

Ten Strategies to Encourage Academic Integrity in Large Lecture Classes

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Introduction

Academic integrity has been and continues to be a lively topic of discussion on most college and university campuses. Many articles and books have been written about cheating and have explored such topics as why students cheat, how students cheat, ways to discourage cheating, and faculty and student attitudes towards cheating. Both students and faculty must take steps and assume some responsibility if the current culture regarding academic integrity in higher education is to change. This chapter presents ten strategies that can be used in large lecture courses (the authors consistently teach sections that have enrollments between 400 and 500 students). Some of the strategies discussed in the chapter are specific to large lecture courses, but many of the strategies would be appropriate to use in courses with smaller enrollments as well.

1. Promote your school's honor code.

Many faculty members do not even realize that their college or university has an honor code, and many who do fail to discuss and promote it with their students. A university's honor code or policy on academic integrity should be reviewed often and shared with students on a continual basis. It has been our experience that many students in our large lecture courses have never seen information on academic integrity on a syllabus or had open discussions on cheating in the classroom. If more faculty members would have open and frank discussions about integrity with their students, the overall attitude regarding cheating would likely start to change.

2. Respond to cheating in your class.

Taking action against a student cheating in your class is not a pleasant experience. Some faculty overlook cheating simply because they do not want the added stress in their life, and it can also become very time consuming (meetings with the student and school officials, written reports of the incident in question,

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hearings, etc.). One of the authors recalls the first time he confronted a student cheating in a class he was teaching as a graduate student. The student became very angry and upset, said there was no proof that any cheating had occurred, and threatened to file a complaint with the university. Understandably, this resulted in a great deal of stress. Ironically, it was a stress management course that was being taught! Luckily, the department chair-

person was extremely supportive, the complaint was never filed, and the student received a zero on the exam. One thing we are not shy about doing when giving exams in our large lecture courses is to respond quickly when we think someone may be cheating. If we find a student whose eyes appear to be wandering a bit, we require the student to move to a different section of the classroom, often from the back to the front. Shortly after moving the student, we usually make an announcement to the class and say something to the effect of “please keep your eyes on your own exam” or “please do your own work.” This sends a strong message—students are often a bit shocked to see this take place—to the other 400 or 500 students in the auditorium that cheating will not be tolerated. Over the course of the past few years, we have done this with dozens of students and not once has it resulted in a student complaint.

3. Individualize papers and assignments to the class if possible.

One strategy faculty can use to discourage cheating in large lectures is to individualize assignments and papers to their respective courses. For example, we recently created a civic engagement assignment for our large health and wellness course, in which students had to research and determine what avenues or resources were locally available to them to be physically active (e.g., bike trails, walking paths). For this assignment, students also had to list five potential avenues or resources for physical activity that were not available in their community and determine whom they would need to contact to see if the addition of such a resource would be feasible. This was a great assignment in

that it encouraged critical thinking and invited community involvement. It was also a unique assignment, one that could not be completed through any means other than conducting the necessary research.

Some faculty who teach large lectures will also frequently change assignments in order to discourage cheating. This makes it harder for students to use and turn in assignments from previous semesters. Also, an additional strategy that can be used if students write papers in your course is to make the topic more narrow or specific. So, instead of having students write a general paper on eating disorders, you could have them focus on one very specific component of the topic.

4. Give clear expectations for assignments and other course work required of students.

We have noticed that students are more confident and more likely to do their own work when they receive clear directions and expectations for assignments, papers, lab reports, class projects, etc. Sometimes it can feel like we are overcommunicating with our students and that we are holding their hands a bit too much, but clarity and communication are especially important in large lecture courses. If you teach a course of 500 students, you probably do not take attendance, and it is reasonable to assume that 50 to 100 students will miss any given lecture. Our assignments are all described in a lab manual that we give students.; they are also posted on the course management tool we use for the class. The assignments are always discussed in class, and e-mails are often sent regarding assignments to remind students of due dates and clarify details. The tremendous focus on group work in colleges and universities today can sometimes become problematic for students. Sometimes student collaboration becomes the norm, and students might not know when they are expected to do their own work or work in teams. Clear descriptions and expectations can certainly help clarify this.

5. Encourage student responsibility.

Faculty are in the ideal position to discuss academic integrity with their students, and more importantly to encourage and challenge students to change the culture surrounding cheating. One of the strongest motivators students have for avoiding cheating is sensing or experiencing strong peer disapproval. It is our responsibility as educators to stir up this desire in students to do what is right. That might include emphasizing to students that they are expected to do their own work or reporting other students who they know are cheating. Much has been written about the “millennial student.” Some believe the students we have in class today are more responsible, more open to our influence, and more

concerned with doing what is right. Within our large lecture course, we often have discussions with students about how harmful cheating can be and how much of an influence it could have on them once they graduate and get a job. Individuals who consistently cheat can certainly lack skills such as critical thinking and the ability to solve problems—both extremely helpful skills to have when entering the job market. The exciting thing about having such discussions in large lecture courses is having the potential to influence such a large number of students. Some faculty may mistakenly think that because they teach a large lecture course, students do not really listen to, care about, or pay attention to what they say. We have found just the opposite to be true. If you truly care for your students and show you are passionate about a topic, even academic integrity, you will impact students!

6. Get to know as many students as possible.

This may seem like a strange strategy for promoting academic integrity in your large lecture course, but we believe that learning the names of as many students as possible and getting to know your students will help deter cheating in your class. A few ways you can do this are by asking for students' names when you call on them to answer questions, paying close attention to their names when you hand back assignments or exams, and arriving to class five to ten minutes early to interact with your students. We teach in a very large auditorium and try to select different sections of the classroom in which to interact with students before class; that way we are meeting and interacting with a wide variety of students. It really is amazing, even in a class of 500, how many students we can get to know with a little bit of effort. Before a lecture one morning, one of the authors met a young lady sitting in the auditorium waiting for class and learned that she was a high-level power lifter. Two and a half weeks later, the topic of the day was resistance training and the importance of proper breathing. The young power lifter, who had just returned from overseas and had won a power lifting world championship, was more than happy to share her expertise on the topic. That interaction might not have occurred if the faculty member had not made an effort to get to know students. If students get the impression that you care about them and you are genuinely concerned about them learning the course material, we believe they will be less likely to cheat in class.

7. Separate students during exams, when space permits.

Nearly every seat in our auditorium is full during our exams. However, after approximately two-thirds of the students have finished with the exam, we require students to move so as to have at least one empty seat between them. Also, after approximately 75 or 80 percent of students have taken the exam, we require

students to move into one section of the auditorium as they complete their exam. Students who are very prepared to take the exam often complete it in less time than individuals who are not, or individuals who are attempting to cheat. Two additional strategies for deterring exam cheating are to encourage students to keep answer sheets covered as much as possible and to check IDs when students turn in their exams, making sure the name on the exam matches the name on the ID.

8. Have adequate proctors to help with exams.

When giving an exam to over 500 students, it is extremely important to ensure that there are enough proctors present. At a minimum, there are eight proctors present at each exam we give. Not only are these individuals responsible for monitoring the students while they are taking the exam, but the proctors can also hand out answer sheets as students enter the room and distribute tests to a specified section of the room. This can significantly reduce the amount of time spent on exam set-up. It is then the responsibility of the proctor to watch over the particular section for any unusual behavior. It is beneficial to put more than one proctor in the larger sections if numbers allow. The mere presence of the proctors seems to deter students from engaging in unethical behavior, making the job of the proctor relatively simple. The proctors should walk around the section designated to them rather than being stationary, as this enhances their presence. Another role the proctors play is collecting the exams. Typically, two versions of the exam are given, and these need to be collected separately. At a minimum, proctors check the Scantron forms to make sure the student has put the right version of the exam down and also included her student ID number.

9. Have multiple versions of exams.

As previously mentioned, we use multiple versions of exams when we give tests. As with the presence of the proctors, the mere awareness of the multiple exams seems to deter students from cheating. To keep the tests the same for every student taking the exam, the same questions are used on each test—they are just arranged in a different order. Many faculty develop a large bank of test questions and periodically rotate the questions on the exams. We always administer exams in at least two different colors. This helps the proctors who distribute the exams make sure students are not sitting next to someone with the same version of the test. If at all possible, we would recommend using exam formats other than multiple choice (e.g., short answer, essay). This may only be possible if adequate teaching assistants or graduate assistants are assigned to the class to help with grading.

10. Engage your students and be enthusiastic.

It is time that we educators also consider why students cheat and possibly accept some of the responsibility ourselves. While many students cheat due to the pressures to succeed and obtain higher grades, they are just as likely to cheat

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when assignments are boring as when they are difficult. We believe that many students cheat because they are not engaged in their classrooms. They are not being motivated to learn, and they are not being inspired by faculty members who are enthusiastic about the content they are teaching. This can be especially problematic in large

lecture courses, for obvious reasons. Some faculty members do an excellent job when it comes to engaging students and motivating them to learn, but the sad reality is that many do not. Many students sit in large lectures and are bored, or apathetic, or fall asleep. They are simply not stimulated by the course content or the individual delivering the material. It certainly can be challenging to prepare a course that encourages frequent student engagement, and some educators may not be comfortable teaching extremely large lecture courses. These are important factors to consider and can impact academic integrity. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss strategies that can be used to engage students in large lecture courses; however, many articles and even some books have been written on the topic. Anecdotally, we can tell you that as we have tried to engage and stimulate students in our large lecture courses over the past few years, the amount of cheating we have encountered has decreased.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented a variety of strategies faculty can utilize to encourage academic integrity in large lecture courses. We believe that it is possible to have an impact on the amount of cheating that occurs on college and university campuses, but this will certainly take some effort on the part of both students and faculty. We believe that if we as faculty encourage student responsibility, have open and frank discussions about cheating, are more willing to respond when students cheat, and focus on ways to engage students and improve our teaching, the current culture surrounding cheating will start to change.