



Going Online: R(e)imagining Teaching and Learning webinar series

May – June 2020

Responses to webinar questions

Assessment integrity

It is important to approach assessment integrity in a sympathetic and developmental way by striking a balance between supportive and punitive approaches, with an emphasis on the supportive, 'a bit more carrot than stick' (Professor Belinda Tynan, RMIT). Some useful principles:

- Do not try to cheat-proof every last task. Concentrate on the major tasks.
- Let your students know that you will be on the lookout for plagiarism and contract cheating, which is surprisingly widespread. Use your experience of the unit as taught and your disciplinary knowledge, as well as text-matching software like Turnitin, to pick up suspicious work. Evidence shows academic staff are very good at this.
- Acknowledge that students frequently have major time management problems which might cause them to respond in desperation to approaches from suppliers of contract cheating. Be sympathetic.
- Ensure that students are aware of the very serious penalties that may apply if they are found to have cheated. Inform them of possible work-arounds they could choose instead of cheating (eg negotiating a grade penalty for an extension).

Contract cheating

Contract cheating refers to a student getting someone to do their assessment tasks, often for pay. As well as personal contacts, these days there is a huge online 'essay mill' industry which pitches to students.

Academic staff should use some discipline-specific knowledge about what contract cheating might look like (for example very general work, work not well-related to the task or topics covered in the unit, work with sections missing, etc).

TEQSA provides some useful resources:

- [Addressing contract cheating to safeguard academic integrity](#)
- [The prevention of contract cheating in an online environment](#)
- [Contract cheating and assessment design](#)

It's a good idea to have a conversation with students about the institution's position on academic integrity, why it is valued, and what it means for a student's post-graduation life. Ensure students have paid attention to the discussion, perhaps by including an academic integrity agreement to be signed with all tasks. Some institutions might choose to provide a micro-credential in academic integrity (perhaps not-for-credit) which can be included in first year studies. Try to make the conversation a positive discussion about the value of integrity, rather than an attempt to frighten students. It's important, however, that it is understood that the institution takes cheating very seriously and that severe penalties can be incurred if cheating is established.

Encourage students to think about possible difficulties involved in making deadlines (illnesses, financial problems, work deadlines, domestic difficulties etc). Ensure that they understand that a first step is to contact staff and discuss the problem. Consider allowing adjustments to be made if institutional rules permit (for example, a system of small penalties for late submission) which might encourage students to approach staff for help, rather than resorting to the risk of paying for a contract essay which might result in a major penalty.

Cheating and assessment design

- Get to know your students and provide in-class formative assessment so that you have an idea of where they are educationally.
- Provide detailed instructions or templates.
- Design tasks which build on work done throughout the course. Build on previously submitted assignments.
- Avoid very general questions which can easily be found on essay mill sites. Consider tasks which bring together two specific aspects of the unit in an unusual way.
- Don't use the same topics every year.
- Consider vivas for major tasks, including 5-10 minute zoom interviews.
- Consider proctored assessments for major tasks, including exams.

