Tips for Preventing Cheating on Exams

WSU Teaching Academy

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The literature on academic integrity strongly suggests that the best results are obtained by creating and actively modelling a culture of academic integrity in your class.  Communicate why you think academic integrity is important and how it benefits your students. You can minimize cheating by reducing both opportunity and motivation without creating an atmosphere of distrust.  Students generally appreciate an environment in which they feel trusted and respected.  They also appreciate knowing that someone is paying attention and taking reasonable precautions to maximize fairness by discouraging cheating, which also protects them by avoiding misunderstandings or false accusations.  The list below offers some suggestions you may want to consider incorporating into your course.

Before the Exam

* Provide a clear vision of implications of infractions articulated in the syllabus and orally
* Provide sample exams/questions to reduce anxiety about what to expect
* Change test questions every semester
* Be careful about using only questions from the publisher’s test bank—some are available online
* Change questions for any students taking a makeup exam
* Have the students sign an honor code

Preventing Cheating During the Exam

* Count exams/blue books distributed and make sure that all are collected
* Check IDs, especially for large classes
* Do not allow electronic devices, including smart watches, especially ones that transmit data over wireless networks
* Use multiple colors of paper for exams (whether or not the actual questions are different)
* Use open-book exams (reduces memory panic)
* Ask individualized discussion questions so students cannot cheat
* Hold the exam in a room with at least one empty chair between students
* Have multiple proctors throughout the room that are clearly visible to the students
* Have proctors stand near students that are acting suspicious
* Have randomized seating assignments so that friends do not sit together
* Have extra seats up front to move students to if they are acting suspicious (e.g. wandering eyes)
* If you notice wandering eyes, remind the whole class to keep their eyes on their own paper
* Remove hats and sunglasses for closed-book tests
* Disallow water bottles as students sometimes write on these beforehand
* Require students to show their work, i.e., disallow answers that have no support
* Have students empty their pockets before going to the restroom
* Require all bags to be stored in the front of the room so that students don’t cheat while ostensibly looking for an eraser or other item in the bag
* Clear the desk areas and ensure that nothing is written on the desks prior to passing out the exams

Catching/Punishing Cheaters

* Have different tests, but give no indication ahead of time that differences exist
* Different question ordering
* Different answer ordering for multiple choice
* Different numbers on math problems that look similar (3 different numbers for a written problem would practically guarantee that the person copied the solution from another test)
* If passing back graded exams, take smart phone pictures of every page in case students change their answers and claim that the test was graded incorrectly

*Additional Information for Washington State University Instructors*

Academic Integrity at Washington State University

<https://www.academicintegrity.wsu.edu/>

Workshop: Establishing a Culture of Academic Integrity at WSU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bn_g1ZQOoE>