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SHSU Online
NEWSLETTER

Three Methods to Discourage Cheating in Online Learning

Admittedly, one of the most disheartening elements in the practice of teaching is knowing that some students are going to look for—and find—ways to cheat their way through their studies. While academic dishonesty has been a longstanding and recurring problem in academia, educators continue to face challenges in dealing with students' dishonest behavior. The advent of online environments has posed new ways for students to play the same old tricks... but by the same token, learning management systems can empower educators to apply technology in ways that can disrupt the potential to cheat.

While academic dishonesty may never be completely eradicated, here are some tried and true recommendations that can deter some of the potential for cheating in courses.

1.   Technical

One way to reduce the likelihood of cheating, particularly on online exams, is to utilize the built-in platform tools that were designed to support academic integrity expectations. For a learning management system such as Blackboard, the options are varied, and they offer a great deal of value when utilized. Here are a few technical features of online exams that are helpful in minimizing cheating:

○ Test Timer: When a test is timed correctly, students who attempt to cheat by looking up answers will not have enough

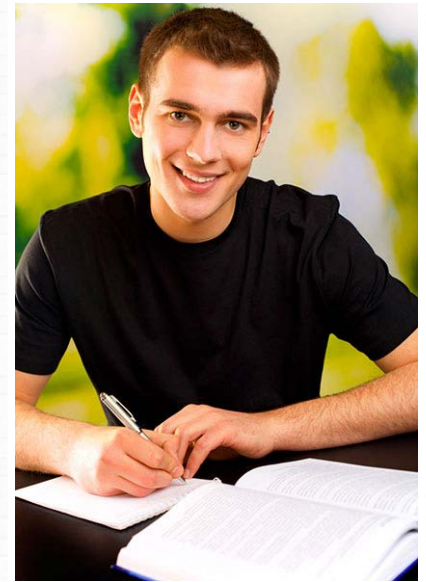time to complete the exam. You may wish to use these research-based recommendations when timing your exams:

Type of questions being asked

a. True and false — 30 sec. Multiple choice — one min.

b. Completion — one min.

c. Short answer — two min.

d. Multiple choice with higher level thinking — 90 sec.

e. Matching items — 30 sec.

f. Short essays — 10-15 min.

g. (Extended) essay — 30 min.

- Test Length: Test length is crucial to the reliability of the test. The fastest student will typically finish a test in about half the time as the slowest student.

- Randomization of Questions: This simple feature ensures that students do not encounter the same sequence of questions as a roommate, a classmate, or a friend who may be taking the exam at the same time.

- Randomization of Answer Options: Randomizing test answers works well with multiple choice and multiple answer questions, so that the right answer is not always in the same place.

- Presentation Style: Statistically, releasing test questions one question at a time, versus all at once, deters students from printing the exam or taking a picture with their device.

- Question Pools: Having a well-built question pool, one that includes several test options to gauge student understanding of a topic, can provide faculty with variety when creating exams. Because any question in a question pool can be compromised, it is recommended that questions are rotated every semester and that question pools are updated at least every three years.

- Time-released Results: To keep students from sharing their test results with one another until everyone in the class has taken the examination, make use of the time-release test feature on test results and test feedback.

- Question Types: It's no secret that auto-graded test questions, such as multiple choice, true and false, matching, and multiple answer save time. Often, though, these types of questions do not elicit higher-level analysis from the learner. Though much more time-consuming, essay questions, for example, may provide opportunities for a more authentic assessment measure.

In addition to exam-based features, there is a variety of additional

technologies designed at minimizing student cheating. Services such as Tegrity and Respondus Monitor & Lockdown Browser are designed to provide remote test proctoring. For essay questions, faculty members can leverage plagiarism detection software, such as Blackboard's SafeAssign, and additional services like Turnitin.

2. Programmatic/Curricular

Another way to effectively counteract student cheating is to implement best practices at the department or college level. For example, a department can collaborate to create a robust question pool that combines exam inquiries from all professors within the department. With a learning management system's question pool tool, such as the one in Blackboard, question pools can be created and structured with meta-data tags that include such markers as…

- Level of Difficulty

- Keywords

- Categories (chapter, topics)

- Question Type (multiple choice, essay, etc.)

- As well as filtering through questions based on what exam they appeared in.

Because creating question pools is a time-consuming process, many colleges and departments miss out on the worthwhile benefits—but it is well worth the endeavor. Since there is always a risk that any question or pool may be compromised (shared with friends, posted on the Internet), it is important to note that question pools should be large enough to allow for faculty to rotate their use across semesters. Every major publisher understands this approach. Some question pools contain thousands of questions to minimize the overuse and overexposure of test questions.

Remember that question pools can become stale over time, so refreshers or scheduled updates in your question pool building strategy should be included.

3. Pedagogical

A third way to curb the potential for academic dishonesty is to make use of a few means of effective assessment. For example, research indicates that most students cheat when they feel pressured to

perform on high-stakes exams, such as midterms and finals. Courses which base a final grade solely on exams will have a higher likelihood of cheating compared to courses that utilize a variety of assessment measures to gauge student learning. Here are a few pedagogical considerations to keep in mind:

- Include a variety of assessment types in the course (don't rely solely on exams)

- Be sure to offer frequent and numerous assessments (to spread out the point-earning potential)

- Provide frequent low-stakes tests to give students a chance to remediate

- Consider open book exams that call for higher level, critical thinking skills

- Invest time in developing authentic assessments

As with any online implementation of effective practices or the application of a particular tool, faculty members can rely on the SHSU Online course development team to provide assistance every step of the way. If you would like to implement these practices or others, please contact the SHSU Online course development team at http://distance.shsu.edu/home/our-staff.html.

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