

Encouraging Academic Honesty Toolkit

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Introduction

This document summarizes issues, solutions and resources surrounding academic honesty in online courses.

While the majority of the information covered in this document fits as well with issues of classroom honesty as it does with online learning, the focus is on fully online courses delivered through CU Online.

The issue of academic honesty is handled in three sections. The problem section puts the issue of cheating into a broader context and looks at some of the underlying motivations that discourage honesty in an online classroom. This section concludes that online cheating is not more prevalent than classroom cheating and that cheating remains a complex issue of motivations and cultural pressures.

The second section deals with strategies for preventing and detecting cheating and encouraging honesty. Through effective online course design, an instructor may minimize many of the most common cheating urges. By clearly spelling out our honesty expectations, teaching citation skills, the educational benefits of a course, and other techniques, an instructor can significantly improve the student commitment to academic honesty. Likewise, an emphasis on confrontation of known and suspected cheating, use of technology tools, as well as an awareness of cheating signs can help root out cheating when it takes place.

The final section offers some additional resources to support the online instructor.

Each subject is tackled in a brief survey. The goal is to provide the online instructor quick access to tools, tips and techniques for improving academic honesty in the online environment. And while this document does not pretend to offer comprehensive coverage of all aspects of academic honesty and cheating, the strategies covered here will go far toward dealing with the issue of cheating in the online classroom.

Academic Honesty At A Glance

Problem

1. Internet plagiarism is similar in frequency and scope to traditional education
2. Cheating remains a significant issue
3. Students cheat primarily due to their cultural environment:
 - Expectations of good grades to land good jobs
 - Culture of file sharing, piracy and cheating
4. Traditional anti-cheating approaches don't always work online

Solutions

Prevention

Stop cheating before it happen

Key Concepts:

- Lower rewards for cheating
- Raise obstacles to cheating
- Encourage honesty
- Educate around cheating

Key Points

1. Use syllabus to set standards and educate students
2. Have students sign honesty statements
3. Advertise academic honesty polices and honor codes
4. Make learning objectives and benefits clear
5. Grade often
6. Use anti-cheating testing strategies
7. Use linked assignments
8. Teach students to cite
9. Build personality into the course
10. Hold students accountable
11. Advertise detection efforts!

Detection

Finding cheating and what to do about it

Key Concepts:

- Be aware of signs of cheating
- Confront known and suspected cheating
- Enforce consequences for cheating

Key Points

1. Confront suspected and known cheating
2. Look for signs of plagiarism
3. Use Google or Turnitin to check suspicious writing
4. Investigate reports of cheating
5. Avoid student entrapment schemes

The Problem

Is cheating worse online than in the classroom? Why do students cheat? Understanding the problem in its appropriate context is the first step in dealing with it.

Internet Plagiarism versus Traditional Plagiarism

The New York Times, September 14, 2003, reported that 38 percent of the students they surveyed admitted to cut and paste plagiarism from Internet sources. Forty percent acknowledged that they had plagiarized from written sources.

“The numbers demonstrate that cheating is a problem on college campuses and that the Internet is probably not making matters better, but plagiarism is certainly not a new phenomenon.” Matthew Willen in the Fall 2004 edition of Liberal Education.

It would seem that, plagiarism online is as big a problem as in the classroom, but not much bigger.

Cheating in the Classroom

“In a recent survey, Mr. Stephens [a research assistant at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching] found that about two-thirds of high-school students admit to at least minor cheating on quizzes and tests, and he estimates that college students are not far behind.” The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 16, 2004.

Cheating is the problem—not simply cheating in an online classroom.

Why Do Students Cheat?

- Pressure to earn a higher GPA
- Competition for jobs and graduate school
- Culture of cut-up (file sharing, Google research, cut and paste creativity)
- Course content not important
- “I’m busy,” “The course is hard,” “I’m falling behind” are not as important!

“Surprisingly McCabe [a Rutgers University researcher] indicates that this [cheating] is *not* an effect of the expectations or requirements for courses being unreasonable; nor are the pressures created by workloads, deadlines and poor time management the primary issues” (Willen, 2004).

Source of Student Pressure to Cheat

“It is not difficult to imagine some of the reasons for students; experiencing higher education this way. From a young age, both parents and the schools inculcate by a narrative that presents the conventional path to success—to living a good life—as paved with good grades, good SAT scores, and acceptance into a good college. All of these, it is assumed, lead ultimately to a good job. Historically, there has been some truth to this narrative, but when confronted with current economic uncertainties, it seems rather inadequate. Graduates now find themselves in intense competition for opportunities for the success myth that are more limited than they were at other times in the past.” (Willen, 2004)

The Cheating Culture

“The message that a lot of young people hear from the culture and economic life is that there is no one to catch you if you fall—you’re on your own. Being really ruthless and competitive is the way you get to the top. Nice guys don’t really finish first. You see it in the television shows like ‘The Apprentice’ and ‘Survivor’ ” (Callahan, 2004).

Cheating is a Social Issue

“One consistent finding stands out in the research. Whether students engage in academically dishonest behavior seems to rest in large part on their perceptions of their peers’ practices” (Meizlish, 2005).

Collaboration versus Cheating

The online environment can feel very isolating to a student. Collaborating with other students is a way to connect to others in the class. When students get together to study for a class or to complete assigned group work, we applaud the behavior. When they get together to complete other kinds of assignments we call it “cheating.” This distinction is not always clear to the student.

Traditional Prevention Methods Don’t Work

Proctoring of classroom exams is a common method used to make sure students do not cheat on tests. Of course, just showing up to class and staying during a test is a natural form of proctoring. However, in the online environment, it is not easy, or even possible, to proctor a test.

Students Lack Positive Models

“Student behavior in a traditional classroom is relatively well-defined. Even a new college student can adapt to instructor expectations by modeling other students in the classroom. In the distance classroom, expectations are not as obvious unless the instructor takes strides to explicitly state them. Appropriate student behavior must be identified and described” (Christe, 2003).

Also, keep in mind this issue also cuts in the other direction. Since online instructors don’t always have a face-to-face relationship with the students in their classes, it’s easy to think of the virtual class as a bunch of potential cheats rather than as earnest learners.

Online is No Different: Cheating is Cheating

“Fundamentally, the problems and their causes are exactly the same for the traditional classroom as for the distance-education classroom” (Christe, 2003).

Conclusions

Online cheating is probably not worse than cheating in traditional classroom environments. Understanding why students cheat is a first step in preventing cheating.

We need to do a better job of helping students understand why academic honesty matters and why cheating will not help them in the long run.

Strategies: Prevention

This section deals with techniques for preventing cheating before it occurs.

Prevention versus Detection

We can separate strategies for dealing with cheating into two general categories: detecting cheating and preventing cheating.

Detection strategies are concerned with the techniques for catching cheaters. Prevention strategies deal with methods of stopping the problem before it happens.

While the temptation is to focus on detection, encouraging honesty depends on focusing on not letting the problem happen.

Or think about it this way:

When you detect cheating, all that remains is confrontation and punishment.

When you work on prevention, you can focus on the positive aspects of responsibility, personal development and learning.

Which side do you think your students would like to be on?

Which side would like to be on?

The Heart of Prevention

A couple of core ideas run through each of these prevention techniques.

- Lower the rewards for cheating: If you assign one or two big papers to determine the entire grade for a class, students have a greater incentive to cheat on these papers. Small assignments worth fewer points are often not worth cheating on.
- Raise the obstacles to cheating: If you make it easy to cheat, don't be surprised if more people cheat. If you offer the same multiple-choice midterm each semester, expect that the answers are floating around your class.
- Encourage honesty: Show the benefits of not cheating. Students cheat because they think that this is a more rewarding alternative than doing their own work. Flip the equation so that students feel cheating is not in their best interest, not just that they will get in trouble if they do.
- Educate around cheating: It's easy for a teacher to look at the issue of cheating as a game of cops and robbers. But prevention is always a better strategy, and honestly starts with knowledge. Be sure your students understand what cheating means.

Make Syllabus Clear

Your frontline of defense in the battle for academic honesty is the syllabus. Be sure you are clear about the subject.

Be sure your syllabus answer the following questions:

- Why does academic honesty matter?
- What is cheating?
- What is plagiarism?
- What are the expectations of the university?
- What are the expectations for this class?
- What are the consequences?
- What will you do in this class to detect cheating?

Set Honesty Standards

In your syllabus, welcome announcements, emails, class assignments and feedback, reiterate the importance of academic honesty. Confront students in areas that cheating is possible. Remind them when assigning an essay that you have tools to check for plagiarism, you will check for plagiarism and you have caught plagiarizers in the past.

Require Student Sign Off

A short quiz or questionnaire given at the beginning of the class covering issues of academic honesty serves a dual purpose. First, it ensures that students understand the honesty policies. In many cases, students do not know they are cheating. Especially when it comes to plagiarism and citation, make sure that they know the rules!

Second, it forces them to explicitly agree to the policy. Both knowledge and agreement can help minimize the desire to cheat.

Some sample questions include:

1. Define plagiarism: (short answer)
2. Plagiarism is:
 - a. Using someone's words without attribution
 - b. Using someone's ideas without attribution
 - c. Extensive borrowing from source material
 - d. **All of the above**
3. After taking an exam, it's OK to talk about the test and share answers with a friend in another section of the same class to help him or her prepare:
 - a. True
 - b. **False**
4. In an online course, it's OK to have someone look over your test answers and make suggestions before submitting the test:
 - a. True
 - b. **False**
5. Paying someone to write a paper for you is an example of:
 - a. Cheating
 - b. Plagiarism
 - c. **Both**

Sign-off questions might include:

1. I understand what constitutes plagiarism in this class and promise not to plagiarize.
2. I understand the university's academic honor code and discipline policies and promise to uphold them.
3. I understand that if I cheat or plagiarize in this course the consequence may include immediate failure of the course.
4. I understand that the instructor may use tools to check for plagiarism.

Academic Honor Code and Discipline Policies

Some of the key language from the university policies includes (consider adding to your syllabus):

“Academic Integrity

“A university’s reputation is built on a standing tradition of excellence and scholastic integrity. As members of the University of Colorado at Denver academic community, faculty and students accept the responsibility to maintain the highest standards of intellectual honesty and ethical conduct in completing all forms of academic work at the university

“Forms of Academic Dishonesty

“Students are expected to know, understand, and comply with the ethical standards of the university. In addition, students have an obligation to inform the appropriate official of any acts of academic dishonesty by other students of the university. Academic dishonesty is defined as a student’s use of unauthorized assistance with intent to deceive an instructor or other such person who may be assigned to evaluate the student’s work in meeting course and degree requirements.”

The full text of this policy is available in “Academic Policies and Regulations” section of the CU Denver Catalog.

Honor Codes Help

Do honor codes really do anything? The evidence suggests that they do:

“In surveys done over the past decade of more than 14,000 students at 50 colleges, McCabe found that 75 percent of the students had cheated. He also discovered that schools with honor codes had 25 to 33 percent fewer incidents of serious cheating on exams.

“If you read as many surveys as I have, there is no way they don't have an impact,” said McCabe, who worked on the surveys with Duke University's Center for Academic Integrity.” -- Donald L. McCabe, a Rutgers University researcher in *The Houston Chronicle*, July 29, 2004.

Use Honesty Sign-Offs

In addition to having students sign global pledges to uphold academic honesty, you may require them to sign-off on individual assignments with a pledge of honesty. For example, require students to place the following phrase at the end of a mid-term paper:

"I certify that the writing contained in this paper is my own and that any direct quotations have been identified and cited. Additionally, I have cited references in any place where I have significantly borrowed someone else's ideas."

Or, for other areas such as math and science:

"I certify that the calculations and data in this assignment were generated independently, using only the tools and resources defined in the course and that I did not receive any external help, coaching or contributions during the production of this work."

Provide the Learning Value

If your course content is a commodity, then students have good reason to invest as little time as possible in completing the material.

"Listing points or percentages to the exclusion of an explanation of how a project contributes to learning explicitly casts the text as commodity, its value only in the final product" (Willen, 2004).

In your syllabus, be clear about what the student will learn (learning objectives). Consider trying to make the objectives relevant to a wide variety of students. If, for example, you are teaching a history course, don't just provide a learning rationale for history majors. Explain why other majors will find the learning meaningful and useful.

When students understand the value of the course, they are less likely to want to shortcut the learning.

Show That Cheating Hurts Learning

"For students who see the objective of a college education as the attainment of top grades to provide the edge over others competing for the same limited opportunities, such an education easily become less about learning and more about results....From a pedagogical perspective, the real crime of plagiarism is less that it is dishonest than that it precludes learning." (Willen, 2004)

Much as steroids can enhance athletic performance in the short term, so can cheating help academic performance. But in both cases, the long-term impacts outweigh the benefits. Sooner or later, make it clear to students that cheating will catch up with them

Grade Often

Grade often—this is a good practice for any online course since it helps the students pace themselves in the asynchronous environment. But grading often can also help minimize cheating. For one thing, grading more often means individual assignments are worth fewer points; doing this lowers the incentive to cheat. For another, grading often increases the effort required to cheat because of the frequency of the assignments.

Strategies for Use In Tests

For many types of instruction, tests are an unavoidable instructional approach.

While essays are harder to cheat on and easier to detect cheating, there are a number of key things that you can do to make your tests more resistant to cheating.

Question pools

When giving a test online, always use question pools. This includes:

- Place all questions in the test in a pool and randomize the pool. This simple technique makes simple sharing of answer keys more difficult.
- Create a pool out of two or more questions on the same topic. For example
 - A) Which of the following IS an important theorist in this field of study
 - B) Which of the following IS NOT an important theorist in this field of study

As you recycle tests across semesters, consider using the two or more question pool approach to easily update your exams. By adding alternative forms for individual questions, you can leverage your past questions without providing an easy-to-cheat recycled test.

Open-ended Questions

Multiple-choice questions are easy to cheat. Whether a student has the answers before hand, or is just familiar with the techniques for taking a multiple choice test, the results are the same—the test is not necessarily a good measure of student knowledge.

Ask questions that do not have set answers. Instead of asking:

Who was the first president of the U.S?

Ask:

Why is George Washington important?

The second question might take slightly longer to grade, but it is a better measure of learning!

Timed Tests

Closed book tests are not feasible online. So, timing a test is a good way to discourage students from studying the material during the test. Consider giving a test with 60 questions with a 60-minute time limit. The students may have the time to look up an answer or two, but they certainly don't have the time to research every answer.

Show Your Work

Another classic strategy involves having students explain their answers. This works especially well on tests where questions only have one answer, such as "What is the square root of 36?" By asking for an answer rationale or having students describe the steps they followed to find the answer, you can better determine whether or not they understand the underlying concepts and evaluate whether or not they were working from an answer key.

Link Assignment Grading

Single assignments are more open to cheating than a linked series of assignments. For example, rather than having a students turn in a single paper, have them submit a graded outline, draft and final paper.

You can also use the notion of linking between tests and other tests of assignments. Ask, "Based on your response to discussion 1, provide an answer to the following question...."

Use Personal Reflection Questions

Another type of linked assignment has the student reflecting the course material with his or her own experience. These assignments also work well if students have been required to introduce themselves in the class with some specific biographical information. For example, in an English class you might ask during the first week: Introduce yourself and tell us about your favorite novel and why you liked it.

Later in the course you might ask: Using your favorite book, describe the narrative point of view and how it frames the narrative experience.

Teach to Cite

In some cases, even in senior-level courses, students do not always understand what counts as plagiarism. Never assume that students know about citation standards. Include citation standards and expectations with every assignment.

Handling Online Citations

Because online material tends to change over time, sometimes a student's citation of an Internet resource can disappear. Require students to either print out or save to their computer any content they cite from the Internet. In the case that you are checking citations and cannot find a particular piece of information, the student should be able to provide it.

Model Citation

In your class notes, outlines and assignments, be sure you are doing everything you can to cite sources! When students see you making an effort, it helps them understand both the importance of citation, as well as see good examples of how it should be done. Likewise, when writing summaries of class discussions or other student work, be sure to cite students. Show them that citation is citation, regardless of the source.

Use Citation Assignments

To help teach citation, you might require some sort of literature review or cyber research. In either case, the goal of the assignment is to have students summarize others' work and to appropriately cite sources. This kind of an exercise has many educational benefits. One key benefit is that it is a great way to step students through the research and citation process before you have them generate original thought.

Include Your Personality

Because an online course can be an impersonal environment for many students, the willingness to cheat may increase. Students who do not feel any accountability to their teacher or to their fellow students may feel that the consequences of cheating are not as important.

Group work and class discussions are a good way to get students interacting. Communicating with students using your personality is much more difficult online than in the classroom. Still, you should remember to let your personality come through.

One technique that works well is to use a professional, academic voice in written assignments and in assignment feedback. But use a less formal voice when writing course announcements. What counts as an informal voice? Write as if you were writing to friends or family. Feel free to joke and share opinions.

Students will appreciate the additional personality and it will lower their willingness to cheat.

Other techniques include:

- Post a photo of yourself in the syllabus
- Create a welcome video introducing yourself
- Send individual students emails when you feel that they are not engaged in the course.

Heroic Make-ups

One constant frustration for online instructors revolves around trying to determine the validity of student excuses. In a classroom, teachers often feel that they can assess student honesty around excuses, or at least believe the students are less likely to lie in person.

Online, instructors often have no more than an email or perhaps a phone call to rely upon.

One strategy that works as a disincentive to made-up excuses for late work is the “no late work” clause in the syllabus. But when that is too onerous, the “heroic make-up” can work well.

In your syllabus, offer a certain number of possible make-ups—one or two. Then, detail how additional make-ups are handled. For example:

“All make-up assignment will be similar to the original assignment, but will hold the student to a much higher standard. This additional work and more difficult grading reflect a sense of fairness to students who did the work on time and are specifically meant as a disincentive to turn in work late. At the same time, this policy does allow for unforeseen circumstances.”

Advertise Detection Resources and Case History

Tell students upfront that you have access to tools for detecting cheating. Tell them stories of past cheaters you have caught and the consequences they suffered. Don’t just use detection as a way to punish the offenders. Use it as a disincentive for others to cheat.

Also, remember, emphasizing detection emphasizes the negative side of the issue of academic honesty. So, while it is important to let students know that you are paying attention to issues of cheating, don’t dwell on the subject!

Making Cheating Easy

Don’t do these things:

- Only one version of a test

- Use the same version of the test across semesters
- Provide different due dates for students/Different review dates for test answers
- Use assessments that focuses on facts
- Have closed book tests

Strategies: Detection

Unfortunately, prevention does not always work. Every instructor should be prepared to identify and handle cheating.

Confrontation

The key issue surrounding the detection of cheating is what to do when you think someone is cheating. Whether you have hard, indisputable evidence or just a sneaking suspicion, you will eventually need to confront the student.

Some key things to keep in mind when confronting students:

- **Don't make the issue personal:** You might feel that someone cheating in your class is a personal insult. But remember, cheating is not wrong because it makes you feel bad. Stick to the issues! Cheating is unacceptable because of the university's policies.
- **Present your evidence:** Explain to the student what evidence you have that makes you think she or he is cheating. Give them specific examples of suspicious material. If you have original plagiarized sources, present them.
- **Explain the consequences:** Be sure that you have decided what will happen as a result of the suspected cheating. If you have hard evidence and intend to give an F on the assignment, explain that the failing grade is a direct result of the cheating, and for no other reason. If you only suspect cheating and have decided to give the students an opportunity to defend themselves, then explain the consequences of your suspicion. You might state, "I'll be carefully scrutinizing your work," or "I want you to resubmit the assignment."

Avoid negotiating consequences with the student.

- **Back up the consequences:** If you give the student a failing grade, be sure to point him or her to university cheating policies and syllabus statements that hold them accountable for their behavior. Again, do not make the issue or the consequence a personal issue.

The Blind Eye Problem

Why do students cheat? One reason is that they are not held accountable. That's right. Research shows that part of the problem is that teachers often don't confront suspected cheaters!

“More than half of Britain's university academics have turned a blind eye to students they suspected of cheating, according to a paper due to be published later this year.
The Guardian (London) - Final Edition, February 17, 2005.

Signs of Plagiarism

Some possible signs of cheating include:

- Mixed writing style or language: Could be indicative of cut and paste
- Introduction of sources, terms of concepts not covered in course
- Lack of bibliography
- Bibliographic sources are all of a certain date or out of date
- Significant difference in writing style or quality between assignments
- Lack of information from course—facts, sources, concepts, etc.
- Odd or mixed formatting: Could be indicative of cut and paste
- Paper submitted in HTML format
- Check “creator” information in Word Properties found under File Menu

Checking for Plagiarism with Google

As simple as it sounds, when you suspect cheating, copy and paste terms into Google. While by no means foolproof, it's a simple way to spot check for plagiarism. Some tips on using Google:

- Use full sentences in quotes. This helps Google look for the sentence rather than just the words.
- When sentences start with general statements such as “I think that...” truncate the sentence to only include the subject of the sentence.
 - Not: “I think that the structure of Citizen Kane is circular, adding more depth every time it passes over the life.”
 - Rather “the structure of Citizen Kane is circular, adding more depth every time it passes over the life” (Try it! The second quote returns the original source plus some examples of places that have plagiarized the original!)
- Select text passages that contain unique, unusual or technical terms.

Checking for Plagiarism with Turnitin.com

CU Online is currently conducting a pilot of an online service that checks for plagiarism. The site scans submitted text and documents for substantial similarities against a database of over 4.5 billion pages.

The system provides comprehensive reports of suspected plagiarism and offers an interface that makes it easy for instructors to submit full papers and discussions for review.

Please contact CU Online for more information about Turnitin.com licenses.

Handling Student Reports of Cheating

At times, students may report dishonest activity by other students. According to the university honor code, students are duty bound to report cheating. Still, the situation is problematic for a number of reasons. Most of all, the idea that students are “tattling” on other students can be very bad for class moral and create an environment of distrust.

If you can take the student report as a tip and independently verify the cheating, then you can go about confronting the cheating student without involving other students.

In many cases, the reported cheating may only be a suspicion. If you feel that the report has merit and you feel you need to act, you have two options:

- Address the entire class with an anonymous claim of cheating and a notice that you will be scrutinizing future work. Point out that cheating doesn't just hurt the learning of the cheater, it is unfair to the rest of the class.
- Confront the student with whatever evidence or information you have. If you only have suspicion, it is still better to notify the student that you are on the lookout for cheating than to ignore the issue.

Entrapment: The Use of Stings, Setups and Bear traps

Creative teachers have come up with a variety of tricks for catching cheaters. Posting fake answer keys and masquerading online as a student are two examples of the many techniques instructors have tried in the past.

But beware! Not only is any kind of entrapment possibly illegal or against university policy, it creates a climate of distrust in the university. Remember to focus on ensuring academic honesty rather than flushing out cheaters.

Guilty Until Proven Innocent Not a Good Policy

Assume honesty. It's a good policy

“Different universities and professors use the system (*Turnitin*) in different ways and to various extents, in some cases requiring students to submit their papers for an electronic plagiarism check as a matter of course.

“That practice ran into a bit of backlash at McGill University in Montreal last fall. According to the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, a student there refused to submit his papers to *turnitin.com*, required by a professor as a condition of reading and grading them. The professor failed the student. Contending that he should not have to prove his innocence, the student appealed to a university committee, which backed him. The professor gave in and graded the papers.” -- *Washington Post*, March 14, 2004.

Resources

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Additional Links

These links may help you and your students in better understanding the issues of academic honesty.

http://library.auraria.edu/findit/subj_guides/copyright/plagiarism.html

Auraria Library Resources

(Many of the following links came from the article: Copyright and Fair use in Technology & Learning January 2005, www.techlearning.com)

<http://www.stfrancis.edu/cid/copyrightbay/index.htm>

Information about Fair Use, including how Copyright restrictions and Fair Use as it relates to student work and faculty course materials.

<http://web.cornell.edu/UniversityFaculty/docs/AI.Acknow.pdf>

Cornell's The Code of Academic Integrity And Acknowledging The Work Of Others

<http://www.georgetown.edu/honor/plagiarism.html>

Georgetown University's "What Is Plagiarism?"

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html

Purdue's Online Writing Lab's plagiarism resources. Very concise summaries of dos and don'ts

<http://www.plagiarized.com/>

Various plagiarism resources

<http://www.turnitin.com>

Plagiarism detection service

Academic Honesty Committee

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