

Virtual Proctoring and Your Students

Before you require students to download and use virtual proctoring software during an online assessment, it is important to consider carefully if this is the right teaching decision for you and your students. This software is a technology tool, and as such can only become an *educational* technology tool if it is used in relation to and with consideration of *productive* educational aims. If your goal in using virtual proctoring software is simply to police student behavior in an attempt to catch cheating, you will potentially damage your relationship to your students and rob them of a chance to understand more about their learning and their behaviors. This is not a productive educational use of this software. If however, your aim is to create an assessment that informs you and your students about what and how they are learning, then the use of this software to deter cheating can be approached and framed in meaningful and productive ways.

If your educational aim in using this software is to deter cheating and to support your students and their learning, you will need to take two key instructional steps: first, learn about students' perspectives on assessment and academic integrity; then have productive discussions about assessment and virtual proctoring with your students. And remember, there are alternatives to using virtual proctoring software to deter cheating, so do consider these alternatives as well.

Students' perspectives on assessment and academic integrity

Research on cheating suggests that students tend to cheat when they feel unprepared for assessments. Students feel more prepared for assessments when they focus on all the practice experiences they've had throughout the semester and see how the assessment is designed to draw on those experiences and the feedback they've received throughout the semester. When instructors show students (in writing) the connection between the work they've done, the skills and abilities they've developed, and the design of the assessment, students are less likely to cheat.

Research on cheating suggests that students tend to cheat when they feel that an assessment has little value to them or their learning. Often students see final exams as simply a hoop to jump through to finish a course. Students are less inclined to approach exams from this perspective when their instructors take the time to explain the value of the assessment for their learning in the course, in their major and in their university career, and in their lives beyond the university. When instructors demonstrate that they want to learn what their students do and don't know and provide useful feedback based on that information, students see assessment as a form of learning. Assessment, from this new perspective, demonstrates the care that instructors invest in their teaching and their students. When instructors make the effort to communicate the value of assessments and a true diagnosis of student learning (in writing), students are less likely to cheat.

Research on cheating suggests that students tend to cheat when they believe that cheating is widespread and not particularly harmful. When students believe others are cheating and also feel that the assessment has little or no value to their learning, it's easy to see why they would not feel compelled to provide their instructor with an accurate measure of their abilities. Students, will however, be less inclined to cheat if they have a reason to believe that other students see the value in the assessment. When instructors communicate the value of assessments with students and structure discussions with and between students about the need for all students to take an assessment honestly, students are less likely to cheat.

Productive discussions about assessment and virtual proctoring with students

Plan time to discuss your assessment with students. Communicate through discussion and in writing how students have been preparing for the assessment through the course and how the assessment will draw on

skills they've been developing. Directly communicate to students how the assessment will help their learning, both in the course and beyond it—in their majors and in their life beyond the university. Show students how the assessment is a part of their learning, a capstone experience, and real information that they can use and you will respond to with regard to their progress.

When you have demonstrated their preparation for and the value of the assessment, you can then discuss how and why it is important for you and for them to have an accurate and true measure of their learning. In your discussion, you should underscore that you've chosen virtual proctoring because you see it as a tool that helps ensure that all students have the same experiences in the exam, making the exam fair for everyone. This means that student scores and grades have meaning; it also protects the meaning and value of their program and their college experience. Ask students to contribute to this discussion so that they also can express their desires for fairness in assessment and the protection of the value of their grades and educational experiences.

Part of this discussion must include an acknowledgement of the difficult situation that students are in during the Covid-19 pandemic: students are tired, worried, stressed, and managing very complex lives. It is wise to share with them your own exhaustion with life and learning online. One of the complexities we are all currently managing is the temptation to multi-task. Sharing your own challenges with resisting the temptation to check email, texts, or twitter during long Zoom meetings may help them understand that you know how tempting it is to click between tabs and interfaces when we really should be focused on the task at hand. Ask students how they manage this problem and discuss how virtual proctoring software is a tool that you want them to use to focus their thinking and help get a true measure of their learning. (Note: this is a good time to clarify that you will have them practice using this software to underscore that this is a learning tool for them. Their experiences on this practice run using virtual proctoring software should be shared, so provide a place or time for them to share how things worked and tips on using the software.)

This discussion must be genuine, but you may need some ideas on how to start it. The sample language below may give you some ideas:

- "We are going to use virtual proctoring because I want to make sure that the test is fair and that everyone has the same chance to be successful."
- "I want to make sure that your grade in this course has meaning, and ensuring the integrity of exams is one way to do that."
- "I have designed this test to help me (and you) get a sense of what you have learned in this course, so it's important to get a fair and accurate assessment of what you can do."
- "I know that there are a lot of temptations when you are taking a test online, and I think virtual proctoring will help you to monitor your own behaviors."

Other options for ensuring academic integrity

How a course is designed and how an assessment is designed can help deter cheating. For ideas about these other options, please refer to the ITLAL guides on [Teaching practices that minimize student cheating in online classes](#) and [Ensuring academic integrity of online assessments](#). For support in course design and assessment design, please feel free to [request an individual consultation](#) with an instructional consultant at ITLAL.