

■ RICK HESSE, Feature Editor, Pepperdine University

Dissuading Student Cheating

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Undergraduate students feel pressure to achieve high grades so they can obtain a high-paying job upon graduation. Campus recruiters may specify minimum GPAs for students to qualify for interviews regarding openings, reinforcing this necessity for high grades. Further compounding the ethics message are high-profile business scandals, such as Enron, WorldCom, and Adelphia. This article gives proactive advice on how to dissuade students from attempting to cheat in the classroom. The cheating problem seems more pronounced with undergraduate students, but certainly students at all levels of study may try to gain unfair advantage of lax test controls.

First, teachers need to design courses and conduct classes with cheater prevention in mind. Handing off proctor duties to a graduate student or administrative staff is an invitation for students to cheat. It is important to realize that there are always students who intend to cheat. There are also students who are opportunistic cheaters—meaning that if nobody is proctoring the test, they might decide at that moment to talk with their neighboring students. This second group is larger and more easily dissuaded using the techniques outlined below. There will be students from the first group who feel they have to cheat, so the methods discussed here will make it more difficult for them to cheat effectively.

Methods

The author has used the methods listed below with great success. These methods have been adopted by other instructors at Georgia Tech with positive results as well. Table 1 shows the main

techniques to discourage the most common types of cheating:

Technique #1 has the most bang for the buck. The first six techniques will prevent most cheating. However, do not ever think that you can stop all cheating.

1. Have a randomized seating chart that you only show on the day of the exam (#1). I have a macro in Excel that shuffles the names. I display the seating chart on the overhead five minutes before the test start time. Good students that study hard will often tell on students they see cheating, which you can then identify from your seating chart. Good students do not want slackers getting good grades while they worked hard. The better students reward you on the teacher evaluations for running a strict, but fair course. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the students too lazy to study or come to class are too lazy to fill out the evaluations. I honestly believe that by catering to the honest students, your teacher evaluation ratings go up. If the number of students compared to the number of seats is high, then students have to sit close to each other. Randomized seating and multiple test variants are necessary with close quarters.

2. Students will write on anything and everything to use as an unauthorized crib sheet (#2). Something as innocuous as a Starbucks™ coffee container can have formulas written on it. Do you know for sure that the iPod™ plugged into their ears is playing music or is recorded formulas and facts? Clothes can be written on—I have found several baseball caps with writing inside them or on the visor.

3. Proctor the test yourself (#3). This means you are there and alert the whole



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| # | Technique | Cheats |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Use a randomized seating chart on test day. When I do this, I keep the front row on one side of the classroom empty for latercomers. | Student reads off their neighbor's test. This will prevent collaboration since two people who planned to share will not sit next to one another. Any latecomers sit in front right next to me. |
| 2 | Allow nothing on the desks except the test and a pencil | Student types formulas into their cell phone, write on wrappers, eyeglass cases, etc. |
| 3 | Proctor your own exam. Make eye contact during the exam. Know the student names | Student talks, looks at neighbor's, has a pinch-hitter take test for him/her. |
| 4 | Use multiple variants of the test. I use three versions of every test and they are distributed randomly (this is easier done by making the tests look the same but altering numbers or the order of the answers in the multiple choice questions). | Student reads off neighbor's test. By copying off a different variant, right answers are wrong answers and the student will fail himself by cheating. |
| 5 | Photocopy all tests before handing them back. This way you have the original to compare if a student resubmits a test for regrading. | Student alters answers after you hand back the test to resubmit for a grade update. |
| 6 | Each class must have new questions to avoid giving an advantage to students who have old exams. | Student will talk with former students or students in other sections. Furthermore, some fraternities and other groups keep test banks of old tests. |
| 7 | Avoid open note, open book tests | A student allowed a formula sheet will use multiple sheets or their neighbor's sheet. Books will have extra notes written in them. |
| 8 | Make all test math such that the numbers are appropriate for hand calculation. E.g. I had a calculation with a square root of a fraction. I made the fraction reduce to 400/4 or 100, so the square root was just 10. | Student will type formulas into their calculators. Calculators now are not just four function, they are alphanumeric mini-computers. |
| 9 | Makeups must be a new version of the test. Allow makeups only with a valid written excuse. | Student either wants more time to study, or to learn from a friend who sat for the test, or even stole a copy of the test for them. |

Table 1: Dissuasion techniques.

time. Do not drop the tests off and leave, or sit glued to your laptop working on something else. I walk around the room and make eye contact. Often cheaters feel guilty—instead of looking at their

papers will look at you to see what you are doing. Many times, I have overheard students tell their friends that they could not cheat because the professor was “looking at them.”

4. Have multiple test variants (#4). I tell students there are multiple versions so their answers A, B, C may be D, D, and B on their neighbor’s paper, and that the order is randomly created by a

computer program so do not look for patterns. Teachers often tend to avoid the same letter twice in a row or try to bury correct answers in the middle. Students can figure this pattern out, so you must truly randomize.

5. Copy all tests (#5). Students want the tests back, but the temptation to alter a wrong answer into a correct one is significant. On ScanTron tests, I tell them that whatever is marked is what is graded. I will not look at their test booklets, or shuffle answers if they missed one. In addition, I write the time the student handed the test in on their test coversheet. When they come to complain about not having time to double-check their answers, I show them that they had x minutes left and this usually silences their protests.

6. Make new questions for each class (#6). Students keep test banks of old exams. Even if this is the first time you are teaching a course, students from other sections may share knowledge about questions. Textbook question pools and borrowed questions from other instructors may aid diligent cheaters.

7. Try to make your tests closed notes/closed book (#7). Related to #2, a single sheet of paper "cheat sheet" can turn into multiple sheets by swapping from a stash on the floor or given to neighboring students. If I need the students to look up values for a normal distribution, for example, I supply that table with the test. Do not let them bring in tables or scratch paper!

8. The test should not require calculator, textbook, or crib sheet (#8). I use a mix of concept and formulas/problems based on the homework. I expect the students to know how to solve some basic formulas. Simple math still allows me to test the student knowledge in my area because I am not testing math per se.

9. Require valid excuses for missing a test; otherwise it is a zero (#9). I make a new makeup version of the test with many different questions under the assumption that the person will have talked with someone who sat for the original test.

I believe that prevention of cheating during and after the test can be par-

tially accomplished by using techniques #4 and #5. By using multiple versions of the tests, a cheater copying off a neighbor will get a very bad score since they have completely different correct answers. They end up with a low score and have no challenge. Copying the exams before giving them back is highly recommended. Students commonly try to alter grades, which can lead to a "he-said, she-said" situation. If you have a before and after copy of the test, the student will drop that challenge immediately.

Summary

You need to learn the names of the students so you know that it is them showing up on the exam day and not a pinch hitter. I have students use name tents and call on them by name to help me memorize their names. This allows me to enforce the seating chart listed as technique #1.

With the above techniques, I feel that many, but certainly not all, of the ways students may cheat are eliminated. I walk around the room as they take the test and generally look vigilant as a key disruptor. These techniques become more important as class size grows. It is easier to keep track of 15 students versus 100 students. Classes of greater than 100 students may require you to have your TA act as another set of eyes. For a large class, not only do I have the seating chart, but also on my copy of the seating chart, I have put a sequen-

tial number next to each student name. I number each test booklet and have them sitting at each assigned seat prior to test commencement. If a test number is missing or a student swaps with a neighbor I will know about it. With judicious application of these techniques, you just may dissuade student cheating. ■

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