

Teaching Tip: Your Cheatin' Heart



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Academic dishonesty is a perennial problem. When students cheat, they undermine the integrity of the college itself, and devalue the legitimate work done by their peers.

Recently, the college revised its [policy on cheating and plagiarism](#). The penalty for academic dishonesty is, as before, a permanent grade of zero on the assignment. As teachers, we have certain obligations in instances of academic dishonesty, and it's important that collectively, we meet these obligations in order to demonstrate that we value academic integrity. If you encounter cheating in your classroom, follow these steps:

1. Let the student know why you've assigned a grade of zero. If your discussion with the student leads you to conclude that no cheating actually occurred, you can regrade the assignment.
2. If you remain convinced that cheating did occur, you need to alert the Registrar's Office – complete the [Cheating and Plagiarism Report Form](#) and send it to the RO. Remember to include a copy of any evidence – for instance, a screen shot of the web page from which the student took material, or copies of the classmate's work that was reproduced. You can send all of this material electronically – just use one of the new photocopiers to send your scanned material directly to the RO.

Once the RO has processed your report, both you and the student will be notified. Students can, of course, contest the accusation, as outlined in the policy. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the policy, and in particular, to the timeline for each step of the process.

An ounce of prevention

Sometimes, cheating occurs “inadvertently,” simply because students are not familiar with the rules of a particular teacher, department or discipline. You can help them avoid academic dishonesty, and prevent instances of cheating, by setting clear guidelines and expectations

Make your expectations clear

Discuss cheating with your students; explain what constitutes cheating, and why it's unacceptable. Research has shown that students are more likely to consider cheating if they believe their teachers don't care. Explain the consequences of cheating, for the student and for the college. Remind students that cheating also means letting a classmate copy from them!

Create a test environment

For in-class tests, make effective use of the classroom space.

- ✓ Arrange the desks before the students enter the classroom (or, to reinforce previous discussions on cheating, have the students move the desks themselves).
- ✓ For in-class tests, prepare and enforce a seating grid - the temptation to cheat is much less if they're not surrounded by their friends.
- ✓ Randomly assign students to seats (or sneakily put people you worry about where you can see them!), and change the seating for each test. Use alternate rows if possible.
- ✓ Take a walk around the class before the students enter and check the desks for notes and equations relevant to your subject. Students often sit in the same seat class after class and their desktop may turn into a memory aid!
- ✓ Remind students to go to the washroom before the test, and have tissue paper on hand for anybody who 'just wants to go blow their nose. Not only does this discourage students from leaving the room, but it limits disruptions during the test.

Define student resources

Be clear about what materials, tools and resources students are permitted to use during a test. Take a moment at the beginning of the test session to scan the room, and have students turn off or put away anything that is not permitted.

- ✓ **Electronic Devices:** smart phones allow students to access the Internet and entire texts. Keep in mind, however, that students also use their phones to take notes. If you allow access to notes during assessments, either let students know that they can use their phones for this purpose, or remind them to print their notes ahead of time and bring the printed copy to class.
- ✓ **Calculators:** specify what if any calculators are permitted during the test. Again, remember that some students use their phones as calculators, so if your test policy allows calculators but not phones, remind them to bring an extra calculator, or provide a couple of extras yourself.

- ✓ Pencil cases – remove what they need before the test (erasers, pens pencils) and place the pencil case in their knapsack during the test.

Be creative with test material

- ✓ Create more than one version of the test. This may be as simple as changing the order of the questions around or changing the variables in a word problem, so that the difficulty is the same but the answers are different. Print the different versions on differently coloured paper – this makes marking easier later!
- ✓ Use small font sizes - if desks are properly separated, it is hard to read a size 10 Calibri font from across the aisle.
- ✓ Make sure the students keep their exams on the desk – Sitting back and relaxing and holding up the test while “reviewing it” is an opportunity to allow someone behind to see what is written.
- ✓ Be vigilant. Wander around the class – sit on an empty desk at the back of the class where the students can’t see you and have to wonder if you can see them. Don’t turn your back on the class when answering a student’s question. Stand so that you face most of the class.
- ✓ The best method to prevent cheating is to design your tests in such a way that you are testing for knowledge transfer to new situations. Hidden notes and formula sheets will not help the student.

What to do if you catch someone cheating:

- ✓ Don’t disrupt the test environment by making loud public accusations. Quietly walk up to the student and let them know that you are aware of what they are doing. Ask the student to hand in their test and any extra material that they have – don’t forcefully take anything from them. You do not want a confrontation, but you do want the student to know you are aware of what they are doing and you are serious about dealing with the situation. Most students will do as requested and hand the material and test to you.
- ✓ Ask the student to leave, and tell them you will send a MIO or call them to make an appointment to discuss the situation. Don’t get into a discussion of what happened or didn’t or what the consequences will be while others are still working. Remind them that the rest of the class is still writing and you can’t allow the test environment to be disturbed.
- ✓ If the student refuses to cooperate, don’t confront. Make the judgement call – it may be better to let the student finish the test. You can collect the test, and then follow the procedure outlined in the Cheating and Plagiarism Policy.
- ✓ If at any point in time you feel you cannot control the situation, call Security. Most students are more upset at getting caught than belligerent. They are aware of the consequences.

- ✓ In all cases, after the test is over, review the College Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism, and ask questions if you are not sure what to do. Immediately after the incident, make some brief notes of the situation as a record; you can include these notes along with any other evidence you can provide when you complete the report form. Photocopy all material so you can keep a copy for yourself, or keep the original and return a copy to the student. Remember that you will need to provide a copy of the test or assignment when making your report to the RO.

In all cases, students have the option to contest your accusation. Be sure to follow the timeline set out in the policy, and remind students that they can appeal, but that they also need to follow the policy procedure.

If you're not sure if a particular case constitutes cheating, or if you have any questions about the policy and its application, you can get in touch with the RO, or contact the PDO for guidance.

Some helpful links on cheating:

http://www.wikihow.com/Cheat-On-a-Test#Fingernail_Method