the identical test while seated separately. I encountered few disputes and never lost any that did occur.

East Orange, N.J., Oct. 15, 2008
The writer was a math teacher.

Collateral Damage

Developing countries have sparked their share of international financial crises over the years. But this time it is not their fault.

As the world's richest nations spend trillions to rescue their own financial systems from the maelstrom caused by years of excess, they must also be prepared to provide billions to poorer countries that did not cause this crisis but are nevertheless its victims.

The developing world has been caught up big time in the global credit squeeze, as beleaguered foreign banks have cut their credit lines and panicked foreign investors have pulled their money out. Private capital flows to emerging markets are expected to plummet 30 percent this year.

Exports are suffering as rich economies slow and commodity prices retreat. Remittances from migrant workers — a core source of earnings for many developing countries — are falling fast.

Eastern and Central Europe, where much of the banking system is controlled by Western banks, is in particularly dire straits. Ukraine asked the International Monetary Fund for \$14 billion to prop up its financial system as money flees. Hungary got 5 billion euros from the European Central Bank.

Pakistan — America's hoped-for ally in the fight against Al Qaeda that has nuclear weapons — is said to need \$3 billion to \$4 billion to finance a gaping trade deficit.

Even robust economies with strong budgets and ample reserves have been walloped by the capital crunch. Two weeks ago, the Mexican peso suffered its steepest drop since the peso crisis of December 1994.

The Brazilian real and the Korean won have plunged by a quarter against the dollar.

Given the depth of the crisis here, it might be tempting to ignore the plight of developing economies. But it is in the clear economic interest of wealthy nations to help. The I.M.F. expects these countries to be the only engine of global growth in the next year or so.

Fortunately, some people are thinking ahead. The International Finance Corporation, an arm of the World Bank, is mulling a \$3 billion fund to help recapitalize shaky banking systems in the world's poorest countries. The Inter-American Development Bank said it would increase its lending and announced a \$6 billion facility to help companies in smaller Latin American countries that lose access to funding.

The I.M.F. said it is flush with cash — \$200 billion plus an additional \$50 billion in standing credit arrangements with donor countries — to mobilize if needed. For that it will need the go-ahead from the United States and other big contributors. The I.M.F. must also be ready to relax — within reason — the battery of preconditions it usually attaches to its help.

The world's richest countries have exhibited enormous myopia throughout this crisis — originally scurrying for ad hoc individual "solutions" that worsened the collective mess. Less than two weeks ago, Washington and Brussels allowed Iceland to go bust.

As the world's financial powers struggle to contain the disaster, they should not lose sight of its effect on other countries. Every economy for itself makes no sense — and could prove highly dangerous — in today's interconnected world.

A War on Janitors

The Wild West weirdness of the nation's immigration policy reached new extremes last week in Mesa, Ariz., a Phoenix suburb where the county sheriff, Joe Arpaio, has gone off the rails as the self-appointed scourge of people without papers.

About 2 a.m. on Thursday, Sheriff Arpaio sent out a strike force of 30 detectives and 30 members of his volunteer "posse," with semiautomatic weapons and dogs, to look for illegal janitors. Acting on a tip to the sheriff's immigration hotline, they raided Mesa's City Hall. They raided the public library. They raided the local headquarters of Management Cleaning Controls, the company with the janitorial contract for city buildings.

Three janitors were arrested at the library. Thirteen other people were picked up at their homes. All are "illegals," according to the sheriff's office, which keeps a running total of its immigration arrests on its Web site.

In most other parts of the country this would be seen as a stunning misuse of firepower, a waste of resources and a bizarre intrusion by one government agency onto another's turf. Neither the mayor nor Mesa's Police Department had been warned about the raids. And the city had already been investigating the company's hiring.

But this happened in Maricopa County, where for months Sheriff Arpaio's deputies have been staging high-profile sweeps, stopping drivers and pedestrians and demanding their papers. The crackdowns have terrorized and infuriated Latino residents of Phoenix, America's fifth-largest city, where citizens say they have been stopped and harassed for the crime of being brown-skinned. They have spurred lawsuits and led the Phoenix mayor and others to plead for a federal investigation.

Sheriff Arpaio's crusade is unconstitutional and repugnant. But it is where the rest of the country could be headed. Immigration has vanished from the presidential race, but its problems are still with us, distorted by opportunists and poisoned by fear.

The system has too few visas, too many shadow workers and no way to bring a huge and vital undocumented labor force into compliance with the law.

The new president will not only have to stand up for something better; he will have to stand against the repulsive scapegoating that hard-liners like Sheriff Arpaio, who is up for re-election next month, have waged for short-term political gain.

He will, in short, have to reassure immigrants, Latinos especially, that America's welcome is secure.

2,000 Is Really Enough

Health officials in New York City call it fast-food sticker shock. Since last May, chain restaurants in the city have been required to list the number of calories for every item on their menus. According to a recent survey, more than 80 percent of those who saw the calorie count were "surprised," even shocked, that an average-looking bran muffin could contain 470 calories and a full-fledged Big Mac attack (with soda and fries, of course) more than 1,200.

Health officials around the country are pushing to adopt New York's "Read 'Em Before You Eat 'Em" postings as another way to attack obesity.

Some restaurants are suing to overturn the requirement. Many restaurants also back the LEAN Act, recently introduced in Congress. This deceptively named bill would pre-empt New York's law, and a similar law in California, allowing restaurants to tuck calorie information

at the back of the menu or in a separate brochure. Try getting a teenager aching for a supersized pizza to check calories in a brochure. Congress should instead look to a bill introduced by Senator Tom Harkin that would essentially apply the New York system nationwide.

It is heartening to see that some corporations have already volunteered to disclose calorie counts.

Yum Brands announced earlier this month that it will begin adding calorie counts to the menu boards at company-owned franchises, including its Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell outlets. Its goal is to label all menus by 2011.

Despite New York City's image as a place where gaunt is glamorous, over half its adults are overweight or obese. City officials have started a good campaign in the subways reminding people that for most adults 2,000 calories a day is enough.

ONLINE: MORE LETTERS

Natural gas and the water supply;
the next president and nuclear
weapons; the No Child Left Behind law.
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Editorial Observer / SERGE SCHMEMMANN

The Case Against and For Mikhail Khodorkovsky

This month marks five years since Mikhail Khodorkovsky — once one of Russia's richest men — was seized in his private plane at the Novosibirsk airport. He was subsequently convicted of fraud and tax evasion and sentenced to eight years in a labor camp. His huge oil company, Yukos, was dismantled and sold off piecemeal to Kremlin loyalists.

In August Mr. Khodorkovsky was denied parole on the grounds that he had not been attending sewing classes at the labor camp in the Russian Far East. Earlier this month he was put in solitary confinement for 12 days for giving a written interview to the Russian edition of Esquire magazine.

The interviewer was Grigory Chikhartshvili, who, under the pen name Boris Akunin, is one of the most popular writers in Russia today. He said people asked him why he was making a fuss about an oligarch who didn't get so fabulously rich by always obeying the law. Mr. Chikhartshvili explained that it was specifically on the Yukos case that

we lost the independence of the judiciary — an institution without which a democratic society cannot exist." He added that "if we restore justice and legality in the case of Khodorkovsky, this will also help all the rest of the victims" of Russia's authoritarian government.

The argument may be a little one for many Russians to understand because the men who made obscene fortunes in the first post-Soviet years are seen as guilty by definition.

In fact, it remains unclear why then-President Vladimir Putin turned so viciously on this one oligarch, while doing business with so many others. One theory is that Mr. Putin saw Mr. Khodorkovsky — who was putting a lot of money into political parties — as a serious rival, and that his arrest was a signal to all oligarchs to stay out of politics.

Another theory is that Mr. Khodorkovsky had personally defied the Russian president on some unknown issue; yet another is that the Kremlin wanted to stop him from bringing Western compa-

Solitary, sewing classes and Russia's need for the rule of law.

nies in as Yukos partners.

The point is that nobody in Russia believes that the real reason Mr. Khodorkovsky was imprisoned was the crimes of which he was convicted.

For Mr. Chikhartshvili, the arrest marked the point at which the liberals of the first post-Soviet years — who had tried, however poorly, to install a rule of law — were pushed aside by "siloviki," the secret service and army chiefs who now rule by raw power (silva).

What struck me was Mr. Chikhartshvili's argument was that if Mr. Khodorkovsky had indeed become a symbol of the lost rule of law, then he is in effect one of the premier "dissidents" of the

Putin era — an unlikely role for a robber baron.

Andrei Sakharov, Natan Sharansky and other members of the Helsinki Group were fighting for a noble cause: freedom. To do that they did not challenge the legitimacy of Soviet institutions or the Soviet Union by a long shot, they argued was in the government obey its own laws — an emigration, freedom of speech, freedom of religion — and comply with the human rights clauses of the Helsinki Final Act.

Soviet rulers responded brutally, imprisoning (usually for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda") or exiling virtually the whole group. But the more the Kremlin openly set itself above the law, the weaker it became. The dissidents of the last Soviet years became the heroes of the first post-Soviet years.

The parallels with the present should not be exaggerated. Putin's Russia is not the Soviet Union by a long shot; Russians have many more freedoms now. And Mr. Khodorkovsky is hardly a human-rights crusader of the mold of a

Sakharov, though in his last years at Yukos he moved the company toward high levels of transparency and accountability.

But so long as Mr. Khodorkovsky is kept in a labor camp and denied parole for not sewing property, he remains a powerful symbol of the lack of independence of Russia's prosecutors and judges. So long as they are not independent, Russia cannot have the effective legal system it needs to combat corruption, referee markets and create and protect a civil society.

There was some hope that Russia's new president, Dmitry Medvedev, would do things differently from his mentor (and now prime minister) Mr. Putin. So far he has failed to live up to his commitment to strengthen the rule of law. But Mr. Medvedev does have the power to pardon Mr. Khodorkovsky. That might start by in a class with letting Andrei Sakharov return from internal exile, but that would be a very welcome signal that there is hope for Russia.