Chapter XIV

Securing and Proctoring Online Tests

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Abstract

Online course delivery has introduced a new spectrum of opportunities not only for innovative pedagogical approaches, but also for cheating. This chapter provides instructors with methods to deter students from cheating in online assessments either by limiting the opportunity to cheat or by reducing their motivation for doing so. Through an extensive discussion of research literature, we provide an exploration of cheating that includes: definitions, cost and effects, ethical considerations, motivations for cheating, role of organizational policy, history and recent examples. In this exploration, both technological solutions and instructional design solutions to reduce cheating are examined. This chapter looks closely at the capabilities and limitations of online testing and the tools technology provides to reduce cheating. We emphasize the role of instructional design in securing online tests. We conclude with a discussion on future trends.

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Online course delivery has introduced a new spectrum of opportunities not only for innovative pedagogical approaches, but also for cheating. As such, online assessment poses a new challenge to today’s instructor. However, it is critical for all instructors to recognize that paper-based testing and oral examinations are also highly susceptible to cheating tactics. An interesting, and perhaps disconcerting, read on the subject is provided by Bob Corbett in his book, The Cheater’s Handbook (1999), which offers 142 pages of methods to cheat on paper-based tests and writing assignments. Another author, Curry (1997), provided a particularly salient example of cheating in an environment most instructors would consider highly secure, the oral exam. In the example, the exam was administered before a dean and two other professors. According to Curry, one student cheated in the following manner:

_Wearing his long hair loose, he hooked a bud earphone up to his cellular phone and hid a small microphone in his tie. A friend well-versed in the subject called him right before the exam, ready to read him the answers he needed. But his cell phone ran out of batteries halfway through the test and started beeping._ (p. 7)

After reading about or even encountering the varied methods of cheating, there are questions online instructors need to consider when planning an online assessment activity. A few of these questions include the following:

- How can a teacher know if the person taking the exam is the person receiving credit?
- What can be done to prevent students from looking up answers in the textbook or online during an exam?
- Is it possible to prevent students from calling one another during an online test or from using other electronic gadgets to store cheat sheets?
- How does a professor prevent students in one section of a course from printing a test and giving it to students in another section of the course?
- And, most important, what motivates students to cheat, and how can we reduce cheating by decreasing that motivation?

Though there is no guaranteed way to prevent cheating, there are techniques instructors can use in online assessment to make cheating difficult and time