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Supporting Student Academic Integrity in Remote Exam Settings

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What problem was addressed?

Academic Integrity is a recognised challenge for the higher education community, even during normal (non-pandemic) times. Universities invest significant resources in preventing and detecting inappropriate behaviours in order to uphold rigorous academic standards and maintain stakeholder confidence in the qualifications they provide. In health professional education, the importance of academic integrity is arguably even more crucial, as breaches have the potential to impact on patient safety. Our particular challenge was to promote and maintain academic integrity while making a rapid transition to remotely invigilated exams during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What was tried?

Prior to implementing remote invigilation, we ran two relatively low stakes remote examinations without invigilation. These exams were administered on students' devices in their own homes. Students received detailed instructions outlining the examination procedure and highlighting the secure nature of the examination and the importance of maintaining appropriate academic conduct. We referred students to the central University academic integrity website and encouraged them to engage with the academic integrity module on the University's Learning Management System. During and immediately after the examination it became clear that many students didn't understand

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their responsibilities. For example, contacts with our helpdesk indicated that a number of students continued to communicate with each other after an exam had commenced. More worryingly, we found clear evidence that some protected exam content was posted on social media. Subsequent conversations with students revealed that many didn't realise their behaviour was inappropriate and most hadn't read the instructional materials provided.

What lessons were learned?

Best practice guidelines highlight the importance of clear academic integrity definitions and a focus on educative and preventative approaches.¹ On review of the central University's academic integrity resources, we found they were primarily focused around plagiarism and collusion, with less of an emphasis on exam conduct and none at all on remote exams. We subsequently produced a basic video talking them through the key elements of our remote examination instructions, highlighting the importance of academic integrity and providing examples of how and where breaches might occur during remotely administered exams. We then produced a series of multiple-choice question items (with feedback) designed to test these concepts, using scenarios that were informed by actual breaches of academic integrity witnessed during our first two remote exams. As part of our rollout of remote invigilation, we've now mandated successful completion of this test prior to students sitting their first compulsory summative assessment. Our cohort size is approximately 1400 students. To date there have been more than 1750 views of our video and 1466 attempts at the academic integrity test, revealing some common misconceptions around social media, communication during exams and post-test communication of exam content. The test results (and future exam experiences) will inform ongoing improvements to our academic integrity video, test items and feedback. We've learnt that student understanding of academic responsibility is not automatically transferred to new settings, so we need to prioritise unambiguous educative and preventative approaches to promote academic integrity during the transition to remote examinations.

Reference

Universities Australia (2017) Academic Integrity Best Practice Principles, November 2017. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/UA-Academic-Integrity-Best-Practice-Principles.pdf> [accessed April 7, 2020].

Link to video

<https://vimeo.com/412301163/7ee0829487>