Strategies for supporting student assessment and maintaining academic integrity in an online environment

Assignments and assessments

Consider your students' mental health and the impact of a high-anxiety situation on their ability to effectively demonstrate their learning.

- Consider removing Enforced Time Limits on online exams and quizzes.
- Be as flexible as possible and avoid creating rigid or narrow time-based expectations for assignments, exams, or participation.

Consider your students' access to technology and working spaces, as well as students' (and your own) technical experience.

- Consider that many students may only have access to a mobile device, so be mindful of how you present information (e.g. chunk information, use bulleted lists, post in PDF format).
- Consider that many students may have children at home, be sharing working spaces with other family members, or have other similar distractions they can't avoid and that may affect their ability to demonstrate their learning.
- Consider that some students may not have reliable access to the Internet when they are off-campus.
- Consider confidentially polling your students (e.g. by email) to determine what access they have to devices and internet, as well as other accessibility considerations. This will help inform some of the options that will need to be provided to students.
- Whatever tool you are using for assessment, give your students a no-stakes practice run in the tool so they, and you, can get familiar with how it works.
- Allow multiple attempts at online quizzes, making testing a learning experience (and to prevent technical issues on one attempt affecting students' grades).

Consider modifying your assessment plan.

- Use ungraded, self-check quizzes for highly technical course content to check student learning and determine whether teaching strategies should be altered.
- Provide students with assessment options to support engagement and learning, as well as their access to, and comfort with, technology.
- Use a variety of assessment types to allow students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge/skills in different ways (e.g. artifacts, portfolios, recorded presentations, slideshows, reflective video responses, written responses, data interpretation and analysis).
- Use self- and peer-assessments to reduce instructor workload, improve student learning experiences, and build community.
- Use frequent, low-stakes quizzes to reinforce facts and concepts and prepare students for larger assessments.
- Use short-answer questions and get students to apply new concepts to specific scenarios to increase the difficulty of online assessments.

Consider providing clear and simple instructions.

- Consider providing more context to learners for assignments and assessments that are now online to provide as much clarity as possible.
- Break down complex or multi-part assignments into smaller components and deliver separately (allows for more frequent feedback) (e.g. a larger essay could have three graded components: a proposal, an outline and annotated bibliography, and a final submission).

Open-book and online assessment

Consider open book assessment online if you are assessing learning outcomes that involve higher-order thinking such as application of knowledge and skills, critical thinking, analysis, or evaluation. Considerations when designing open book assessment:

- Are you assessing interpretation and application of knowledge, comprehension skills, or critical thinking skills rather than basic knowledge recall?
- Are you designing your questions and exam / paper with the skills and knowledge as stated in the course learning outcomes?
- Do questions require students to apply and make use of the information from their textbook or notes rather than simply require them to locate and re-write the information?
- Consider using problem-based scenarios or real-world cases.
- Refer specifically to course content, lectures, and materials.

Quick reads on open book assessment:

Open Book Exams - Newcastle.Edu

Why Open Book Tests Deserve a Place in Your Courses

Quick reads for online assessment strategies:

But what if they cheat? Giving non-proctored Online Assessments

Which Assessment Strategies Do Students Prefer?

Variations to Traditional Multiple-Choice Testing

Feedback

- Look for opportunities to provide feedback to the entire class – i.e. an announcement or e-mail summarizing patterns observed in student assignments.
- Give feedback in different formats, including written, audio-recorded, or video-recorded.
- Include some element of formative feedback, such as multiple attempts for questions, hints, full solutions, and recommendations for the future, to help students learn through doing the assessment.

Organization/Logistics

- Share detailed criteria with students in advance of the assignment in the form of rubrics or guidelines.
- Ensure that questions, instructions, and rubrics are clear (students won't be able to ask for clarification as readily as they can in a face-to-face environment).
- Record synchronous meetings so that students can watch at a later time if necessary.
- Provide a space for students to ask questions, such as a discussion board, so that all students have equal access to information.
- Provide opportunities for students to contribute to asynchronous discussion boards or complete online quizzes at times that are most convenient to them.
- Start with practice tests using the test-taking platform before completing a quiz on the same platform so students can become comfortable and familiar with its use.
- Set realistic expectations for assignments/projects, bearing in mind students' access to resources and the ability of teams to meet in person.

Academic Integrity

- Communicate with students about what constitutes academic integrity in an online environment.
- Ensure expectations and guidelines for assignments, assessments, and projects are clear for students, including whether activities are to be done individually or collaboratively.
- Use tools in D2L such as question and answer randomization or shuffling questions, use of question pools, changing numbers in math questions, or blocking access to course content, to protect academic integrity on online assignments and quizzes.
- Design questions that cannot be answered easily unless students have done previous work in the course; assign work that builds sequentially, or on prior submitted work.
- Design different (or alter) questions for different sections of the same course.
- Consider having students submit a short video or audio answer by phone or Kaltura in response to questions or prompts (helps ensure they have formulated arguments on their own).
- Have students apply personal experience when answering questions, or require the incorporation of unique resources (e.g., current newspapers).
- Include a self-reflection and/or critical thinking component in assignments and assessments.
- Use multiple choice questions primarily for ungraded assignments or self-assessments.
- Alternate standard assessments, such as quizzes and midterms, with case studies, portfolios, presentations, or discussions
- Put one question per screen to reduce the use by students of "screen print" to copy the test questions.
- Use authentic assessment (activities or projects where students demonstrate application of their learning), using rubrics where possible.

References

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