

In the Classroom 72

How to Prevent Cheating in Online Courses

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks for taking the time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot I, and I really mean it. This month we are about to hit 400 downloads of the podcast. That's my number one. We beat that by, I'm thinking, 39 downloads, so I'm pretty happy. We're almost cracking 400, so we're about three away. I'm hoping by the end of the day, we'll get there. Anyways, all to you guys. Thank you ever so much for listening to this podcast.

This week we are going to talk about cheating. As my campus ramps up for the fall term, there is a great chance we are going to be working in a remote working environment. I had some faculty who are looking for a proctored testing solution because they are concerned about cheating. On the flip side, we have a \$5.8 million gap to fill, and I'm looking for solutions that cost no more money. With cheating, what do we do about it? Let's talk about it.

First of all, does cheating exist? Of course, it does. I would be extremely naive to think that cheating was not out there, and it wasn't a problem. The question is, is it a bigger problem online compared to face-to-face? Well, there's a lot of research done on this particular topic. Some of the research indicates that it's a greater problem. Other research points that it's not. In fact, face-to-face is a greater problem. It's pretty much inconclusive, but it is still a problem. The fact of the matter is, if someone wants to cheat, they will.

Why does cheating exist? According to George Veletsianos, in his book *Learning Online: The Student Experience*, one of the rises in cheating is due to institutional issues. I quote, "Universities focus on economic growth at the expense of the student on grading above learning, and on institutional prestige above providing assistance and support to students who need it most." I see it a different way. I see that we are focused more on sorting than we are on learning, that institutions of education have always been about sorting based on the courses you take and the results you get, determine if you can continue with your education that you may be denied a program. It's all based on arbitrary things like, well, you have to learn it in a certain time, or you're not able to learn it, which is not entirely true at all.

Some people- one issue may hold them back compared to another issue, but we've created this. That's one of the issues, so if you're preventing me from pursuing my dream, then I may consider other strategies in order to be successful in addition to studying hard. Studying hard may not necessarily get me there, but still maybe the idea of assessment is preventing me from achieving my dream, so that's one area.

There's other areas that were included. I found these also in different articles, which I shared in the show notes, so please check them out. Number one, pressures to

succeed. I talked about that a little bit. There are institutions out there, I had the fortunate ability to go to the United States Air Force Academy Preparatory School, had a great time there, but there was a lot of pressures. If I went to the Air Force Academy itself, there are certain courses like electrical engineering that have an enormous amount of pressure for all kinds of reasons. That is typically the courses where students cheat because the courses are extremely hard, but they're also gateway courses to careers that you want and things like this. Folks, when put up with those types of situations, enormous pressure, will take actions that are outside their normal value set, so pressures to succeed.

Other reasons, assessments that require information regurgitation and inauthentic application of knowledge. If you can look it up on Google, why shouldn't you be able to look it up on Google? That's what a lot of folks think that you're just asking me to prepare the information that there's more to life than just memorizing basis facts. I would have to argue that there's also the importance of foundational knowledge. Getting students to understand why they're learning something, that's critical. I've talked about that over countless episodes that it's important to let students know why they are learning particular information, and why they have to learn it certain ways, but there's also a lot of busywork.

I want you to memorize this for no other reason than maybe, "Oh, I had to do it when I was a student." They haven't bought into this idea of being professionals in the industry yet, and so we have to get them there. Other reasons are individual morals, cultural background, time constraints, time pressures are usually a reason for taking a shortcut. A lot of folks speed because they want to get there quicker. Are they supposed to? Well, the law says no, but they do. Lack of significant consequences for dishonesty. I very seldom see anyone kicked out for dishonesty. I've seen some really blatant and stupid things that people have done, and I'll talk about a couple of them, but have lacked consequences.

Air Force Academy Prep School, Air Force Academy, military academies, they're pretty strict on that. You will get kicked out for academic dishonesty. They have a little phrase, "Thou shalt not lie, cheat or steal, nor tolerate anyone among us who does." Not only if you see somebody cheat, and you do not turn them in, you could get kicked out, so a little stiffer standards, but I don't see that and normal higher ed.

Some folks don't actually understand what constitutes cheating. There was a story of a woman who had been out of the classroom for 30 years, goes back into the classroom, and in her first class, she was almost expelled because of plagiarism which is a form of cheating. She obviously was not clear on this because, in the workforce, she was able to use material that she found on the internet in order to build documents to prove a point, and that was accepted practice. Then we get into higher ed, it's not necessarily accepted practice, but everybody assumes the other person knows.

When I was in the Air Force, before you dragged somebody on the carpet, you had to ask four questions. Are they aware of the standard? Have they been trained to meet the standard? Do they have the equipment to meet the standard? Is the environment conducive to meeting the standard? I see pretty much the first two. Are

you sure that they know the standard and understand it? They may not. We can say, "Well, they learned this in secondary school."

I'm saying they probably did not. When I was in my graduate program, I was asked questions, after my general exam to do things. I had to look at them like they were coming from Mars because they were asking me to do things that I had not heard of in my whole academic career. I learned them, but I didn't know them at the time. Just to assume that somebody knows it maybe is not right.

The one that I think is a big problem is high-stakes testing. If you have a test that's 50% of the grade, you are increasing the chances that somebody will try to cheat. High-stakes testing, if you have only a midterm and a final, you're increasing the chances of somebody cheating. Other reasons, desire to help others. They may help them out, give them information. Procrastination, once again, that goes into the time thing. The need to pass the class which is pressures to succeed, and that the course is difficult. Those are the reasons why somebody may try to cheat. It doesn't matter if I cheat, that no one cares. We'll talk about that one a little bit later, but the fact that if you show that you're not involved in your class, the students may take advantage of that situation.

The other thing is cheating is easy. In this virtual environment, if the instructor is not there, then there's an attitude that the student won't get caught, or that the instructor won't notice or that the instructor doesn't care. Those all can happen in a virtual environment. That's why it's absolutely critical to humanize your course, to be actively involved in your course, to put a real person there, that once you have made that connection with the students in your class, then they probably won't try to take advantage of it.

It really comes down to what type of environment do you want to create? Then you have to ask the question, what's the purpose of assessment? An assessment is a tool to determine if the student met the objective, if they can demonstrate whether they know something, or they can do something. It's also a way to assess the quality of the instruction.

If a student gets a question wrong, is the problem with the student, the assessment, or the instruction? That's what you want a good assessment to be able to do. You want to make sure that the assessments are fair, and that they're tied to the learning objectives.

I've talked about this in previous episodes, and I encourage you to go check on those. Also, if you start ramping things up, you start using technology like proctoring systems, what kind of relationship are you creating with your students when you are demonstrating that you don't trust your student? Is it an environment that is conducive to learning? Like I said, I was at the United States Air Force Academy Prep School, and we had an honor code to live by, and it was amazing.

The tests were very stern, very strict under a time guide. You had to take the test, and you did it to speed, but there was an environment that you just didn't want to cheat. You didn't want to be the person that cheated and be eliminated from the

school. Well, not everybody is in that environment, so how do you create this environment, where you want to create it that people don't want to cheat? One of the ways is to tap into their value system, their morals because if they cheat, they start on a path of cheating, what's to say they won't cheat in their job where they're embezzling or they're taking shortcuts or other things? The reason I bring that up is because I've had examples where I've had cheating occur in classes that I taught. I taught a martial arts class at one of the first colleges I worked at, and part of the requirement is I had to have the students write a paper, so I had him write a one-page paper dealing with the martial art we were learning.

The papers automatically had to go through Turnitin which checked for originality. How many students put their academic career on the line for a simple one-page throw-away assignment was amazing. I called them into the carpet and basically, read them the Riot Act on what cheating was all about and what kind of character they have because once somebody cheats, I will always look at them differently. I know that they cheated, that they are cheaters and that they will take advantage of somebody and I know that they're different at that point in time.

I try to stress that to them, so they can go forward and lead a better life. I've had that happen in my student success class, students taking advantage of different assignments that I put in front of them. One wanted to be a lawyer. I pointed out that I could actually stop him from being a lawyer simply because of how he responded to this assignment. Another one, his dad owned a business. I asked him would his dad tolerate somebody doing these type of practices in his business. That's what I try to talk to them, try to get in their head a little bit and explain why you don't want to go down a path of cheating.

There's an article that I put into the show notes from Richard Landers who said that your real responsibility as an instructor is not really to implement cheating prevention techniques but to make cheating unattractive in relation to the moral violation that cheating would create. I think that's what I talked to a little bit here, was why is the individual cheating and what the ramifications are later in life.

With that all in place, what are some ways that you can prevent cheating? Lots of good recommendations for preventing cheating. One is master quizzes. With master quizzing, you could give a couple small low stakes quizzes that the student would have to pass in order to be able to take a higher-stakes test. Have a sequence of tests that they can take multiple times, as many times as they want until they mastered it, and then open up the final test.

Test pools. Well, test pools are great because you can just pack them full of questions and then randomly draw questions from these test pools and give them to the student. No test would be alike. You could have same difficulty, the same idea, but just different problems set so different answers will come out. The fact that you draw them from a test pool, nobody gets the same questions, added to this is randomizing tests and randomizing answers, so that students can't look over at somebody else's page.

There was one example where somebody printed a test on four different colored papers and handed them out. The tests were all the same, but the paper was different colored, they have four different colors, and that helps slow down cheating because the students assumed that the tests were different. I would say, in line with this master quizzing, is just have also more low stakes quizzing where students can do it as many times as they want in order to develop this sense of mastery, but just more quizzing, but low stakes throughout the course. Eliminate the high stakes testing.

If you change that testing for other activities that are more authentic, that will also help reduce cheating. When you're doing other projects, you can monitor the progress throughout the term, so you can see them constantly improving on the product. That way it's not, "Okay, turn a paper in at the end of the term," you have no idea if somebody has turned in that paper that they got from a paper mill, you have no idea. If you have them working on this paper, and you're providing feedback for them to improve it, odds are that they're probably not cheating on it.

Use other forms of assessment, mix it up. This is very much in line with Universal Design for Learning, having them create presentations, doing quizzes, other projects, essays, just mix it up and create multiple opportunities that are lower stakes across your course, that will keep the motivation from having to go out and cheat. Also, remove the zero score. If they turn in something late, they get zero for it. I used to be in favor of that. It's like, "Well, you got to have a deadline to do this." I've had instructors demand a deadline to do this, but it really doesn't meet up with any of the objectives where you can certainly penalize them for turning something in late, but to give a zero score because they didn't turn it in on time, I think, it's just making it more high stakes, and students- when they feel that pressure, you're opening the door.

You just try to remove factors that make cheating effective. Other ways of dealing with this, if you give generous time limits, open-book exams, open notes, just open everything, that also affects it too. It doesn't necessarily degrade learning, because as they're negotiating the question that you provided, they are still working, that learning is still happening. You can also have students turn in a reflection after the test indicating what sources they used and how effective they thought those sources were. That's certainly strategies that you can add to this.

If students have not ever taken one of your online tests, you may want to give a practice quiz with unlimited attempts, so they have a feel for how the tests work, how the online environment works, just get them comfortable in that type of environment. That reduces the idea of technology coming into play, that errors happen, their computer setup, give them an opportunity to understand how the technology works.

In this article, supporting online exam cheating without proctor supervision, a lot of good strategies here, I'm not in total agreement with all of them. This was created by G.R. Clusky, Craig Ehlen, and Mitchell Raiborn's article. They talked about these eight control procedures, online exam control procedures that I want to just let you know what they are. They broke it into three different groups. The first group is limiting exam time. Under that, they have two strategies that they use for limiting exam time.

One is scheduling an exam for a specific time and date that you don't necessarily have the exam open for a 24-hour period or 48-hour period. Now, I'm not necessarily in favor of this because not everybody has the same schedule in life, some have to work at night, some have to work during the day, some are with childcare in an online course. I believe there should be some flexibility. One of the strategies that they quote is scheduling it for a specific date and time period. They also advocate that the test closes after a specific time period. You may give 45 minutes for an exam, that at the end of 45 minutes, the test closes, it's done. Not necessarily in favor of these things, but those certainly are strategies that will help reduce the amount of cheating that occurs if you believe that cheating is widespread.

The other one is limiting for student access, that exam should be open to the internet for only a specific period of time, that students can only work at one question at a time and they cannot go back to completed questions, that they only have one time to take the exam and that it should be a program like Respondus LockDown Browser or its equivalent. These are certainly strategies that will definitely help control the test. You can experiment with them. That's all about limiting student access.

Finally, the last piece is changing test characteristics. A couple of these I already talked about, that you should randomize your test sequence and answer choices, just randomized. I would say also, use a test pool, so you're pulling different questions, not just randomizing a 25-question test, but pulling in different questions so everybody definitely has a different type of question.

The other thing is that you should rotate or modify your exam each term, at least a third of the question. This is where a test bank comes in, that each test can be different, you have different ways of doing that. Those are the online exam control procedures that help you limit exam time, limit student access, and also, change the test characteristics. There's eight elements under that. I have a link to the article, feel free to go check it out, good stuff. Create questions that require a higher order of thinking, pull out Bloom's taxonomy, move up the pyramid, and try to find questions that cause somebody to think about it just a little more. Avoid things that you can simply put into Google and answer because Google will certainly let you do that. The other thing is, humanize your courses. I mentioned this earlier, but be a human in your courses. Folks in an online class don't typically have the same type of respect for online teachers because online teachers are often absent from the class. They never meet them face-to-face, they don't get to know them, therefore, you don't have a presence that they have built a relationship with. That's why instructors need to talk with students. Set up those virtual office hours, add a video to your class, upload photos, talk about yourself, talk about activities that are real, and why students should be tapped into this.

Another strategy is to promote integrity. Before you give a test, have them review and virtually sign off on the honesty policy, whatever policy that your campus has, dealing with academic integrity before they even take the test. Use it as a gate that you have to review this, you have to acknowledge that you understand it. Once you acknowledge it, then the test is made available to you.

Another strategy is doing statistical analysis on the question. Look at all the questions, dump them all out and identify what students are getting wrong to identify if there's particular patterns, something that you may be concerned but you'll be able to see these things if you get students missing the same questions and the questions they're getting wrong, they're getting them wrong with the same answers. That's one way that you can narrow it down.

Like I said, open notes exams, certainly different ways that you could do that. Add a section to your exam when you're doing open notes, as I said, to list all the resources that you used to answer questions, and then some prompting questions that, "Did the sources help or hinder you? What was a specific difficult question? Explain your process for answering it." Maybe choose a question that you would rewrite how you would rewrite that or eliminate the exam and why? Make them think about the exam and how they did that.

As I also noted, make sure that you vary your test question type. Also, delay when you give out the final answers to the questions or the test to the final score. You don't have to give it out right away. One of the things that you could do is sit on it, wait until everybody has turned in the exam, then go in and change the variables like in Blackboard to say, "Okay, here's now what you got for your score," or they could see the score, "But here's what you've got wrong." Don't necessarily give them all the answers, just show them what answers they got wrong. Refrain from using publisher test banks verbatim because everybody's got the answers to those.

Those are some strategies that you can use to control as far as tests that wouldn't need a proctoring software service. Proctoring software services are there for a purpose. They're there to make money. They're there based on fears that you've got rampant cheating going on, and we're the final solution, pay us a lot of money to do that. Cheating has been going on since we started inventing tests.

I'm not saying it's right, but I acknowledge that it has been out there. There has been an arms race trying to get past, "I'm going to prevent cheating," and the students who really want to cheat will still continue to cheat. This has been an arms race ever since, but there are ways that you can reduce the amount of cheating that's going on and some of the strategies I shared with you will help you do that. A really important topic, I'm not trying to make light of it, but I think we could do a lot more by building better courses and focusing on the learning as opposed to the sorting, and that's where I'm at with that. Before I let you go, here's a plug for my book.