Developing a Culture of Academic Integrity

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Although academic dishonesty cannot be prevented entirely, studies have shown that some methods significantly reduce the likelihood of student cheating during online assessments. The use of online proctoring tools like Respondus LockDown Browser can reduce cheating in half, particularly when it comes to preventing actions that might not be perceived as cheating by students, such as referring to notes or searching for an answer or hint online (Pleasants et al, 2022). However, detecting cheating in other academic assignments can be more difficult, including those requiring students to use software or tools that cannot run in a web browser.

In these situations, it may be helpful to consider non-technological options to deter cheating such as those suggested by James M. Lang in his 2013 book *Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty*. In this book, Lang (2013) suggests that cheating happens "for understandable reasons, in response to a specific environment, and can best be addressed through thinking hard about that environment and making modifications that will better motivate students to learn and give them the tools they need to do so." Below, we examine Lang's four methods to create such an environment: Fostering intrinsic motivation, learning for mastery, lowering stakes, and instilling self-efficacy.

Fostering Intrinsic Motivation

Integrating more significant concepts or relating topics to current events can make the lessons relevant and discourage students from "studying to pass" rather than "studying to learn." Instructors may also find that addressing students' questions about how the lessons integrate with their experiences outside of the classroom sustains interest and encourages intrinsic motivation.

Consider asking students to think about unanswered questions within the field, rather than only examining "solved" problems. Assistant professor Sarah Cavanagh at Assumption College suggests grounding lessons in the following ways: time, place, personal, and interdisciplinary. In other words, connect course topics to (1) events or conversations that are unique to that semester, (2) things related to the local community or students' hometown, (3) topics important to the individual students and their personal experiences, and (4) other disciplines that students may be studying in other classes. For instance, Cavanagh suggests a time-based exercise that asks students to select a recent scientific

article from popular media and compare/contrast it with the original research. Requiring students to select an article written in the past few months enables students to make timely connections with the material and prevents them from plagiarizing work from previous semesters.

Learning for Mastery

Avoiding standardized performance-based evaluations in favor of opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of a topic through the method they feel best reflects their strengths can help prevent students from being discouraged by poor performance. Giving students control over the method of evaluation and/or the priority of task completion encourages them to find their own path to mastery. It discourages them from prioritizing performance in individual assessments over mastery of the topic. It can also be beneficial to allow students to respond in ways that allow creativity and flexibility, rather than relying solely on formats such as multiple-choice exams.

To explore mastery-based courses, Lang (2013) refers to the practices of Virginia Tech faculty member John Boyer. In Boyer's World Regions course, students are given points for completing assignments of their choice across various types. Students can choose to do more writing and avoid the exams, improve their grade by completing many smaller assignments, or participate in several of each style of assessment. As long as their accumulated points reach the required total for the course, they earn their A grade. In addition, his assessments are open-book and multi-attempt, allowing students to master the subject even if it takes several attempts.

Lowering Stakes

Although it may seem intuitive that studying is where most of the learning takes place and that testing merely verifies that the information was retained, Lang (2013) refers to research by Jeffrey K. Karpicke and Henry L. Roediger III that refutes that notion. Their 2008 *Science* article describes an experiment in which students were divided into four groups based on high and low levels of study-time and testing. The conclusion was, in brief, that students who were tested fewer times, regardless of length of study, retained the least, while students who were tested more often and more comprehensively retained more of the material, even when allowed less study time (Karpicke & Roediger, 2008).

These findings are relevant to our discussion because literature has also shown that higher-stakes testing, such as board exams or final exams that comprise a large portion of a student's course grade, produce higher rates of cheating. As Lang puts it, "The more pressure you put on a single exam, the more likely the chance that students will respond by using any means necessary to succeed on it." Consider the reduced pressure to cheat in

Boyer's World Regions class where he offered many smaller assignments. It might be tempting to rely on multiple-choice quizzes in this situation, but not only are varied assignments an important part of the kind of well-rounded course that promotes learning for mastery, another study by Roediger showed significant improvement in long-term retention when using short answer questions to quiz students versus using only multiple-choice questions (McDaniel, Roediger & McDermott, 2007).

Instilling Self-Efficacy

In this section, Lang describes the problem of student overconfidence created by overly positive feedback. Overconfidence can lead students to under-prepare and subsequently perform poorly on assessments. He suggests two primary ways to combat this: improving student metacognition and faculty communication. Referencing the work of cognitive psychologist Stephen Chew, Lang describes student metacognition as "students' awareness of their actual level of understanding of a topic." As Chew explains, including more formative assessment provides students with a more accurate perception of their abilities. Ideally, these low-stakes assessments familiarize students with the topics and question formats they will encounter in high-stake exams later. This improves their metacognitive skills and allows them to assess their learning progress continuously.

Lang continues by examining several studies that demonstrate how poor metacognition due to lack of formative assessment can lead to an increase in cheating as students fail to allocate the necessary time to complete a task and then feel pressure to beat the deadline by any means necessary. Much of the rest of the chapter is a discussion of the advantages of a flipped classroom, primarily how this teaching style—where students do most of the reading at home and class time is dedicated to formative assessment and instructor-student interaction—provides students with more opportunities to gauge their abilities and receive feedback from the instructor. As the Roediger studies show, repetition leads to better understanding of the material. Flipped classrooms offer more chances for students to repeat tasks in a supervised setting while receiving crucial feedback from the instructor. Improving students' metacognition and allowing them to prepare for assessments more adequately can also reduce cheating.

Additional Reading

Student honor codes—wherein students sign an agreement to remain honest and cases of dishonesty are often adjudicated by their peers—are another popular option for encouraging a classroom culture of academic honesty. Research shows inconsistent results from honor codes, but several institutions have seen a marked improvement in honesty after adopting an honor code and facilitating the associated student and campus culture. For a more thorough discussion of honor codes and ethics in higher education, look to University

Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics by James F. Keenan, S. J., available as a free e-book by signing into the Detroit Mercy Libraries site. In this book, Fr. Keenan explores a variety of research, editorial opinions, and case studies related to the culture of ethics in higher education. Although it was written with no foresight of the rise of artificial intelligence, the non-technological methods it explores grow even more relevant as it becomes more challenging to detect inauthentic work.

References

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