Minimizing Academic Dishonesty During Examinations

# Why do Students cheat?

Before we talk about solutions, we need to understand causes. Students engage in academic dishonesty or cheating for various reasons. Cheating is a function of their expectations of success and the value placed on success in an academic task like doing well on an examination. Thus, the costs of students’ engagement in academic dishonesty are weighed against the potential value of achieving their goals. This behavior is less likely to occur when the costs outweigh the perceived gains. Related, those students who are oriented more towards performance goals rather than mastery or learning goals are more likely to participate in academic dishonesty. Also included are student’s self-interests and self-promotion (e.g., protecting their beliefs about their intelligence), lack of consequences, seeing peers do it, and lack of preparation. There are situational factors as well. Students who feel alienated from the university due to a lack of interaction with faculty, large class sizes, and emphasis on group learning over individual accomplishments are more likely to cheat. A student’s commitment to academic integrity is a function of the students’ sense of commitment to education, to the organization, and to the professors they most likely come into contact. If faculty do not care about the learning process, there is increase likelihood of academic dishonesty and decrease rate of reporting.

These factors are augmented in high achieving students. High achieving students have higher performance expectations and higher workloads. Higher performing students can regularly rationalize cheating by externalizing the blame onto the professor or situation, and these externalizations increase when students see the pedagogy as poor, the teacher as uncaring, or the classroom as focused on performance versus mastery goals

Finally, raising the stakes on an assessment may induce cheating. Infrequent, high stakes exams produce high rates of cheating because they represent the only opportunity for students to earn their grade in the course. The more pressure placed on a single exam, the more likely the chance that students will respond by using any means necessary to succeed on it.

# What are some solutions to minimize academic dishonesty?

First, we need to recognize we probably cannot stop academic dishonesty. We can create an environment and put things in place to minimize the chances.

1. Design courses that focus on learning with feedback being a major portion. This may mean lowering the stakes on “midterms” and conserving higher stakes assessments for true assessment of competence.
   1. This helps build self-efficacy and focuses on learning rather than accumulating points;
   2. Also allows for higher stakes exams (e.g., a final exam) to potentially be better proctored.
2. For higher stakes exams, make it clear to students that they are working towards that goal. If the high stakes exam is the game, then the other elements of the course, like midterms or assignments, are scrimmages that get them feedback on their learning.
3. De-emphasize grades or points and focus on learning
   1. Removing grade scales (moving to Pass/Fail),
   2. Eliminate any norm-referenced grading or class rank.
4. For examination delivery:
   1. Use ExamSoft for major assessments;
   2. Have multiple versions of the examination. This can be accomplished in ExamSoft by randomizing questions and answer choices;
   3. Use TAs or other individuals to help proctor;
   4. Prohibit back tracking;
   5. Include honor pledge and have students sign honor pledge;
   6. Minimize items on or around desks;
   7. Assign seats for examinations;
   8. Use privacy screens on computers;
   9. Monitor upload times;
   10. Have students sign in, sign an honor code, or sign out;
   11. Number scratch paper or paper examinations;
   12. If in a simulation room, show green screen to camera.
5. Maintain student dignity

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# Potential Consequences for Academic Misconduct\*

| **Issue** |  | **Consequence** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Taking a graded quiz or examination for another student |  | Suspension |
| Changing a response after a paper/exam/quiz was graded, then reporting that there had been a misgrade and requesting credit for your altered response |  | Failure of course |
| Using unauthorized cheat sheets or other materials during a quiz or examination |  |
| Copying from another student during a quiz or examination |  |
| Claiming to have handed in a paper/examination when in reality you did not |  |
| Permitting another student to look at your answer sheet during a quiz or examination |  |
| Removing items from a reserved reading file so that others will not have an opportunity to review them |  | Failure of assignment |
| Asking another student for the questions and/or answers to an examination that he/she has already taken and that you will take in the future |  |
| Providing information about an exam that was intended to be confidential |  |
| “Making up” sources for bibliographic citation |  |
| Posting unauthorized information about exams, assignments, quizzes, etc. on social media |  |
| Using a false excuse to postpone an exam |  |
| Using direct quotations from other sources without giving proper reference |  |
| Working with another student on a quiz or homework assignment that was assigned as individual work |  | Letter grade decrease on assignment |
| Using unauthorized test questions from a previous year, including materials found on public websites |  |
| Claiming to have attended class when you actually did not |  | Written warning |
| Visiting a professor after an exam or at the end of the semester to bias his/her grading |  |
| Listing unread sources in the bibliography of an assignment |  |
| Missing class or lab due to a false excuse |  |
| Doing less than your fair share in a group project or a laboratory |  | Verbal warning |
| Failing to prepare adequately for a group assignment or laboratory |  |

\*From Royal et al.