

## 1. Full Citation

Cooper, M., & Schwartz, R. A. (2007). Moral Judgment and Student Discipline: What Are Institutions Teaching? What Are Students Learning? *Journal of College Student Development, 48* (5), 595-607.

## 2. Abstract or Short Summary

College students find themselves in conflict with their college or university when they make choices counter to the expectations of the institution. Typically, these expectations for conduct are outlined in a published code of conduct, which is, in a sense, a moral code for student behavior. “The special function of the construct of moral judgment is to provide conceptual guidance for action choice in situations where moral claims conflict,” (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999, p. 499). This Statement highlights the essence of a question often raised in college and university judicial affairs offices across the country—do students who violate conduct codes operate at a lower level of moral judgment than those who do not?

## 3. Summary

### a. Purpose of Study

To investigate the moral judgement of college students who violate campus judicial codes, a group of students who had been referred for a judicial hearing and sanction process were studied to determine the relationship between levels of moral judgment, type of discipline code violation, and selected demographic variables. A second group of students who were not involved in the judicial process were examined for comparison purposes.

### b. Framework

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### c. Population and Sample

The study was conducted at large, public, research institution in the Southeast with a student population of 34, 000 at the time of the study. Students alleged to have violated the conduct code are referred to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR)The comparison group were non-violator students who were randomly selected from the 7,000 students living in the campus residence hall system.

Sample: Of the 181 charged (SRR) students who were asked to participate, 141 agreed to complete the DIT2, a return rate of 77.9%. 18 participants were removed from the study as 5 were later found not responsible for an alleged violation. Moreover, the comparison group of students from the residence halls initially consisted of 176 students. After some were removed for a number of factors, 149 were left, with 120 completing the DIT2 for a return rate of 80.5%.

### d. Overview of Methods

The study was conducted at large, public, research institution in the Southeast with a student population of 34, 000 at the time of the study. Students alleged to have violated the conduct code are referred to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR)The comparison group were non-violator students who were randomly selected

from the 7,000 students living in the campus residence hall system. The participants were asked to complete a Defining Issues Test (DIT).

**e. Variables or Broad Topics**

The following variables were considered: Age, education, academic performance, Greek affiliation, and alcohol. Student development and judicial offenders was the broad topic that was considered.

**f. Findings/Results**

1. Just over 91% of all SRR violators were under the age of 21.
2. Females represented 68.1% of the group. Males made up 31.9% of the group.
3. Just under 9% of the group were members of a Greek fraternity or sorority.
4. GPA of the comparison group showed that 29.2% under 3.00 and 70.8% over 3.00.
5. The variables may have influenced the outcome of those charged, but were not statistically significant for either group of students.

**g. Implications**

1. Judicial affairs professionals might incorporate the concepts of developing moral judgment among the students with whom they work.
2. Institutions to find - with intentionality and strategy – activities and supports that would help students understand their responsibilities for living in an academic community.

**4. Critiques & Limitations**

**a. Conceptual**

It would have enhanced the study to also include how SRR currently helps students within the academic community understand their responsibilities. For example, are they already part of the orientation presentations that all students attend?

**b. Data**

I think considering the return rate of both the sample and comparison groups the data was solid. Obviously, from a population of 34,000 I would have liked the sample groups to be higher, but the return rates were strong considering the nature of the student with alleged offenders of the student conduct code. However, as I continue my studies and better understand applied research, this opinion may change.

**c. Analysis**

Due to the instruments used and methods, this was a strong study. The analysis of the data, in particular the variables, made it easy to follow the findings. However, I do think I need a better understanding of research methods to effectively assess limitations in this area. For example, understanding what a factorial ANOVA is would be helpful to better analyze this information.

**d. Interpretation**

I have little critique in this section.

**e. Application**

Those who work in student conduct can apply this to their work. For example, maybe not just focus on students who are Greek affiliated and widen the approach across the institution.

The university can also apply strategy and intentionally to educating students on civility and smart choices. Some examples from FSU include: Uphold the Garnet & Gold, and FSL Ambassadors.

**5. Follow-Up**

**a. Little Questions**

Why was Greek affiliation a variable?

Could residence hall type have been a variable?

**b. Big Questions**

How can SRR use this information to inform their practice?

If the variables analyzed had little statistical significance, what impact and practice could positively impact those students under 21 who violated the student code?

**c. Next Steps**

How might the university use this to devise a plan/approach to deal with the high percentage of students under 21 who had violations?

How might that change the approach and strategy? For example, FYE curriculum, etc.

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