

Shelli's Blog Post #3

Going Virtual Quickly: Rethinking Exams

Caveat: This blog may make you feel a bit uncomfortable, as I'm asking you to suspend what you've probably always thought about exams in higher education. So, prepare yourself now before you read on. . . this piece may go against your teaching philosophy, but I encourage you to hear an alternative perspective that may end up resonating with you.

In this blog I decided to focus on rethinking exams in a virtual teaching world. If you are like me, and the myriad of other faculty who were teaching face-to-face less than a month ago, you may be contemplating how you are going to preserve the integrity of your exams online (I know I did). I've heard that some faculty are investigating online proctoring options, but I wanted to present another way of thinking about exams. Before I do that, let me share some of the interesting information I've learned from my CSU colleagues who are experts in online education.

Is Online Proctoring the Best Option this Semester?

From discussions via Zoom with other Directors of Academic Technology, I've learned that many other campuses are trading cautiously about recommending faculty use of an online proctoring system, *especially* if the course was not using one before COVID 19. Their concerns are valid: (1) students didn't sign up for the course knowing that their exams would be proctored online; (2) student privacy issues associated with online proctoring; (3) potential added cost to students for the use of an online proctoring solution; and (4) potential equity issues, such as some students not having the needed equipment and learning environment that works well for online proctoring to be effective.



My colleague, Jill Leafstedt, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning Innovations and Senior Academic Technology Officer at California State University, Channel Islands, highlights these concerns specifically in [her Ed Surge article](#):

“Let’s examine the issues involved with online proctoring, an approach that often involves a webcam, microphone, and claims to capture if a student is, for instance, talking to someone else in the room or simply looking away from their computer screen. First, this is creepy and anxiety producing. (The idea of your every move being watched through a webcam while taking an exam in your home doesn’t exactly calm one’s nerves.) More than that, it goes against much of

what we teach students about online privacy. When would we encourage students to give a stranger access their webcam?”

Why Rethinking and Redesigning Exams for Online Might A Better Solution

Redesigning an exam to assess a student's ability to create, evaluate, analyze, and apply course material rather than test memorization of facts would benefit them. Therefore, if I redesign my exams to assess those higher order thinking skills, I will dramatically reduce any concerns I have about "cheating." Additionally, I will end up with a more authentic assessment, mimicking the real world, where I look up stuff all the time to help me tackle problems in my career, and no one calls that cheating.



So, I've decided to rethink and redesign my exams this semester for the online environment my students and I now face. I'm going to accept that my students will have access to notes, books, the Internet, etc., and I'm going to rewrite my exams with that in mind. Instead of factual questions, [I will present them with scenarios, case studies, and other types of problems to solve](#). And I welcome them to use their course notes and other means of accessing course content information.

Jill Leafstedt shares some additional ideas for designing authentic online assessments:

“. . . in a chemistry course, students could make a video of themselves doing a set of problems and explain the process. This would allow instructors to better understand students' thinking and identify areas that they are struggling in. Another example could be in a psychology course, where students could curate and evaluate a set of resources on a given topic to demonstrate their ability to find and critically analyze online information.”

Let's face it, academic dishonesty in the classroom can happen anywhere, whether face to face or remotely. Subsequently, I have concluded that it is pointless to try to control all the online learning variables to recreate my face to face exam experiences, and it would not be in the best interest of my students. Instead, I'm going to redesign my assessments for an online environment, and hopefully in doing so, also improve their authenticity for student learning.

Until Blog #4,

Shelli

P.S. Two other documents on exams during this virtual time that may interest you: (1) [OET's Best Practices to Reduce Cheating](#), and (2) [FDC's Keep Teaching Testing Strategies](#)