Ensuring Academic Integrity in Online Assessment and Evaluation

TEACHING & LEARNING CENTER

Ensuring Academic Integrity in Online Assessment and Evaluation

One of the most common concerns about online assessment and evaluation through learning management systems like Blackboard is that students can cheat more easily. This guide has been prepared to answer questions about how to encourage academic integrity and prevent cheating in online assessments and exams.

1. Can I completely prevent cheating in online exams?

The shortest answer to this question is "no". Although this guide has been prepared to reduce the possibility of cheating, it is not entirely possible to prevent a determined student from cheating. The most valid precaution against cheating is to convince students that cheating and plagiarism are unethical behaviors that conflict with the principles of academic integrity. In addition, it is necessary to state the seriousness of the possible violation consequences. However, reducing grade anxiety can help students to move away from the tendency of cheating. The extra workload to be given to the instructors, the availability of technological equipment for the students, how the psychology of the students can be affected by the planned practice and the privacy rights of the students should be taken into consideration while determining the strategies to prevent cheating.

2. What can I do to reduce the tendency to cheat in general, regardless of the platform on which the exam was held?

Making statements that make students feel trustworthy, being transparent in all assessment and evaluation processes, and supportive approaches will reduce students' chances of cheating. At this stage, sharing the principles of academic integrity (as a pre-prepared text) with students, and discussing and explaining its necessity will support the process. It is necessary to make sure that students understand what kind of behaviors are considered cheating/plagiarism for different assessments (exam/assignment) and different conditions (group work etc.) and the sanctions to be applied if such behavior is detected.

3. How can I reduce the possibility of cheating with the selection and design of the assessment method?

- The most important component here is to decide which learning outcome will be measured with which tool. For this to happen most effectively, all instructors should be familiar with online tools (Blackboard tests, assignments and discussion forum tools). Please refer to the related training videos and guides. If you need further assistance, please contact the TLC.
- Try to diversify the assessment methods you will use in a course.
- Make sure that students understand what you assess and how. Also, make sure that they are technically competent to use this assessment tool. For this purpose, if necessary, you can deploy a short unassessed demo exam or assignment.
- Try to keep the weighting of exams that consist of questions such as multiple choice, multiple answers or matching designed to assess lower-level cognitive skills to a minimum.
- Adding one or two short answer or essay questions to an assessment that mainly includes multiple choice, multiple answer and matching questions will make cheating for students more difficult.
- When creating multiple choice and multiple answer questions, use the *randomize* feature, which ensures that the options are presented to the students randomly. Please remember to avoid "all/none of the above" type of options in multiple-choice questions.
- Using a *question pool* to create questions can ensure that your test consists of randomly selected questions based on the criteria that you use while creating the pool.

- You can choose the methods such as open-book questions or essays that students need to apply their analysis-synthesis skills by using different sources. These can be part of the exams (tests in Blackboard terms) or created as assignments. Assignment is part of assessment in Blackboard terms.
- All assignments must go through the SafeAssign process to determine plagiarism. Make sure you share with your students the fact that this SafeAssign tool is activated for a particular assignment. SafeAssign is integrated in assignments in Blackboard; however, it cannot be used for tests that include essay/short answer questions.
- Grade the assignments, open-book or essay questions using rubrics and share your rubric with students in advance.
- You may consider designing assessments that require students to make presentations over Collaborate.
- You may also consider giving students a group assignment.
- You can create an assignment that requires students to upload a video that proves that they have performed a task as a response to the assignment. Similarly, you can ask students to record their presentations and upload them in response to the assignment.

4. How can I reduce the possibility of cheating with the Test Options?

- In tests, you can arrange the settings in such a way that the questions are presented in random order. However, this option is not suitable for exams that consist of questions that should progress in a specific order or that should follow each other in scope.
- You can set the details (what information to include) and time (when to announce) of the feedback that will automatically be given to the students after the exam. For instance, you may select not to enable any feedback options "after submission" and enable certain feedback options "on a specific date" when the exam and grading has been completed.
- You can set a timer in order to specify a limit to the duration of the test and even have the answers entered by the student automatically submitted once the time is over. However, please avoid activating "force completion" in assessments where students are allowed a single attempt.
- You can present questions one at a time to students and prohibit backtracking to prevent students from changing the answer to a question that has already been submitted.
- Hide the assessment column from students' view during the exam so that they will not be able to see their grades before the exam and grading is over. Please remember to change that setting back after the grading is completed, otherwise students will not be able to see their grades. If you have not deployed and graded any other assessments before this particular one, the Total column in the Grade Center will also display the grades for that assessment. Therefore, you may wish to hide the Total column from students' view. Please <u>do not</u> change the external column setting, just hide the column from students' view.
- Follow the progress of the students through the Grade Center interface during the exam. Refresh your page frequently so as to see the last status of the student submissions. If there are any students that encounter a technical problem in an assessment with a single attempt, you may use the "Test Availability Exceptions" and provide a second attempt and/or additional time. Alternatively, you may check the "View Grade Details" of a particular student for that particular assessment, and clear the previously incorrect submitted attempt. Please remember these must be done <u>with caution</u>.

Finally, please do not assume that all of your students are adept at using various software. Although they are capable of using many digital platforms, please consider that they may not be competent at using MSOffice or the Learning Management System (Blackboard). Therefore, it is important to guide the students during a synchronous session prior to the assessment and/or create an announcement on Blackboard providing all the details and the steps students should take while completing the assessment. A short unassessed replica of the test/assignment could also be deployed in order to identify possible problems and to make students familiar with the assessment.

Ensuring academic integrity is an ongoing challenge not only for traditional face-to-face courses but also for online distance education courses. While a number of expensive technology solutions, such as retinal eye scanners, face recognition and live video monitoring are available to prevent cheating in online courses, we do not currently have access to this kind of tools. The practical suggestions shared above can reduce the impact of cheating on assessing student performance in distance education courses.