

# Distance Learning Systems

## Teaching Tips #16 — Assessment Integrity

Every instructor, whether a distance educator or not, faces the issue of promoting and enforcing standards of academic integrity... a concern only highlighted by the distributed student population in a distance course.

### Defining the Problem

Studies indicate that academic dishonesty is on the rise among high-school and college age students. There's no evidence that cheating is more common in distance education. Advances in computing technology and the ubiquity of the Internet has reduced the barrier between the impulse to cheat and the actual practice of doing so.

### Coping Strategies

- *Develop a clear class policy.* Provide a statement to your students that explains the importance of academic integrity and what you expect from them. But don't stop here! Create an atmosphere of support and trust: outline what you expect from yourself as an instructor, provide access to information about how to use outside resources, and give directions for obtaining help.
- *Utilize Technology.* The Blackboard system allows you to assign password protection and time limits to quizzes and tests which can be automatically created using random selections from large pools of test questions. If you suspect plagiarism you can search for unique phrases with Google or utilize a paper scanning service to check the work automatically against a large number of paper-mills and cheat sites.
- *Change-Up Your Curriculum.* Assign less common readings and ask different questions. Tie your assignments more closely to your individual class materials and discussions. Change your assignments each term. Add your unique perspective to put a "twist" on assignments. This is likely to be more interesting for both you and your students!
- *Focus on Process.* By attaching importance and expectation to process, you can spread the weight of a grade out, taking away much of the motivation for cheating. This can take the form of keeping drafts, copying research materials, having students write up the research process, benchmarking, etc.
- *Rethink Your Assessment Strategy.* Sometimes the "quiz-quiz-test" cycle remains in place out of habit. Take some time to think about exactly what you want your students to learn and what other ways might exist to assess the effectiveness of your instruction. Perhaps portfolios, structured writing assignments, discussion, games, role-playing or other less traditional tools can be of use, leaving traditional tests and quizzes for reinforcement and self-assessment (or for use in proctored situations).

### Positive Effects

Each of these strategies for dissuading dishonesty is also a potential point for improving the educational experience. While it is important to stand firmly for—and as an example of—academic integrity, the challenge of creating more "cheat resistant" curriculum materials and assessments can help you more clearly identify what is really important to you as an instructor and create a richer and more diverse curriculum for your students.

### More Resources

Find more information, including a variety of links to papers, studies, and tools for your classroom, check this Tip's resource page on the Distance Learning Systems website: <http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/resources/tt/integrity/>

For more Teaching Tips and other Distance Education information, please visit the new and enhanced Center for Distance Education Distance Learning Systems website at: <http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/>