

Chapter 34

Cheaters Beware: (Re)designing Assessment Practices to Reduce Academic Misconduct

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive chapter tackles the issue of ‘preventing’ academic misconduct via effective assessment design. A dearth of literature is focused on ‘detecting’ plagiarism, but assessment (re)design can help ‘prevent’ the pervasiveness of ‘cheating’ if tasks are relevant, authentic, real-world, educative, and career-focused from the outset. While contemporary society is demanding and complex, many educational assessment practices today remain unimpressively straightforward. Academic faculty are central to confronting cheating. In this chapter, the authors focus on a three-pillar system that empowers higher education institutions (HEIs) to better prevent malpractice rather than reacting to it afterwards. The aim of this chapter is to provide a descriptive investigation into why assessment is so important in the fight against academic misconduct, and a three-pillar approach to bolster assessment practices that will help minimize opportunities for students to engage in academic offences. Within this presentation are included author narratives that will help readers understand the many and varied ways tertiary-level students can challenge faculty assessment design.

INTRODUCTION

Annually, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) acknowledge concerns over the growing prevalence of cheating cases. In formal education settings, assessment practices are fundamental and is an area that is the subject of constant innovation and debate as students appear to be more hands-on with new technologies that enable cheating to be faster, easier and more cost-effective. At present, there appears to be a predominantly ‘reactive’ rather than ‘proactive’ approach in the literature pertaining to academic

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misconduct. Assessment must evolve to ensure its security and push students to justifiably attain their award/qualification at the end of their academic journey. Just as students seek to find many and varied ways to cheat, educators should seek to find many and varied ways to combat misconduct, and thus make the temptation to cheat more burdensome and counter-productive than it would seem worth.

BACKGROUND

HEIs should be responsible for acculturating students into their academic community. That is: empowering them to become legitimate members; bolstering their writing, language and research skills; equipping them with skills and knowledge of genre-specific practices; making the rules clear; providing them with ample opportunities to practice the development of graduate attributes (Leask, 2006); and significantly, promoting the ‘fundamental values of academic integrity’ (McGowan, 2008, p. 98). AI embodies the principle that students’ work is ‘genuine and original’ (Katoch, 2013, p. 108). Failure to recognize cheating/dishonest behaviors may, however, reflect the HEI’s failure to clarify ground rules with students, rather than any deliberate act of sabotage by students (Carroll & Zetterling, 2009; Collins & Oliver, 2015; Katoch, 2013).

Assessment design can be defined to include all processes that take place in order to form specific tasks for satisfactory completion of a unit/course, and includes the selection and scheduling of tasks, development of rubrics, and re-development of activities in response to student performance. It does not include the individual feedback provided to a student on a particular task, although we suggest that feedback is strongly influenced by design elements such as scheduling and/or rubrics. While assessment design is often the key to promoting student learning, it can be time-consuming and troublesome for course coordinators. Nonetheless, it is advisable that educators explicate the full nature of assessment tasks to encompass all *ten* of the following steps: (1) introducing the activity; (2) explaining the activity; (3) clarifying the learning objectives underpinning the activity; (4) outlining the procedures/steps that need to be taken; (5) giving model examples to better express expectations; (6) setting appropriate time limits; (7) providing prompts/advice to help motivate students from the outset; (8) fielding any questions students may have in relation to the activity; (9) reminding students of the requirements several times over; and (10) setting all students on the right track (adapted Velliari, 2015).

Lewis and Williams (1994) asserted that ‘...in today’s rapidly changing environment there is an increased demand for flexibility and the capacity to leverage previous knowledge and experience in new and different ways’ (p. 5). Thus, teaching and learning opportunities that enable (expanded) awareness, adaptability, resilience, resourcefulness and play (i.e., a capacity for creativity, reflection, decision-making, and self-awareness) are imperative in a ‘modern society’ (Grabinger & Dunlap, 1995, p. 5). In agreement with Livingston (2010):

...[i]nteraction and collaboration are now important in most workplaces and are expected to be even more important in the future. Higher education needs to use its natural resources in ways that develop content knowledge and skills in a culture infused at new levels by investigation, cooperation, connection, integration, and synthesis. Creativity is necessary to accomplish this goal. (p. 59)

Educators today, therefore, must develop assessment tasks within the nuances of individual, departmental and HEI circumstances; balancing multiple tensions across a diverse range of factors. Assessment

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