

I want to do it, but will they cheat? Some Guidelines for Instructors who Test Online

At this point in the semester some instructors are still giving midterm exams while others are beginning to think about final exams so it seems like a propitious time to talk about testing. In this segment I'll discuss some ideas pertinent to online testing.

Our Blackboard course management system is used by the vast majority of faculty who teach online for Palomar College. Blackboard enables instructors to develop online surveys, quizzes, and tests using some 17 different question types. The Blackboard system requires students to authenticate using an individualized username and password and is a secure testing environment in that sense. However, there is concern about students signing into the system and then having someone else take his or her online test. There is also concern about students printing the online test to show to others. In a word, instructors are concerned about students being able to cheat more easily online.

Online students overwhelmingly prefer to take their assessments online – in fact, they increasingly expect that an online class will have made provisions for online assessment. Online students after all take an online class because of the convenience it offers or, in some cases, because they cannot come into campus to take a class. These students argue that it defeats the purpose of an online class to require (as some of our faculty do) students to come into campus to take tests. Students really like online testing but many instructors are wary of adopting it.

While it's true that students taking online tests could pay someone to take the tests for them, it's probably about as unlikely as students paying someone to take an on-campus class for them (it happens, but not very often). But, since cheating by online students is a concern for some faculty, are there measures that can be taken to minimize this risk? Fortunately there are. Here are a few ideas.

- set up your online class with many small online tests or quizzes – it's extremely unlikely that someone could arrange to have all of them taken by another person
- create online assessments that require the application of concepts – in other words, the test requires the student to do more than look up an answer in a textbook
- set up the online tests with a time limit and have the students answer one question and submit the answer before the next question appears
- Blackboard allows for pulling test items randomly from a pool of questions – with a large enough pool of roughly similar items, this ensures that students all get similar, but different test items
- make Blackboard online tests only one part of the overall assessment of learning

Resources

Using Blackboard Assessment Tools for Blended or Face-to-Face Courses

http://www.elearningmatters.co.uk/Articles/article_item.asp?SubmitArticleID=156

Using Blackboard for Assessment

http://www.elearningmatters.co.uk/Articles/article_item.asp?SubmitArticleID=19

Teaching Effectiveness Program at University of Oregon

<http://tep.uoregon.edu/technology/index.html>