

## Students Called on SMS Cheating

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ROCKVILLE, Maryland -- Six University of Maryland students have admitted cheating on an accounting exam by using their cell phones to receive text messages with the answers, the school said Thursday. Another six students were implicated in the case.

The scheme worked this way: Test takers brought their cell phones into the exam with them. They used the phones to contact friends outside the classroom. The friends looked up the exam answer key that had been posted on the Internet by the professor once the test had started. Then the friends messaged the answers back to the test takers.

Officials with the university business school said they caught the students in a sting: A fake answer key with bogus answers was posted online after the exam began last month; then the exams were checked to see which test takers put down the bogus answers.

It appears most of the 12 students hatched the plan independently of each other, said John Zacker, head of the university's office of judicial programs. He said it was the biggest cheating scheme involving cell phones uncovered on campus.

"We've had isolated cases in past semesters, but not in these numbers," he said.

The case highlights the struggle schools face as they try to keep up with tech-savvy students. Hitotsubashi University in Japan failed 26 students in December for receiving e-mailed exam answers on their cell phones.

The scope of the Maryland case is unprecedented nationally, said Diane Waryold, executive director of Duke University's [Center for Academic Integrity](#). It is also a sign that students might have a technological edge on their older professors, she said.

"It's a generational issue," she said. "It's safe to say our students are far more sophisticated."

The six Maryland students who confessed will fail the class and have a mark placed on their transcript that indicates they cheated. Five others either met with school officials or are awaiting trial by the school's student honor council.

The 12th student died over the winter break. Zacker did not know the circumstances surrounding the death and would not release the student's name.

The council is also looking for the people who sent the text messages to exam takers, Zacker said.

Provost William Destler sent a letter to faculty members over the weekend recommending they not post answer keys while an exam is ongoing. The school has no plans to bar students from bringing cell phones to class, Zacker said.

The number of Maryland students caught cheating has risen recently, from 97 cases in the fall semester of 2001 to 156 cases in the fall semester of 2002, Zacker said.

The use of cell phones is a new twist. Many phones allow text messages to be passed back and forth silently. The accounting exam was monitored by proctors walking the aisles who failed to notice the cheating.