Academic Integrity in Remote and Online Assessment

In support of the move to remote and online assessment in the context of Covid-19, the following recommendations may be useful in the design and implementation of assessments to minimise concerns about academic integrity.

Staff who teach and support learning in Irish higher education are likely to be worried about academic integrity in the assessment of modules when students are no longer grouped in exam halls, where the usual examination rules and monitoring apply.

Are online students more likely to cheat?

Research indicates that online students are no more likely to cheat on assessments than campus-based students. This is because the same opportunities exist for cheating on homework, take-home assignments, essays, group-work etc. So, your students are not suddenly going to start plagiarising on continuous assessment simply because of the move to remote learning.

However, the exception to this might be in end-of-module exams, where students are used to being monitored under exam conditions. Students are more likely to cheat when they are under pressure, when they have opportunity and when it is unlikely that there will be consequences, if caught.

What can you do as an educator to support academic integrity? ...

What can you do as an educator to support academic integrity?

Create an environment conducive to academic integrity.

- Make information about academic integrity easy to find in your online course. Include a prominent link from the VLE to university or local policies.
- Make sure that information is clear and useful. What does academic integrity mean for your course and assessment? If online assessment is to be "open book", what does that mean? Explain what are legitimate sources for them to consult during assessment.
- Discuss academic integrity with the class. Encourage them to suggest what it means for your course, assessment, and their professional lives. If they are involved in the co-creation of an honour code, they are more likely to understand it and take it seriously. This helps to create a culture of academic integrity.
- Require your students to affirm academic integrity on each piece of assessment, linking to the honour code and acknowledging their sources (which may include people consulted or legitimate groupwork).
- Form a personal moral connection with your students, through sharing your own concerns and motivations. Students will not want to let you down by cheating, if they feel a personal connection with you. Model academic integrity in your own actions.

Consider module assessments in the context of academic integrity.

- Reduce motivation to cheat by ensuring your assessment is meaningful and authentic, giving appropriate levels of choice (in topic or form of submission) and control. But don't overwhelm students who are already under stress with too much choice.
- Assume that your students will access information on the internet and talk to other students, family members etc. Clarify what you mean by "open" and who or what are legitimate sources. Redesign your assessment to assess how they can make use of those sources. Encourage students to acknowledge all their sources, not just books and journals, but also people they have consulted.
- Students are used to practicing (for example, consulting past papers). Give opportunities for them to practice any new formats.

Make use of online tools.

- Use the testing and assessment features in your VLE, where appropriate, for timing, randomising questions, similarity checking. Don't use question banks from textbooks, these can be easily googled.
- If using similarity checking tools, check all the papers submitted, not just a sample.
- If possible, use online tools to conduct short follow up oral sessions with students, to check understanding and authorship.
- Consider simple proctoring using online collaboration tools with video, where you have small groups or teaching assistants to help.

Don't give the impression that academic integrity is not important because of the unusual situation.

- You are the person who has to support and model academic integrity for your students. Continue to monitor for plagiarism and contract cheating.
- It is your professional and ethical obligation to follow the usual institutional procedures for reporting issues that arise.

Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning
Irish Universities Association