

Cheating in Higher Education

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the value of original work and how it helps you better understand how cheating is defined and the methods of cheating students employ. Then, the ethical concerns and consequences of cheating are explored, as well as the ways cheating is commonly detected. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Value of Original Work

For most students, the practical goal of higher education is a degree—the official recognition that you’ve successfully completed the requirements.

But a degree is much more than a ticket to move on to the next stage of your life; it’s a symbol of what you have accomplished in terms of your education. This is why we say that students earn their degrees—they represent the honest effort students put into their courses.

One key difference between higher education and high school is the expectation of original work. A high school education depends a lot on the ability to absorb, memorize, and repeat information; basically, a high school student becomes familiar with the formulas and definitions, the names and dates.

This is a significant part of higher education as well, but college students are asked to not only familiarize themselves with scholarly conversations but also contribute to them. Doing original work means thinking for yourself, filtering those scholarly conversations through your perspective, and introducing new ideas into the world. This is how degrees are truly earned.



BIG IDEA

If you’re looking for an institution of higher learning’s policy on plagiarism or cheating, you will generally find it under the heading of academic honesty and not academic dishonesty.

Violations of a school’s academic honesty policy are referred to as academic dishonesty—but it’s important for the schools to discuss the issue as a positive quality that they expect their community to uphold and sustain, rather than a series of forbidden practices. This is because your college or university wants to trust you, to treat you like a mature and independent thinker, and to convince you that academic honesty is a quality you want for yourself and your school.

2. Defining Cheating

Cheating in higher education can be broadly defined as any dishonest or deceptive behavior with the intention of obtaining credit or improved evaluation in your courses. Basically, cheating is lying or misrepresenting your work to get ahead or aiding others in lying or misrepresenting their work to get ahead.

It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with your institution or your course's policies on academic honesty, but if you have any doubt whether what you are about to do constitutes cheating, it's better to be on the safe side, not just because it is the safe side, but also because it is the honest and ethical side.

3. Methods of Cheating

Plagiarism is one of the most common and serious ways that students cheat in higher education, but there are many more types of violations of academic honesty and integrity that some students are tempted to commit.

As with plagiarism, technology has been a significant factor in the evolution of student cheating. Some of the more prevalent methods of cheating involving the use of a smartphone for various dishonest purposes include:

- Consulting notes or a “cheat sheet” on a phone.
- Using a phone to access the internet and look up answers on an exam.
- Using text messaging to share answers on an exam.
- Taking pictures of an exam with a phone.

A very serious, if less common, problem that constitutes cheating would be falsifying records with regard to test scores or reference signatures.



THINK ABOUT IT

You learn of a website where students can share notes about particular courses. You go to the site to see if it can help you study for your upcoming art history midterm. What you find is that a previous student in the course has uploaded pictures of the exam with the note, “Professor Vincent uses the same midterm every year.” You were under the impression that the website was a legitimate resource for students, but this doesn't seem right. Would it be cheating to look at the exam?

Yes! These websites tend to be ethically neutral, and it is up to students to use them honestly or dishonestly. Obviously, your instructor does not intend for you to go into the exam knowing all of the questions on it. This is not academic honesty.

4. Cheating as an Ethical Concern

Just like plagiarism, cheating is never worth it. As we'll discuss next, you run a good risk of getting caught and facing serious consequences, but even if you do get away with it, you damage your personal integrity. This is because, besides being dangerous, cheating is just plain wrong.

A cheater is dishonest and seeks an unfair advantage over their classmates. In addition, the adage that

cheaters are “cheating themselves” is accurate. If, for example, you get exam answers from a friend, the shortcut you are taking skips the process of learning the information. Cheaters might cheat for grades, but they do so at the expense of their actual education.

5. The Consequences of Cheating

Remember that every school has a policy on academic honesty. Students found in violation of these policies will face serious consequences, from failing an assignment or failing an entire course to being reported to administrators for disciplinary action and potential expulsion from school.

Even those students who aren’t caught or don’t face any academic consequences can suffer personal consequences. If the cheater has a conscience, they know that their gains are unearned, and their personal integrity has been compromised.



SUMMARY

The expectation of using **original work is valued** in higher education. **Cheating is defined** as when you lie or do anything misleading to give yourself or another person an unfair advantage. Some **methods of cheating** include using a phone to access the internet during a test or sharing answers via text. **Cheating is an ethical concern** in higher education that may result in serious **consequences**.