



Promoting Academic Integrity: Are We Doing Enough?

CHEATING CONTINUES to be a pervasive problem in college courses. Institutions have policies designed to prevent it and faculty employ a range of strategies that aim to catch those who do. And still the problem persists. A study at a university in Australia, where it is the students' responsibility to read and follow the academic integrity policy, found that only 50% of the students said they read the policy. Nonetheless, 80% rated their understanding of plagiarism 7 or above on an 11-point scale. However, when asked to identify a set of behaviors associated with academic dishonesty, their answers indicated confusion and misunderstanding of cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of collusion that occur in courses and on campus.

Could it be that in our efforts to prevent cheating we have failed to also promote academic integrity? Another study found that students understood they weren't supposed to plagiarize, but they weren't sure why. These students avoided plagiarizing so they wouldn't get in trouble with the teacher, not because they really understood what it was or why it was a problem.

I can't forget the comment of a student who compared cheating to speeding. You know you're not supposed to exceed the speed limit, but almost everybody does and most don't get caught. If lots of people do it and nobody considers it a serious offense, then our efforts to prevent cheating have failed to convey how much academic integrity matters. It's become a power issue where teachers use radar guns to catch a few cheaters with the rest proudly evading any consequences. What's been lost in the process is the recognition that it's personal integrity and the viability of the academic enterprise that's at stake here.

If we wanted to better balance efforts to prevent cheating and promote academic integrity, what could we do? We could talk more about personal integrity. Are students

confronting themselves with what cheating does to them? The damage to the sense of self-worth is difficult to repair. Cheaters lie to themselves and they lie to others. By deciding to cheat, these students are telling themselves that it doesn't matter that they haven't learned or haven't done the work, and that it's OK to pretend to others that they have. And those aren't the type of actions that make a person feel proud and accomplished. Cheating may improve a grade but the costs to personal integrity are high and far-reaching. Cheating is an addictive behavior that doesn't stop with one assignments, one exam, or one course. And it doesn't end at graduation.

We could talk more about the role of academic integrity in the advance of knowledge. What if researchers cheated on their studies? Doesn't that change what we think we know ... and don't we act on what we believe to be true? Are there some examples you could use from your field? I think we may have made cheating too much of a local issue—something students should not do in courses. The reasons for academic integrity are so much larger. The implications may start with citing a source not consulted but can end with credibility compromised and sometimes careers destroyed.

Teachers need to exemplify high standards of academic integrity. Small actions can exemplify those standards. Tests, papers, and other assignments are returned when promised. Posted office hours are kept. Electronic queries are answered within a specified time period. Content details are not fudged. Mistakes are acknowledged and corrected.

I see two barriers to what I'm proposing here in terms of how we can address the imbalance between preventing cheating and promoting academic integrity. First, we need more concrete examples of things teachers can do to promote academic integrity. Second, rather than tell students

that academic integrity matters, it is always more powerful if there's an activity that enables students to make that discovery for themselves. Can you help out? Are there specific activities you use, not those that prevent cheating (which, of course, we need to continue doing), but actions that demonstrate why academic integrity matters, both personally and professionally. Please share your approach.

References:

Gullifer, J. M., and Tyson, G. A., (2013). Who has read the policy on plagiarism? Unpacking students' understanding of plagiarism. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39 (7), 1202-1218.

Power, L. G., (2009). University students' perceptions of plagiarism. *Journal of Higher Education*, 80 (6), 643-662.

Maryellen Weimer, PhD; Teaching Professor Blog; Faculty Focus; April 22, 2015; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/promoting-academic-integrity-are-we-doing-enough/>] April 29, 2015.

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All Grades in - May 3
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How Assignment Design Shapes Student Learning

THE DESIGN OF assignments, that is, the actions required to complete them, shapes the learning that results. We know this, but do we make the most of what we know when we design and select assignments?

I'll try to make the point with writing assignments. We have come a long ways since the days when term papers were the gold standard of writing assignments. Paper options now include authentic assignments that approximate professional writing tasks. The Writing-Across-the-Curriculum movement has introduced us to low-stakes writing activities from students jotting down a few ideas before they speak, to free writing that starts the flow of ideas, to journals that encourage personal connections with course materials. Technology adds still more assignment design options. Students can blog and respond to posts; they can write collaboratively on wikis and Google Docs. The options are many, but the features of each writing assignment directly shape the learning that results.

A recent issue of *Teaching Sociology* contains a well-designed study that illustrates the power of even small design details. The author compares more than 1,000 journal entries and over 1,000 blog posts written in multiple sections of an introductory sociology course. The blog posts were read by classmates; the journal entries by the instructors. The author wanted "to clarify the effect of peer readership on reflective writing practices by way of a direct comparison of the learning outcomes associated with private journals and public blog posts." (p. 106)

What he found (with an interesting research design) wasn't terribly surprising. The assignments accomplished different learning outcomes. "Students appear to be overall more likely to take greater intellectual risks in blogs, which they know will be read and commented on by their peers. Conversely, journals—the more private option—compel students to be vulnerable and take more personal risks in their reflections." (p. 111) By intellectual risks, he means that in the blogs students were more likely to take positions on issues or propose an explanatory theory. In journals students were more likely to compare multiple readings, link course material to personal experience, and acknowledge their misconceptions. "This research has shown that neither private journals nor public

blogs produce definitively higher quality reflections from students. Instead, each is more likely to elicit different forms of productive reflection." (p. 112)

We can more effectively shape learning outcomes if we start with objectives that force us to get specific about what we want students to know and be able to do. Most of us write objectives for the course approval processes and they appear on many of our syllabi, but are they front and center when we make assignment decisions? If not, we can come at this from the other direction, like the study does. We can look at the products produced by the assignment to make some determinations about what and how students are learning. I can hear some being adamant that the better way to start is with objectives, and that may be right. I'd rather be adamant about all of us understanding the relationship between assignment design and the learning that results.

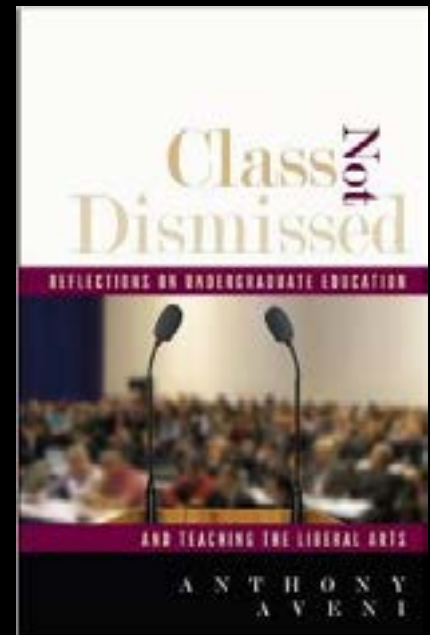
Writing assignments are the example here, but every kind of assignment influences the shape of learning. So, what would you say about how you've constructed exam experiences in your courses? Are they shaping learning in the ways you want? I once observed an instructor who, on the first day of class, asked students, "Are you worried about what's going to be on the final?" Heads nodded. "Well, no worries in this course. You'll find the final attached to the syllabus." It was a page of essay questions. "You'll be writing responses to some of those questions on the final and we'll be dealing with content throughout the course that you can be using in your answers." Would that approach change the way students take notes throughout the semester? Would it enable instructors to ask a different kind of exam question? Would students prepare for the final differently?

What's the shape of learning that results from your assignments?

Reference: Foster, D. (2015). Private journals versus public blogs: The impact of peer readership on low-stakes reflective writing. *Teaching Sociology*, 43 (2), 104-114.

Maryellen Weimer, PhD; *Teaching Professors Blog*; *Faculty Focus*; April 8, 2015; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/how-assignment-design-shapes-student-learning/>] April 29, 2015.

BOOK



Class Not Dismissed

Anthony Aveni (Author)
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In *Class Not Dismissed*, award-winning professor Anthony Aveni tells the personal story of his six decades in college classrooms and some of the 10,000 students who have filled them. Through anecdotes of his own triumphs and tribulations—some amusing, others heartrending—Aveni reveals his teaching story and thoughts on the future of higher education.

Although in recent years the lecture has come under fire as a pedagogical method, Aveni ardently defends lecturing to students. He shares his secrets on crafting an engaging lecture and creating productive dialogue in class discussions. He lays out his rules on classroom discipline and tells how he promotes the lost art of listening. He is a passionate proponent of the liberal arts and core course requirements as well as a believer in sound teaching promoted by active scholarship. - AMAZON.