

Shifting the Focus from Stopping Cheating to Promoting Academic Integrity

Trying to Stop Cheating is a Losing Game

Research and experience suggest that developing elaborate plans to stop cheating—especially to stop cheating in digital environments—is a losing game, for at least two reasons:

1. By focusing narrowly on the chance that a few students will cheat, we message to our students that we don't trust them. They are likely to respond to those low expectations in kind. They see that we expect that at least some of them will cheat, and they do not wish to be disadvantaged by those who do.
2. By transparently messaging the strategies we have developed to stop cheating, we, in essence, give students and other bad actors a roadmap to how to circumvent our cheating abatement plans. The internet is full of easy to access strategies for cheating with nearly every digital cheating abatement tool available.

Furthermore, by attempting to replicate in person examinations in online settings, we fail to recognize that a change of medium may require a change of design.

At the level of design, lots of materials are available online for using technology to [make quizzes and exams more cheat-proof](#) and for [preventing some of the most common ways students cheat in online exams](#). CITL is happy to consult on best practices for [designing exams in Canvas](#) that make cheating difficult.

Promoting Academic Integrity

As naïve as it may seem, you may get better results by **promoting academic integrity** than by **trying to stop cheating**. You can find out more information about this approach on websites developed by [MIT](#) and [UCSD](#), among others. Perhaps the most that you, as an instructor, can do is to present to students with a strong argument for the benefits of maintaining their integrity, while developing minimally cheat-proof assignments.

Promoting academic integrity involves making explicit to students that no matter how well or poorly they do on the exam, sacrificing their integrity is not worth it. You could develop an honor code that you ask students to sign or initial at the start of each exam (as MIT does), or you could ask them to copy or retype a brief statement affirming that what follows is their own work.

Most importantly, you might want to discuss the following points with your students:

1. When you cheat, you circumvent an opportunity to solidify your learning. While this may benefit you in the short run, it will catch up with you eventually.
2. Once you have engaged in cheating, you will likely enter your next course unprepared. This will lead to the likelihood of further cheating in the future.
3. The stress and anxiety that come from cheating on a test will almost certainly outweigh the stress of preparing to the best of your ability. Moreover, the stress and anxiety that come from cheating remain with you after you take the exam. Nearly all people who have cheated on a test remember having done so for the rest of their lives.