



Tools for Teaching

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Preventing Academic Dishonesty

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Between 40 and 70 percent of all college students have reported cheating sometime during their academic career (Aiken, 1991; Davis, Grover, Becker, and McGregor, 1992). Researchers have begun to identify the factors that influence academic dishonesty (Aiken, 1991; Barnett and Dalton, 1981; Davis, Grover, Becker, and McGregor, 1992; Roberts and Rabinowitz, 1992). These include competition and pressures for good grades, instructional situations that are perceived as unfair or excessively demanding, faculty who are perceived as uncaring or indifferent to their own teaching or to their students' learning, lax attitudes on the part of faculty toward academic dishonesty, peer pressure to support a friend, and a diminishing sense of academic integrity and ethical values among students. Not all these factors are under an instructor's control, but there are specific steps you can take to prevent academic dishonesty:

- Inform students of academic standards for scholarship and conduct.
- Explain how cheating harms students and describe campus sanctions.
- Minimize the opportunities for cheating and plagiarism.
- Take visible actions to detect dishonesty so that students know you will not tolerate cheating. (Even if you don't actually carry out all the actions you say you

will take, honest students will appreciate knowing that you care enough about academic integrity to take precautions.)

- If cheating occurs, respond swiftly with disciplinary measures and formal action.

The following ideas are designed to help you impart to your students the values of academic honesty and to help you set policies that encourage academic integrity.



General Strategies

Spend time at the beginning of the term discussing standards of academic scholarship and conduct. Cheating may mean different things for faculty and students ("Academic Dishonesty in our Classrooms," 1990). For example, students are often unclear about how much they can work with other students and under what circumstances. Describe for your students acceptable and unacceptable behavior, giving examples of plagiarism, impermissible collaboration, and other practices relevant to your class. Explain that cheating will not be tolerated, and discuss university policies, procedures, and penalties for academic violations. Some departments hand out written materials that define cheating and plagiarism and require students to sign a statement that they have read and understood the material. Here is an example of material that is distributed to students:

Cheating means getting unauthorized help on an assignment, quiz, or examination. (1) You must not receive from any other student or give to any other student any information, answers, or help during an exam. (2) You must not use unauthorized sources for answers during an exam. You must not take notes or books to the exam when such aids are forbidden, and you must not refer to any book or notes while you are taking the exam unless the instructor indicates it is an "open book" exam. (3) You must not obtain exam questions illegally before an exam or tamper with an exam after it has been corrected.

Plagiarism means submitting work as your own that is someone else's. For example, copying material from a book or other source without acknowledging that the words or ideas are someone else's and not your own is plagiarism. If you copy an author's words

exactly, treat the passage as a direct quotation and supply the appropriate citation. If you use someone else's ideas, even if you paraphrase the wording, appropriate credit should be given. You have committed plagiarism if you purchase a term paper or submit a paper as your own that you did not write.

Make sure students know the criteria for evaluating their performance. Review students' work throughout the term so that they know you know their abilities and achievement levels. (Source: Malehorn, 1983)

Develop a climate and group norms that support honesty. For example, you may wish to take a vote in class to conduct the exams under the honor system (without proctors). (Source: McKeachie, 1986)

Learn to recognize signs of stress in students. Make students aware of campus resources that they can turn to for help if their grades are low or if they feel under pressure. Familiarize yourself with the services of your campus's student learning center and counseling center, as well as tutoring provided by student honor societies.

Ensure equal access to study materials. Establish a file in the library or department office of old homework assignments, exams, and papers. Or attach a sample of past exam questions to the syllabus. (Source: Singhal and Johnson, 1983)

Make students feel as though they can succeed in your class without having to resort to dishonesty. Give more rather than fewer tests. Encourage students to come talk with you if they are having difficulties. Minimize the threat of exams and grades. See "Allaying Students Anxieties About Tests" and "Grading Practices." (Source: Eble, 1988)

If you suspect students of cheating or plagiarizing material, confront them directly. Deal with the problem immediately. Don't join the 20 percent of faculty members who tend to ignore evidence of cheating (Tabachnick, Keith-Spiegel, and Pope, 1991). Talk with a student about your suspicions and listen carefully to the student's response. Here is some specific advice (adapted from "Handling a Plagiarism Interview," 1987, p. 10):

- If you have qualms or hesitations, talk with an experienced colleague or your department chair before you meet with the student.
- Consult your campus student conduct office for specific guidelines and due process procedures.
- When you meet with the student, objectively explain the problem as you see it.
- Describe why this is a problem in grading or evaluating the student's work.
- Avoid using the words cheating or plagiarism.
- Project an air of concern for the student as an individual, but communicate the seriousness of the situation.
- Listen to the student's explanation.
- If a student denies any wrongdoing, question him or her about specific aspects of, say, the paper by asking for definitions of terms, interpretations, or restatements.
- Be prepared for pleas, excuses, and tales of hardship and extenuating circumstances.
- Show some sympathy if a student is distraught or upset. Suggest a referral to the counseling center, if appropriate.
- Explain what will happen next to the student.
- Take whatever official action your institution prescribes for handling student academic dishonesty.



Plagiarism

Clarify the distinctions between plagiarism, paraphrasing, and direct citation.

Provide students with instances of correct and incorrect ways to use others' ideas and words. You might want to seek permission to distribute the following example from *The Random House Handbook*, 6th ed., by Frederick Crews (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992, pp. 181-183):

Consider the following source and three ways that a student might be tempted to make use of it:

Source: The joker in the European pack was Italy. For a time hopes were entertained of her as a force against Germany, but these disappeared under Mussolini. In 1935 Italy made a belated attempt to participate in the scramble for Africa by invading Ethiopia. It was clearly a breach of the covenant of the League of Nations for one of its members to attack another. France and Great Britain, as great powers, Mediterranean powers, and African colonial powers, were bound to take the lead against Italy at the league. But they did so feebly and half-heartedly because they did not want to alienate a possible ally against Germany. The result was the worst possible: the league failed to check aggression, Ethiopia lost her independence, and Italy was alienated after all. (J. M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 845.)

Version A: Italy, one might say, was the joker in the European deck. When she invaded Ethiopia, it was clearly a breach of the covenant of the League of Nations; yet the efforts of England and France to take the lead against her were feeble and half-hearted. It appears that those great powers had no wish to alienate a possible ally against Hitler's rearmed Germany.

Comment: Clearly plagiarism. Though the facts cited are public knowledge, the stolen phrases aren't. Note that the writer's interweaving of his own words with the source's does not render him innocent of plagiarism.

Version B: Italy was the joker in the European deck. Under Mussolini in 1935, she made a belated attempt to participate in the scramble for Africa by invading Ethiopia. As J. M. Roberts points out, this violated the covenant of the League of Nations. (J. M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 845.) But France and Britain, not wanting to alienate a possible ally against Germany, put up only feeble and half-hearted opposition to the Ethiopian adventure. The outcome, as Roberts observes, was "the worst possible: the league failed to check aggression, Ethiopia lost her independence, and Italy was alienated after all." (Roberts, p. 845.)

Comment: Still plagiarism. The two correct citations of Roberts serve as a kind of alibi for the appropriating of other, unacknowledged phrases. But the alibi has no force: some of Roberts' words are again being presented as the writer's.

Version C: Much has been written about German rearmament and militarism in the period 1933-1939. But Germany's dominance in Europe was by no means a foregone conclusion. The fact is that the balance of power might have been tipped against Hitler if one or two things had turned out differently. Take Italy's gravitation toward an alliance with Germany, for example. That alliance seemed so very far from inevitable that Britain and France actually muted their criticism of the Ethiopian invasion in the hope of remaining friends with Italy. They opposed the Italians in the League of Nations, as J. M. Roberts observes, "feebly and half-heartedly because they did not want to alienate a possible ally against Germany." (J. M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 845.) Suppose Italy, France, and Britain had retained a certain common interest. Would Hitler have been able to get away with his remarkable bluffing and bullying in the later thirties?

Comment: No plagiarism. The writer has been influenced by the public facts mentioned by Roberts, but he hasn't tried to pass off Roberts' conclusions as his own. The one clear borrowing is properly acknowledged.

Watch out for electronic plagiarism. With the growth of electronic bulletin boards, information servers, and electronic mail, students can obtain papers from students at other universities or have on-line access to encyclopedias, Monarch notes, or other source material. While there is little you can do to prevent abuse, letting students know you are aware of the possibility may deter potential cheaters. (Source: Bulkeley, 1992)

Tell students that resubmitting their previous academic work as a new product for your course is inappropriate. Ask students to check with you if they have a paper or project they submitted for another course that may be appropriate for yours. Some faculty work with students who wish to use a recycled research paper by allowing students to use a different statistical method to analyze data already collected or by letting students use the conclusions of their previous papers as springboards for topics for new papers. (Source: "About Plagiarism," 1990)



Paper Topics

Assign specific topics. Design topics that are likely to require new research, that stress thought and analysis more than recall of facts, and that are challenging but not overwhelming. Topics that are too difficult invite cheating, as do boring, trivial, and uninteresting topics. See "Designing Effective Writing Assignments." (Sources: Eble, 1988; "Preventing Plagiarism," 1987; Singhal and Johnson, 1983)

Limit students' choices of broad paper topics. If given complete freedom, students may flounder and turn to commercially produced term papers or "file" papers as an easy out. (Source: "Preventing Plagiarism," 1987)

Change the assignments for each offering of a course. Changing the topics or assignments prevents students from simply appropriating an essay from someone who has already taken your course. (Source: "Preventing Plagiarism," 1987)



Writing Demystified

Give a short lecture on how to research and write a paper. Let students know what you expect of them and how they can proceed. Some campus libraries offer consultation services to students on developing research skills.

Discuss in class the difficulties of writing. Help students understand that the anxieties or blocks they face are a normal part of the writing process. "If, in the classroom, you emphasize the stages of the composing process and the normal tribulations of every writer, your students may be less likely to conclude that cheating is the only feasible way of getting from an assigned topic to a finished paper" (*Handbook for TAs*, n.d., p. 18).

During the term schedule a variety of short in-class papers. In-class assignments help students develop their writing skills and help you determine their abilities. Instructors who assign only one paper a term have a hard time judging whether that assignment is the student's own work. See "Helping Students Write Better in All Courses." (Source: Malehorn, 1983)

Early in the course require students to come in to discuss their paper topics. Again, later in the course, ask them to share outlines and to discuss how they plan to organize and present their ideas and findings. This approach not only helps students write better papers but also allows you to see students' ideas develop. (Source: "Preventing Plagiarism," 1987)



Preparation and Submission of Papers

Require students to submit first drafts. Quick comments on first drafts can help students improve their writing skills. See "Evaluating Students' Written Work."

Request that final versions of papers be handed in with drafts. Ask for note cards and outlines as well. Also ask students to turn in the original version and one duplicate. Keep the copies for your files so that you can consult them to identify pirated or purloined papers the next time you teach the course. (Source: Malehorn, 1983)

If possible, collect papers from students during class. This will only work if your course size is not too large. If papers are turned in at a department or faculty office, consider using locked mailboxes with slots for collection.

Consult the catalogue descriptions of term paper firms. If you suspect a student has purchased a term paper, you may wish to review the catalogues of paper factories. Ask your campus office of student conduct for any catalogues on file.



Exam Questions

Change exam questions as often as is practical. Ask students and (graduate student instructors, if you have them) to submit prospective questions. With judicious editing, some will be appropriate for the exam and others could form the basis of an item pool. See "Quizzes, Tests, and Exams."

For multiple-choice exams, use alternate forms. Scramble the order of questions, and color code the different exams. Some researchers suggest rearranging both test questions and answers (Aiken, 1991). Or collate the pages in different orders, if possible. (Source: Singhal and Johnson, 1983)

Create individualized tests for students, if appropriate. Using a computer, a faculty member in business creates customized assignments for students. In a tax accounting course, he varies the sales price and monthly payment amounts to generate unique problems for each student (using four sales prices and four monthly payment amounts yields 64 different problems; upping each of these variables to six results in 216 different problems). Using software with word-processing, spreadsheet, and mail-merge capabilities makes it possible to create unique problems and the solutions for each so that scoring can be readily handled. (Source: Burns, 1988)

Keep exams, grade books, and rosters safe. Store all exam materials in locked cabinets, desks, or file drawers in your office. Make copies of computer grade files. (Source: "Preventing Cheating on Exams," 1985)



Test Administration

Make certain that you (or proctors) are in the room at all times. During an exam arrange for proctoring or plan to monitor the test yourself, unless your class is run on an honor system. Periodically walk up and down the aisles to actively watch students. Students have developed ingenious ways of cheating during exams: using systems of hand and feet positions, tapping corners of the desk to represent responses to multiple-choice questions, surreptitiously opening books or trading papers, using tiny cassette recorders filled with information. (Source: Davis, Grover, Becker, and McGregor, 1992)

Seat students randomly in alternate chairs. Have students place personal belongings on the floor rather than in empty seats. If needed, schedule an additional room.

In large classes, check students' photo IDs. Check photo IDs displayed on desks against class lists to be certain that each student takes his or her own exam. If you do this, let students know in advance you will be checking IDs. Or seat students in preassigned groups. For example, students could sit by section so that graduate student instructors can determine whether all their students are in attendance and that "ringers" are not taking tests. (Source: "Preventing Cheating on Exams," 1985)

In rooms with seat numbers, keep a seating chart. Hand out blue books or exams with prerecorded seat numbers. In rooms without seat numbers, pick up the exams in the sequence of rows. (Source: Singhal and Johnson, 1983)

Make certain that students have cleared the memories on their calculators. Before you distribute the exam or as students enter the room, check the calculators' memories to be sure they are erased. Also make sure that crib notes are not concealed in a calculator's cover. (Source: Putka, 1992)

Supply scratch paper. Do not permit students to use their own paper or pages of their blue books. One intrepid student reported writing answers on a paper flower and pinning it to her blouse. (Sources: Davis, Grover, Becker and McGregor, 1992; Singhal and Johnson, 1983)

Take action if you observe "wandering eyes." If you notice "wandering eyes," go up to the offending student unobtrusively and ask that he or she move to another seat where it is less crowded. If the student seems reluctant, whisper in his or her ear that you would prefer that the student move. If you observe cheating, position yourself near the offenders to discourage them. Or make a general public announcement: "Please do your own work." If you have suspicions about students, allow them to complete the exam, but take notes on what you observe. (Source: McKeachie, 1986)

Spend some time in the back of the room. Students who are thinking about cheating will have to turn around in their seats to see where you are. (Source: Singhal and Johnson, 1983)

Do not allow students to rush chaotically to turn their bluebooks in at the end of the period. Require students to sign an attendance sheet when they turn in their exams, or collect exams from students. Count those present at the exam to make certain that the number of examinees matches the number of exams. This will prevent students' claims that their exam was lost or misplaced but that they took it. (Source: "Preventing Cheating on Exams," 1985)



Blue Books

Have students turn in blue books prior to the exam. Collect blue books at an earlier class meeting or as students enter the exam room, and then redistribute the blue books at random. (Source: "Preventing Cheating on Exams," 1985)

Require students to write only on the left-hand pages. Or ask students to leave a certain number of pages blank at the beginning of their blue books. (Source: "Preventing Cheating on Exams," 1985)

Examine all the blue books before leaving the classroom. One scam for cheating described by Moore (cited in Flint, 1992) involves a student's pretending to take the test but submitting a blank blue book without his or her name. The student then completes the test at home in a spare blue book using notes and materials. The completed blue book, with the student's name, course, and professor's name on the front, is then dropped outside the classroom, in the hallway, or outside the professor's office. The student depends on someone finding the blue book and returning it to the faculty member, who is supposed to think that it slipped out from the pile.



Scoring and Returning of Exams

Clearly mark incorrect answers. Use an inked X or slash mark to indicate wrong answers or blank spaces.

Let students know that you will be using computer programs to detect cheating on multiple-choice tests. Programs such as "Cheat-1" and "Cheat-2" compare students' responses and determine probabilities that pairs of students by chance will show the same distribution of answers (Aiken, 1991). Even if you do not actually use the software, telling students you may, may be sufficient to deter cheating.

If you permit regrading of exams, take precautions. Throughout the term photocopy the exams or quizzes of students who initially ask for regrading. Or photocopy a sample of all exams before returning them to students. (Source: "Preventing Cheating on Exams," 1985)

Return exams and assignments to students in person. This will work only if your course is small enough. Do not leave exams in the department office or on your desk for students to pick up. For large courses with GSIs, distribute exams in section. For large courses without GSIs, use techniques described in "Preparing to Teach the Large Lecture Course."



Fraudulent Excuses

Distinguish between fraudulent, legitimate, and unacceptable excuses. A legitimate excuse is based on events beyond a student's control; a fraudulent excuse is one fabricated solely to avoid an academic responsibility. In one study, researchers found that over two-thirds of college students admitted to using at least one fraudulent excuse to postpone an exam, turn in a paper late or not at all, or miss class. An unacceptable excuse, such as forgetting when a paper was due, may be truthful but is not a Justifiable reason for failure to do the assigned task. (Source: Caron, Whitbourne, and Halgin, 1992)

Clearly state your policies about accepting excuses. Let students know at the beginning of the term what you consider as acceptable and unacceptable excuses. Tell students that no excuse will be accepted without some type of proof of its validity. While it is clearly impossible to obtain evidence that all excuses are legitimate, just saying you will ask for

documentation may discourage potential excuse makers. Better yet, try to structure your course so that students are not placed in situations where they might be tempted to lie. For example, allow students to miss a quiz without penalty. See "Allaying Students' Anxieties About Tests." (Source: Caron, Whitbourne, and Halgin, 1992)

Recognize that the excuse "my grandmother died" is more likely to be valid than fraudulent. Research shows few significant distinctions between the content of fraudulent excuses and legitimate excuses. Don't become so cynical that you dismiss every family emergency as an invention. (Source: Caron, Whitbourne, and Halgin, 1992)