

COVID-19: A Silver Lining for Academic Integrity from a Pandemic

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Never in our lifetime did any of us expect to experience a pandemic. Almost everything we once took as routine was suddenly no more (e.g., visiting family and friends, working or going to school outside of our homes, travelling within our own country and abroad to other countries etc.). Although there are many devastating impacts from COVID-19, I would like to focus on the bright spots – what we are doing well in the field and how we can leverage it (Heath & Heath, 2010).

Academic integrity issues became top news in March 2020 as instructors and students struggled with the massive and rapid shift to online education. Compounding stressors from the pandemic have exasperated some areas in teaching and learning – specifically student engagement and assessments.

Research has shown that when students feel there is value in what they are learning, they feel connected with the content and instructor, and the assessment methods are up-to-date and relevant, the incidence of academic misconduct is reduced (Bretag et al., 2018; Brimble, 2016; Morris, 2018; Young et al., 2018).

Instructors have demonstrated ingenuity in developing new ways to involve students from being passive recipients of information on the other end of a video screen to actively engaging students' interest by adding personal touches to course delivery, making themselves more approachable and humanistic, providing touch points with students across the term to check in, and providing multiple opportunities for formative feedback.

Moreover, the pandemic has necessitated revamping traditional methods of assessment such as tests, exams, and assignments that have been reused year-after-year, or evaluations that focus only on rote memorization. Instructors have implemented better ways to assess students by using summative assignments, oral examinations, peer demonstration and grading, and giving tests that build on previous knowledge in the course or using reflections and synthesis questions which cannot be easily answered using the internet.

All of the aforementioned examples of innovative instruction and assessment are bright spots (Heath & Heath, 2010) that focus on continuous improvement. Education is a shared

responsibility on both the instructor and the student to show a committed investment in teaching and learning and an aspiration to do the best they can.

Now is the time for the field of academic integrity to showcase its importance as a foundation of education. No longer should academic integrity only be a conversation during a scandal – it should be commonplace. This means that a shared understanding of academic integrity should be readily identifiable and promoted throughout all levels of educational institutions, and that frequent conversations about academic expectations and educational resources occur between instructors and students. The values of integrity need to be systemic and threaded throughout everything we do in education (Morris, 2018; Stephens, 2016).

Ultimately, building a culture of academic integrity is the best way to discourage academic misconduct (Khan, et al., 2020; Peters, 2019). Now is the time for educational institutions to seize the moment and leverage all the positive things that we have learned and demonstrated throughout the pandemic, and nurture environments that demonstrate the values of academic integrity every day going forward.

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