

Teaching for Integrity: Steps to Prevent Cheating in Your Classroom

Jason M. Stephens, Ph.D.

David B. Wangaard, Ed.D.

Results from over 100 studies¹ over the past four decades have made two facts very clear:

- 1) most students cheat at some point every school year, and
- 2) teachers can play an important role to reduce student cheating.

The following are research-based strategies for preventing (or at least reducing) academic dishonesty in your classroom. We strongly encourage you to discuss the following strategies within your departments and agree to implement ideas you support. By doing so, you'll be creating the kind of classroom community that helps students achieve academic success with integrity.

Communicate and Care

One of the most important things you can do to reduce cheating in your classroom is to **communicate to students that you are aware that academic dishonesty is a problem and that you take the issue seriously**. Practical steps to communicate your concern include:

- Include your position on academic integrity and consequences in your syllabus.
- Discuss with your students the value of academic honesty during the first few days of school. Be **specific about what behaviors constitute academic dishonesty in your course** (e.g., copying homework, unpermitted collaboration, plagiarizing from a written or Internet source, using unpermitted notes during a quiz, test or exam, etc.) and be specific about the consequences for engaging in these cheating behaviors.
- **Make it clear to students that: 1) academic dishonesty is morally wrong** (i.e., it involves lying to or otherwise deceiving others and creates an un-earned and unfair advantage over others), and **2) that they are personally responsible for not cheating** (i.e., blaming others or the situation are just cheap rationalizations and not acceptable).
- **Reinforce this message and policies throughout the year**

Emphasize Mastery Goals over Performance Goals

Many students today feel tremendous pressure to succeed academically. Getting high grades and test scores (so called "performance goals") have become more important than learning and understanding the subject matter (so called "mastery goals"). **Research shows that students who are more performance oriented than mastery oriented cheat more often**. Strategies for communicating that learning and mastery of the material are more important than high test scores and grades and can include:

- **Engage:** Create learning experiences that tap into students' *interest* and make how and what they learn *useful* or *important* to them. Students work harder (and cheat less) when their perceptions of "task value" are high.
- **Challenge:** Provide students with *optimal challenges* (too easy=boring; too difficult=anxiety) and *scaffold learning experiences* (i.e., provide relevant examples of completed work, encouragement). Students are more motivated to learn and persist longer at a task when it is reasonable challenge and they are supported in their efforts.
- **Empower:** Give students some *voice and choice* in the learning process and the products they create (i.e., select product/project outcomes via classroom decisions).
- **Recognize:** Emphasize and acknowledge students' effort to learn and understand. Make it clear that what is most important is they are learning and *developing competence*.

¹ Visit our project website at <http://www.ethicsed.org/programs/integrity-works/index.htm> and click on resources to find a file of research abstracts related to academic integrity.

- **Individualize:** Provide private individual evaluation of progress and avoid practices that invite social comparisons of performance differences. Make it clear that students' primary goal should be self-improvement (that they are getting more knowledgeable and skilled) and not how they are doing compared to others.
- **Play Fair:** Establish and clearly communicate your learning objectives (what students are expected to learn and why) and assessment practices (the grading requirements and the criteria you will use to evaluate all major assignments).

Specific Strategies for Reducing Different Types of Dishonesty

Reducing Homework Cheating

- **Don't Assign Too Much:** Keep your homework assignments to a reasonable number and of reasonable length.
- **Make it Meaningful:** Nearly all students copy HW and most don't think of it as cheating because it's boring or meaningless to them (unneeded practice of skill already learned).
- **Create** and use a school assignment calendar to avoid multiple major events/assignments in a narrow time frame.

Reducing In Class Test Cheating

- **Offer multiple** grading opportunities versus only one or two tests per quarter.
- **Space Seating and Monitor:** Space students if possible and actively move about the room during exams with all desk and floor area clear of student resources.
- **Create Multiple Forms:** Don't re-use the same exam every year and/or randomize order of questions and answers.
- **Ban Digital Technologies:** Do not allow students to use cell phones, PDAs, etc. during quizzes, tests and exams.

Preventing Plagiarism²

- Make** Assignments Clear and Manageable
- Provide** List of Specific Topics (and/or required components)
- Require** Process Steps (series of due dates: topic, outline, first draft)
- Meet** with Students to Discuss Their Papers
- Require** Oral Reports (ask process questions)
- Require** Annotated Bibliography (could be a process step)
- Require** Recent References (prevent use of paper from a "paper mill")
- Require** Meta-Learning Essay (complete in-class essay summarizing assignment)

Detecting Plagiarism

- See** the Signs (different voice/style, off topic, mixed citation styles or formatting, lack of references, anomalies in citations)
- Know** the Online Sources (e.g., Cheathouse.com, [School Sucks](http://SchoolSucks.com), [Screw School](http://ScrewSchool.com), [The Paper Store](http://ThePaperStore.com))
- Search** Suspicious Sections of Papers (using free search engines such as Google)
- Use** Plagiarism Detector (e.g., www.turnitin.com)

Confronting Suspected Plagiarism

- Non-Confrontational** (speak privately and inquire about your questions)
- Indirect to Direct** (provide opportunity for student to acknowledge problem first)

² Adapted from Harris, R. (2001). *Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers*. Online at: <http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm>