

# Promoting Academic Integrity Online

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As we navigate our way through online design and delivery of our courses, it is not surprising that many questions about academic integrity in the online environment have surfaced with faculty. Buried deep in our higher education culture is the idea that the face-to-face classroom is the best place to monitor our students and control their behaviours. Once we move to a learning environment that separates students and faculty in terms of space and, in some cases, time, it would stand to reason that maintaining academic integrity has become severely compromised and challenging.

Let's remind ourselves of the primary reasons that drive students to make poor decisions and cheat: stress and undue pressures, focus on extrinsic goals rather than intrinsic ones, lack of interest in the content, poor instructions compounded by the lack of understanding on what is cheating and what isn't, and the assessments are performance-based and less on mastery of competencies. Students online find themselves in similar situations but are they more likely to cheat in online courses compared to face-to-face courses? The most common breaches of academic integrity associated with online learning are plagiarism, unauthorized help on assessments, and identity misrepresentation.

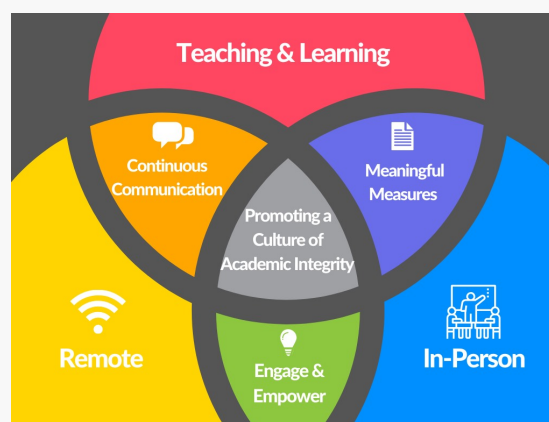
With online learning, are there more opportunities for plagiarism? The ability to copy and paste and online access to paper mills is available **regardless** of the instructional delivery. Research has shown that those who are intent on plagiarizing content will do so with whatever means is available and not solely because the internet exists.

Can we prevent students from getting unauthorized help with their assessments? How do we know the students are actually doing their own work? Again, regardless of the delivery type, the type of assessment that is being used is what impacts how likely students will cheat. Web-based multiple-choice exams would be easier to cheat on than a web-based exam that included essay-type questions. In his book *Cheating Lessons*, James Lang talks about how students find themselves in learning environments that are designed to provide more incentives for cheating – such as courses with very high-performance stakes evaluations

that rely on a single assessment. (Lang, 2013)

Similar to in-person classrooms, promoting a culture of academic integrity is still recommended as the most effective way to reduce cheating. How do we do that in the online environment? There isn't anything different with our approaches and strategies for promoting academic integrity, but we may emphasize some areas more and pay attention to how we set up our assessments.

1. Continuous Communication – This means to educate your students, have clarity in instructions, and appropriate responses to cheating.
2. Meaningful Measures – Design assessments that are authentic and less traditional.
3. Engage and Empower – Try giving students more choice and control.



**Continuous Communication.** When students are informed and understand fully what academic integrity means and Seneca's Academic Integrity Policy, they are less likely to make poor decisions. Be sure that the information is easy to find and that they have the opportunities in your course to complete the three Seneca Academic Integrity tutorials for students. Discuss with your students the importance of academic integrity, definitions, how to properly cite sources, appropriate collaboration when working online, and how to find Seneca supports online. Reinforce these throughout the course. Clarity with your instructions with the online format will help students understand what is expected of them. Always provide opportunities for students to ask questions.

**Meaningful Measures.** The design of assessments – formative and summative – can be key in preventing students from cheating. Moving assessments to online has provided an opportunity to rethink types of assessments and to optimize their alignment to the learning outcomes. When students are invested in their assignments and can see the relevance and importance, they will be less likely to cheat. Instead of giving them questions that can be answered by a web search or in their textbooks, create questions and assignments that require higher-order thinking and requiring them to demonstrate their mastery of content. Authentic assessments for students are realistic and allow students to show what they know by applying their knowledge and skills effectively to solve a real-life problem or task.

If you planning to use more traditional assessments, try to create a test or exam that includes some open-ended questions. These are more difficult for students to share answers on, as they are required to explain their answers in their own way and how they understand the course content.

**Engage and Empower.** When we want to make assessments more like real life and their future jobs, and less like school, we need to give student ownership of the assessment process. This means they can figure out what they already know and what they need to still learn, set their goals, and create a plan to improve. They see assessments as relevant and they are motivated. Try shifting from more teacher-directed assessments to student-directed assessments. This doesn't mean you are not assessing their work – but you can be working more collaboratively, giving feedback and creating opportunities for students to also self-assess and have peer assessments. Assignments and projects can be more loosely structured where students have more autonomy in what they are creating and the process. This is when students are engaged but also feel empowered, taking ownership of their learning, which results in more motivation on their part to learn in a fair and honest way.

## Academic Integrity Resources at Seneca

Seneca's website contains information and resources for students and faculty:

- The [Academic Integrity Policy Module for faculty and instructors](#)
- The [Academic Integrity tutorials for students](#):
  - [Integrity in Action online module](#)
  - [Plagiarism & Citation online module](#)
  - Integrity Matters app (available for [Android](#) and [iOS](#))

The [Teaching & Learning Centre Nutshells](#) page on [The Teaching & Learning Centre](#) website contains the [Academic Integrity nutshell](#). As part of the [Teaching Online Series of Nutshells – Part 1](#), the [Going Online with Academic Integrity Online nutshell](#) is now available.

## References

Lang, J. (2013). *Cheating Lessons*. Harvard University Press.

View the [June 2020 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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