

Fostering an Environment of Academic Integrity in Assessment: Best Practices

Most learners do not purposefully engage in academic dishonesty. Instead, research shows that most learners choose a path towards academic dishonesty and cheating for several reasons including:

- individual circumstances and characteristics,
- the institutional or contextual environment,
- a lack of clear understanding of policies, what is being asked or the negative consequences of cheating,
- a lack of support and practice,
- rationalizations and justifications, such as intense academic pressure, grade pressure and stress
- and/or course and assessment design choices (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe *et al.*, 1999; McCabe *et al.*, 2001; McCabe & Pavela, 2004).

From a learner-centred lens, focusing on educational opportunities for learners to understand what is and is not academic dishonesty, and providing them with opportunities to practice so that they can become experts within their discipline is preferable to deploying technological and logistical countermeasures to prevent academic dishonesty. This goal can be achieved through fostering an environment of academic integrity and adapting pedagogically to prevent academic dishonesty. Instructors can design courses and assessments that promote academic integrity and create and model cultural norms related to academic integrity. These strategies have been shown to be successful in reducing academic misconduct (Lang, 2013; McCabe and Trevino, 1993).

Instructors can use the evidence-based practices below to create an environment that fosters academic integrity around assessment design and delivery.

Instructional Practices in Assessment Design and Delivery to Promote Academic Integrity

- **Clearly communicate purpose and expectations.** Communicating the purpose of the assessment and what you expect from your learners reduces academic dishonesty (McCabe and Pavela, 2004). Where possible, link the assessment to something beyond what occurs in the course to create relevance (e.g., professional application), and explain why it is meaningful and how it contributes to their course/program learning outcomes. Ensure students are clear on the expectations of the assessments well in advance of the deadlines and what is and isn't allowed. This includes expectations about contribution divisions in group assessments.
- **Align your assessments to your course learning outcomes.** Ensure that your assessments have been designed to align with at least one of your course learning outcomes and communicate that alignment clearly to learners. This process will aid in articulating the purpose and relevance of the assessment, which is noted above. Learners also perceive value in what is being taught and assessed if teaching and assessments are aligned, which further reduces academic dishonesty (East, 2009)
- **Clearly outline what is being assessed and how it will be evaluated.** Include the marking scheme or rubric that they will be using to grade the assessment to ensure accurate and impartial evaluation. Accurate and impartial evaluation creates a fair and trusting relationship between learners and instructors, which promotes academic integrity (ICAI, 2021; McCabe *et al.*, 1999).



- **Use an honour pledge or statement.** Require learners to affirm an honour pledge or statement at the beginning of the assessment. Honour codes or pledges are a low-tech solution that have been shown to promote academic integrity, particularly in an environment that fosters a culture of academic integrity (Konheim-Kalkstein *et al.*, 2008; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe *et al.*, 1999). For honour pledges and statement templates, see [Making the Transition to Take-Home Exams](#), [Sample Open Book Academic Integrity Statement](#), and [Honor Pledges](#).
- **Require multiples sources.** Require learners to consult and cite a variety of sources (e.g., at least 3 journal articles) to complete an assessment and clearly spell out your precise expectations for the types of resources students may and may not consult. Academic dishonesty can be reduced by limiting the opportunity and temptation for learners to engage in dishonest practices (Pavela, *et al.* 2017). This practice is an example of how an instructor can reduce opportunity and temptation.
- **Develop creative forms of assessment by diversifying assessment types.** Using a diversity of assessment types that enhance learning allows learners an opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and learning in different ways (Pavela, *et al.* 2017). Providing a variety of assessment types is also an inclusive assessment strategy.
- **Provide examples.** Provide learners examples of academic work that demonstrates your expectations (e.g., proper formatting for citations). From a learning perspective, the development of citation skills takes time and practice and requires explanation, guidance and modelling (East, 2009; Kier, 2014).
- **Provide students with feedback and opportunities for practice.** Provide opportunities for students to submit assignment drafts/revisions for feedback or to practice their skills in multiple contexts. This practice shifts the focus from grades to learning, which promotes academic integrity (McCabe *et al.*, 1999). Release feedback to students as soon as possible after the submission deadline to promote learning.
- **Consider alternative assessment types.** Modify or change your assessments from traditional exams (e.g., high stakes multiple-choice exams) and select assessment types that call for higher-order thinking skills or assessments that interest learners (McCabe *et al.*, 1999).
- **Allow learners to practice using technology.** Allow learners to practice using any technology you plan to use before submission of the graded assessment with a no-stakes practice assessment before high stakes assessments. On this practice test, include samples of all the different types of questions (multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, matrix of choices, etc.) that you think you may wish to use later in the course. This practice will reduce anxiety around performing with unfamiliar technology.
- **Consider including course specific or personalized design elements.** For assessments that require learners to synthesize information, including original elements or specific material provided in the course can reduce issues with academic integrity. For example, you could ask learners to reference personal experiences in relation to course material or write a personal reflection as an element of an assessment, or as the assessment. Collaborative assessments can also achieve this goal of personalization. As noted previously, academic dishonesty can be reduced by limiting the opportunity and temptation for learners to engage in dishonest practices (Pavela, *et al.* 2017).
- **Allow student choice.** If individuals or groups will be focusing on different topics for an assessment, allow them to choose the topic. This practice increases engagement, ownership, and motivation which decreases likelihood of academic misconduct (Lang, 2013).
- **Get rid of the clock.** Limit or eliminate use of timed assessments where providing a response or completing an assessment in a restricted amount of time is not part of the learning outcome. Time pressure can contribute to an increase in academic misconduct. Assessments that have short turn-around times are more likely to result in learners engaging in academic dishonesty (Bretag *et al.*, 2018).

- **Limit the amount of time an assessment is available to students.** For traditional exams and midterms delivered in an online format, or other assessments that have practical and/or pedagogical reasons for being timed, provide a specific time limit for them to access and complete the assessment (Cluskey *et al.*, 2011). A 24-hour window will accommodate varying student schedules and time zones.
- **Adjust assessment frequency and weighting.** De-emphasize traditional tests and put more weight on other types of assignments whereby learners can demonstrate their progress toward achieving the course's learning outcomes. Replace infrequent, high-stakes summative assessments with more frequent, low-stakes formative assessments. This practice helps to mitigate the motivation to cheat in the first place. The weightier an assessment, the more powerful the motivation to cheat (Lang, 2013). Reducing weighting can also be accomplished through scaffolding assessments (i.e., breaking down a larger assessment into smaller, manageable pieces where learners demonstrate progress or use of feedback in successive parts), which also reduce stress and anxiety that can lead to cheating (Rundle *et al.*, 2019).
- **Write questions that are not easily searchable.** For assessments that learners complete in a non-invigilated environment, design questions that require deep and critical thinking skills or application. For example, create questions that are applied to a scenario or integrate multiple concepts, as these are more difficult to search for the answers. This practice is an example of reducing the opportunity for learners to engage in academic dishonesty (Pavela *et al.* 2017).
- **Create authentic assessments.** Assessments that are tailored to the course and are connected to other courses, a larger context, or profession provides relevance, and therefore are perceived as having value. The perception of value fosters intrinsic motivation in students (Ambrose *et al.*, 2010).

Policies and Tools to Promote Academic Integrity

- Become familiar with the [University of Guelph's academic integrity](#) definition, rules and regulations
- Make sure any statements related to academic integrity and academic dishonesty consequences are in keeping with institutional policies, and any associated academic misconduct policies.
- Create a course honour code (similar to the assessment honour pledge/statement noted in the "assessment design and delivery" section above). Research has demonstrated that less cheating occurs in an honour code environment (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Bowers, 1964) and honour codes can have a long term, enduring effect on behaviour beyond the educational environment (McCabe *et al.*, 1996). Consider co-creation of the honour pledge with the learners to create shared responsibility (McCabe, 2004). This process will engage learners in the discussion of academic integrity.
- Use plagiarism detection software as a teaching tool by allowing learners to see their plagiarism report with draft submissions and guide them through their results. This can provide a learning opportunity, particularly in cases of unintentional plagiarism. Turnitin is integrated in Dropbox in CourseLink and can be used as a teaching tool for your written assessments. Citation skills require time and practice to develop, with additional guidance and modelling from instructors (East, 2009). If you plan to use this tool it is important to be aware of the implications on student intellectual property. You can read [this article](#) by Morris and Stommel (2017) to learn more.



Office of Teaching and Learning Instructor Resources Related to Academic Integrity

The Office of Teaching and Learning offers multiple avenues to engage in the topic of academic integrity through consultation and resources.

- **SoTL Snapshots:** These brief summaries of research related to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) are designed to provide a quick overview of SoTL research findings for instructors. The “Assessment of Student Learning” category contains several Snapshots related to academic integrity.
- The OTL website houses self-guided resources on [course and assessments design](#), and [learning outcome development](#)
- Educational Developers are also available for one-on-one consultations to discuss teaching and learning topics related to academic integrity. Email us to book a consultation otl@uoguelph.ca

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