Academic Integrity and Transitioning to Distance Learning: Ten Recommendations

By Gary Pavela

See also: IS report to affiliated schools (includes suggestions for colleagues working from home)

TOPIC LIST (includes links to aditional resources)

Academic Integrity and Transitioning to Distance Learning: Ten Recommendations

1 Seek guidance from your campus administration about transitioning to distance learning

Here's an example of helpful transitioning guidance from UAB (University of Alabama at Birmingham):

EXCERPT:

>"Hallway" Conversations: You know those conversations you have with students or that students have with each other right after class in the hallway or in the parking lot? You do not have to lose those valuable interactions either. Provide a discussion board that is open for students to have their own conversations about the course content, share experiences, and exchange resources.

2 Seek insight from peers experienced in distance education

The Chronicle of Higher Education has created an active Facebook page: "Higher Ed and the Coronavirus Group" A post by Julie Harlan was especially helpful.

EXCERPT:

>Realize that students are not in town and likely do not have great connectivity. They are also dealing with family who may be ill, have a loss of income, and are generally stressed and upset by all these changes. Expecting them to tune in at a specific time is difficult at best.

>A talking head takes a lot of bandwidth, especially when recorded for long periods of time. Consider short videos (5 minutes or less), posting content in text or ppt files, and using synchronous class time Zoom sessions to discuss and answer questions from students. Record these (I recommend saving to your computer rather than the cloud for immediate access) and post the recording for students who were unable to attend.

>Rather than two big exams with 100 questions each, consider breaking information into smaller chunks, with smaller exams or more focused activities...[IS note: this approach also minimizes the likelihood of contract cheating].

>Recognize that this isn't the usual semester and do your best to make the tools you have work to your advantage. Fancy isn't necessary. Don't let perfection be the enemy of the good.

>One of the principles of universal design is that what is good for one student is good for all. Captioning, sharing notes and presentation materials, and videos are good practices that help your students with documented disabilities as well as everyone else in your class.

3 Review the Document "Ten Principles of Academic Integrity for Faculty" (see Document with related notes). Sharable link http://bit.ly/2KMbq9mTEN (copyright waived for non-profit educational purposes)

Many insights in the Ten Principles are fully applicable in distance learning settings.

EXCERPT (Principle Six)

Develop creative forms of assessment that enhance student learning.

Faculty members should develop forms of assessment that require frequent and active student engagement, creative thought, and opportunities to learn from mistakes [a]. “Assessment” does not necessarily entail giving a grade, and may include exercises in both self-assessment and “team” or “peer” assessment [b]. The educational aim in most forms of assessment should be evaluation and enhancement of learning -- "not a means to rank, but a way to communicate with students” [c]. When faculty members assess student learning they're also being given an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of their own teaching.

[Click the link above to view the document notes]

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4 Review research on ways to protect and promote academic integrity in distance learning (be sure to see relevant faculty resources offered on your campus)

Here's worthwhile research we've used ourselves: Curbing Academic Dishonesty in Online Courses by Anita M. Krsak.

EXCERPT:

> Many suggestions for designing test questions were found. Instructors may:
>
> >Design questions that could not be answered easily unless the individual has done the previous work in the course (Olt, 2002);
>
> >Have students apply personal experience when answering questions ("Strategies to Minimize", 2006);
>
> >Use multiple-choice tests to emphasize important terms and concepts. Nelson said that he permits referring to the textbook for answers – "so much the better; for some, sad to say, it may be the only time they read the text" (1998, pp. 7-8).

We also recommend related guidance at Penn State University, including use of a "course readiness quiz" and enhanced training for instructors on assessment of student performance in online instruction.

> "Repeatedly engaging in academic dishonesty is comparable to aspiring to be a top athlete, but hiring someone else to do all the practice and training. **It simply doesn't work.** The failure inevitably becomes apparent on the athletic field and in the workplace. Meanwhile, when dishonesty is detected--as it often is--students are creating educational records damaging to their reputation."
>
> --IS guidance to students

5 Explain at the outset of the course why academic integrity is important to you

EXCERPT (from Principle Five in the Ten Principles of Academic Integrity for Faculty):

> **Know your students and encourage their capacity for learning, self-management, and trust.**
>
> *"Knowing your students" necessarily entails giving them an opportunity to know you. There are many collateral benefits from this result, but the most important is group formation (teachers and students working together) [h] in growing bonds of trust. Partnership in the pursuit of learning, grounded in trust, is by any measure the most effective single mechanism to promote academic integrity.*

>Consider this related observation from Ken Bain What the Best College Teachers Do:

EXCERPT:

> Highly effective teachers tend to reflect a strong trust in students. They usually believe students want to learn, and they assume, until proven otherwise, that they can. They often display openness with students and may, from time to time, talk about their own intellectual journey, its ambitions, triumphs, frustrations, and failures, and encourage their students to be similarly reflective and candid. They may discuss how they developed their interests, the major obstacles they faced in mastering the subject, or some of their secrets for learning particular material. They often discuss openly and enthusiastically their own sense of awe and curiosity about life. Above all, they tend to treat students with what can only be called simple decency (p. 18).

>Your opening class discussion might reference standards of ethics for your discipline or profession.

>Be candid about the immediate and long-term consequences for academic dishonesty. Feel free to use our "Help Henry" video (copyright waived for non-profit educational purposes).

>Here's a related statement we regularly share with newly enrolled Integrity Seminar students:

What is our primary aim? We hope to alert students to the imperative of trust in the modern workplace and the consequences when trust is broken. Please consider this observation by E.O. Wilson in his book Letters to a Young Scientist (Wilson is University Professor Emeritus at Harvard University and winner of the National Medal of Science):

'You will make mistakes. Try not to make big ones . . . A simple error in reporting a conclusion will be forgiven if publicly corrected. But never, ever will fraud be forgiven. The penalty is professional death; exile, never again to be trusted.' (underlining added).

Wilson isn't exaggerating. Here's one federal agency (HHS) that openly publishes names of "research misconduct" offenders. It isn't difficult to imagine the likely impact on their future careers. This phenomenon isn't limited to STEM fields. It applies to any work or profession, given multiple ways employers evaluate candidate reputation, including "deep background" checks online.

6 Ask students to discuss why academic integrity is important to them

Consider sharing with your class this student letter to the editor of the University of Colorado campus newspaper.

EXCERPT:

Last Thursday I took a second semester physics midterm. I have now taken several of these exams, and they're tough. The class averages have fallen somewhere between 60-80%. But the class average for the exam given in the new online format? 98.6%. I refuse to compromise my ethics in order to receive the same scores as my peers. The sense of triumph that comes from doing well on a tough exam as a result of working hard is a great motivator . . .

So please, students, complete your schoolwork with all of the personal integrity you can muster in these chaotic times. Your personal decisions affect your entire community. Wash your hands. Don't cheat on exams. We're all in this together.

Ask students to summarize the author's point and what they might add to it. This discussion, in itself, will alert students to the reality that many of their peers object to academic dishonesty and recognize the threat it poses to teaching and learning.

As you respond to these student discussions you might reiterate several points made by Jody Greene (associate vice provost for teaching and learning, director of the Center for Innovations in Teaching and Learning, and professor of literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz) in the March 17, 2020 Inside Higher Education:

EXCERPT:

Perhaps the most that you, as an instructor, can do under the present pressures is to present students with a strong argument for the benefits of maintaining their integrity, while developing minimally cheat-proof assignments. Other points you might touch on include: when you cheat, you circumvent an opportunity to solidify your learning. While this may benefit you in the short run, it will catch up with you eventually; once you have engaged in cheating, you will likely enter your next course unprepared and this will lead to the likelihood of further cheating in the future; the stress and anxiety that come from cheating on a test will almost certainly outweigh the stress of preparing to the best of your ability. Moreover, the stress and anxiety that come from cheating remain with you after you take the exam. Nearly all people who have cheated on a test remember having done so for the rest of their lives.

You'll find related discussion of this topic in the Using Sources Guide at Harvard University.

EXCERPT:

> Scholars place a premium on careful, original thought. Academic writing is essentially an ongoing conversation among scholars. As a college student, you are part of the community of scholars who are working to answer genuine questions in their fields by building on the knowledge and ideas that others have contributed. When you use sources to write a paper, you have the responsibility to represent others' ideas accurately and to contribute your own ideas to the discussion. Your professors expect you to do your own thinking, and they assign research and writing so that you can figure out what you think rather than reporting or parroting someone else's thoughts. You actually don't learn anything when you take your ideas from someone else; you learn by analyzing the ideas you have read about and developing your own responses to them.

Finally, your campus almost certainly provides guidance on how academic integrity is defined. This resource at MIT is one model in that regard. You should also alert students to online tutoring services likely to be available at your campus writing center

"Most faculty members became teachers and researchers because they love to learn. One job of a teacher is to demonstrate that learning can be a deeply engaging experience, especially when it entails finding creative ways to explore interesting, important, and challenging questions "

7 Pay heightened attention to the reality of contract cheating

Contract cheating may be one of the greatest challenges you face. We suggest candidly discussing this topic with students, referencing some of the observations in Part 6, above. See, generally, a comprehensive report on contract cheating by IS tutors Gregory Pavela and Justin Coon (February 8, 2019 Association for Student Conduct Administration Roundtable).

Some IS "candid discussion" about plagiarism and contract cheating can be seen in instructions to students about a film we assign:

EXCERPT:

> ***A word of caution**: We're not asking you to find outside commentary on this film. You're being asked to think and write for yourself. Much of what we see online about the film is demonstrably wrong--and an invitation to plagiarism (we monitor several pertinent plagiarism and contract cheating sites).*
>
> *Some cheating sites promise to provide "plagiarism free" essays. These are the last people you should trust. In one instance we found most of the content came word-for-word from Wikipedia. You're far better off seeking free assistance from your University writing center.*
>
> *Repeatedly engaging in academic dishonesty is comparable to aspiring to be a top athlete, but hiring someone else to do all the practice and training. **It simply doesn't work**. The failure inevitably becomes apparent on the athletic field and in the workplace. Meanwhile, when dishonesty is detected--as it often is--students are creating educational records damaging to their reputation.*

Note: this kind of cautionary language about academic dishonesty can be included as a "timely reminder" in the assignment itself.

Course design suggestion

You might ask students to submit a short written statement about what they hope to learn in the course. That statement will allow you to personalize future responses and reconfigure some assignments--worthy pedagogical aims in themselves; it also serves as your baseline for their writing style. If you encounter significant deviations in style on subsequent assignments you can arrange a personal conversation with the student about their knowledge of the work submitted. In any event, you may prefer to ask for shorter, more frequent submissions spread evenly throughout the course.

8 Encourage engagement in learning

Academic Integrity scholar Don McCabe cited the relevant work of Pulvers and Dickhoff (1999) in his 2012 book *Cheating in College*: "Cheaters described their classes as significantly less personalized, satisfying, and [more] task oriented than students who did not cheat."

Here's what we say in Principle Eight of the "Ten Principles of Academic Integrity for Faculty"

EXCERPT:

> **Foster a lifelong commitment to the pursuit of knowledge**
>
> Most faculty members became teachers and researchers because they love to learn. One job of a teacher is to demonstrate that learning can be a deeply engaging experience [a], especially when it entails finding creative ways to explore interesting, important, and challenging questions [b]. By modeling lifelong learning, faculty members can help students develop cognitive skills and adaptation strategies that last a lifetime [c].

Here's a key note for this Principle:

EXCERPT:

> Engagement in learning can be enhanced if faculty members tap into the power of personal stories. Christie Henry, Director of the Princeton University Press, discussed that approach in a September 4, 2017 Chronicle of Higher Education interview:
>
> > Most scientists I know are wonderful storytellers, but they are taught from early in their careers to edit out the story, to redact the personal. I have collaborated with scientists who have discovered fossils in the Arctic, have worn zebra costumes in the Serengeti, have encountered the first and last of species the world over. These stories are as necessary as they are illuminating and enrapturing.

Consider this related observation from Mark Edmundson, Professor of English, University of Virginia in his book *Why Teach* (2013)

EXCERPT:

> We face people who are on the verge of major decisions. Should I marry? Should I have children? Should I go into law? Should I stay in my parents' church? Such questions matter to young people, and they matter now. If thinking about these questions in a classroom can be dangerous, it can be much more dangerous not to think about them. The result of never brooding over major issues is likely to be that one follows the crowd . . .. A fundamental qualification for teaching literature should be the view that great books are worth studying, and because of the salutary effects that they can have on life. [from *Why Teach*, p. 101]

Edmundson develops this theme in his September 9, 2003 New York Times article: How Teachers Can Stop Cheaters:

EXCERPT:

> Unfortunately, there is nothing easier or more tempting to plagiarize than assignments that are exclusively detached and analytical. I'm sure that there are plenty of essays to be had over the Internet on Wordsworthian nature and Shakespearean eros. But you cannot buy your own opinion from someone else. If professors asked students not only for analysis, but also for personal reasoned responses, they would, I trust, get fewer purloined papers. Students would be more inclined to believe that the work had to be theirs -- and that what they had to say actually mattered.
>
> I'm not naïve enough to think that more personal and immediate teaching would put DirectEssays.com out of business. But it would make a difference, I'm sure. Speaking of his exchange with his pupils, Socrates, the founder of humanistic education, once observed: ''What we're engaged in here isn't a chance conversation but a dialogue about the way we ought to live our lives.'' The closer we professors come to following Socrates, the less cheating we're likely to see.

One short video based on the work of Richard Feynman suggests how teachers can inspire engagement in learning on almost any topic they teach. See his "Ode to a Flower" [skip any ad].

"You will make mistakes. Try not to make big ones . . .A simple error in reporting a conclusion will be forgiven if publicly corrected. *But never, ever will fraud be forgiven. The penalty is professional death; exile, never again to be trusted."*

-- E.O. Wilson, Letters to a Young Scientist (University Professor Emeritus at Harvard University and winner of the National Medal of Science)

9 Ask for a commitment: empirical support for honor pledges

The use of honor pledges as "timely reminders" (in traditional classrooms and online) was explored in two newsletter articles by Gary Pavela: Honor Pledges and Self Image (2017) and The Educational Benefits of Timely Reminders (2012). A leading researcher on this topic is Duke University behavioral economist Dan Ariely, author of *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (2008). A review of *Predictably Irrational* appeared in the May-June 2008 issue of *Duke Magazine*:

EXCERPT:

> [T]he Enron financial scandal . . . prompted Ariely to explore the value placed on honesty . . . [H]e and his colleagues devised studies that would tempt people to cheat. Student subjects, for example, would be paid for each correct answer on a multiple-choice test. In some cases, they transferred their answers to a sheet that had the correct answers pre-marked-meaning they could, if provoked into dishonesty, readily cover up their mistakes. In different versions of the experiment, the test- taking students were asked to sign a statement, just at the moment of temptation, testifying that the exercise fell under an honor system. Alternatively, they were asked first to write down [what they could remember of] the Ten Commandments.Those gestures had a significant impact on his subjects' behavior. Once they began thinking about honesty through firm reminders, they stopped cheating completely. 'In other words, when we are removed from any benchmarks of ethical thought, we tend to stray into dishonesty,' Ariely observes in the book. 'But if we are reminded of morality at the moment we are tempted, then we are much more likely to be honest.'
>
> Confirming research about the impact of timely ethical reminders can be seen in work by Benoît Monin, a professor of organizational behavior and psychology at Stanford University: How Word Choice Can Affect our Moral Boundaries (2012) In one study, Benoît and his colleagues found that timely reminders influenced behavior *"both in a face-to-face interaction . . . and in a private online setting*."

Integrity Seminar students are asked to type this "timely reminder" ("Integrity Affirmation") and the end of answers they're about to submit to their tutors*: "I do honest work. The words in these answers are mine, unless other sources are identified."*

10 Be attentive to the educational needs and experiences of international students

This topic was explored in the Integrity Seminars document **Academic Integrity Strategies and Initiatives for International Students** (based on a 2015 study group of college administrators conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

EXCERPT:

Consider these suggestions offered in "Advice from Students to Faculty Members on Protecting Academic Integrity" (Gary Pavela, *Law and Policy Report*)

"[a] Discuss why you were attracted to your field or discipline. Why does the subject interest you? What questions or mysteries remain to be solved?

[b] Discuss the academic challenges you encountered and the strategies you developed for success.

[c] Invite discussion about the academic and ethical standards applicable to your discipline or profession.

[d] Pay attention to students as individuals. Identify interests, strengths, and weaknesses. Urge students who are struggling to ask for help.

[e] Participate on one academic integrity hearing panel a year so you can discuss your personal insights with students about how the academic integrity system works.

[f] Emphasize that cheating and plagiarism are a *breach of trust* with fellow students and with you."

>Recognize the special importance of mentoring to international students. Confer at least once with each student individually.

>Use a "syllabus quiz" to determine if students are reading and understanding academic integrity policies described there.

>See, generally, Discussing Academic Integrity with your Students (Gary Pavela, *Law and Policy Report*). Here is one of several suggestions:

"The importance of trust in the classroom can be highlighted by this exercise (initiated by the instructor):

'Pretend my syllabus states the mid-term examination will be on October 10. Then, at the beginning of class on October 3, I announce:

'I have good news and bad news: the good news is that I just found a great fare to Cancun! The bad news is I have to leave tomorrow. So, the examination scheduled for October 10 will be administered today. I apologize for any inconvenience, but part of what we do at the University to help prepare students for the unexpected.

Some students are momentarily speechless when asked to respond to this scenario. It strikes them as an obvious breach of trust. They should be reminded that the principle of reciprocity applies. Teachers trust students to do honest work and feel betrayed when that trust is broken."

>Stress the following point: "Successful students ask instructors for help"

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About the Author

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Gary Pavela is a nationally recognized writer and consultant on law and policy issues in higher education. He was part of the team that developed the University of Maryland Code of Academic Integrity--one of the first “modified Honor Codes” in the United States. In 2006 he was recognized as the University of Maryland “Outstanding Faculty Educator” by the Maryland Parents’ Association. Pavela has served on the Board of the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University and is a past president of the International Center for Academic Integrity. He is a Fellow of the National Association of College and University Attorneys.

Integrity Seminars
A Student Development Resource

AIS instructional goals > one minute video.