

Does Remote Instruction Make Cheating Easier?

In spring 2020, students across the U.S. faced a strange new world: most headed back home, and courses moved online due to the evolving COVID-19 public health crisis.

Today, colleges across the nation are making critical decisions for the coming academic year. UC San Diego recently announced that the campus will offer more than 4,750 undergraduate and graduate lecture, lab and discussion course sections this fall. Approximately 30% of courses will be conducted in person, based on plans developed by the academic units offering them. The rest will be conducted in remote or hybrid formats.

Higher education is embracing virtual learning in what could become the norm in a post-pandemic future—leading to the question: Does remote instruction and cheating go hand in hand?

Tricia Bertram Gallant, director of the UC San Diego Academic Integrity Office and an internationally known expert on integrity and ethics in education, offers guidance to ensure academic integrity, regardless of what scenario takes place in the coming years.



Tricia Bertram Gallant, director of UC San Diego's Office of Academic Integrity. Photo by Marcy Zimmerman.

Is it remote instruction that can increase the chances of students cheating, or more likely the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Unfortunately, we know much less about remote instruction than we do for online learning, which is very different from remote instruction. Online learning is planned, and often exams are still proctored (with either online services or required in-person proctoring). Remote instruction is the mode of instruction in which students are temporarily separated from the instructor and course content is delivered digitally, as in the case of an emergency campus closure.

We don't know if students are cheating specifically because of remote instruction. But we do know from the research conducted over the last 10 decades by behavioral economists such as Dan Ariely and psychologists such as Eric Anderman, among others, that human beings are more likely to cheat when:

- They see or believe that other people are doing it.
- There are temptations/opportunities (that is, cheating is situational).
- There is a heightened state of arousal, stress or pressure.
- The class rewards performance rather than mastery of the material.
- The class reinforces extrinsic (i.e., grades), not intrinsic (i.e. learning), goals.
- Instruction is (perceived to be) poor.
- When it's less likely that there will be costs to cheating.
- They can disassociate their self-identity from their actions.

So, if remote instruction or the pandemic result in any of the above factors, then it is logical to conclude that there would be increased chances of cheating.

A March 2020 Inside Higher Ed article notes: As naïve as it may seem, you may get better results by promoting academic integrity than by trying to stop cheating—and the article points to MIT and UC San Diego as examples of this type of thinking. Why does this approach work?



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We can't make assignments, exams or classes "cheat-proof." This is impossible because students are human beings and human beings are known to cheat, lie or steal occasionally and situationally. Think of the last time that you sped while driving, or the last time you told a "white lie" to someone. Why did you do it? You have your excuses, or as psychologists call them—rationalizations and neutralizations. These excuses mitigate the mental discomfort you might otherwise experience at committing an act that is misaligned with your perception of self as a

"good person." I had to speed because I was late. I had to lie to spare her feelings. I had to cheat because the professor is unfair. These are all rationalizations.

However, when instructors and universities focus on learning rather than cheating, they can enhance integrity. This is because the same pedagogical methods that are good for learning (e.g., focusing on mastery instead of performance, intrinsic instead of extrinsic motivations, improving meta-cognition)

also are good for integrity. Plus, when we directly promote integrity, we are helping students build their capacity to morally self-regulate in stressful situations like the COVID-19 crisis, or in situations where no one is watching like remote instruction.

The world doesn't simply need more scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, managers, politicians and other professionals—the world needs more *ethical* scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, managers, politicians and other professionals, as well as ethical citizens. It is the moral imperative of higher education to develop ethical citizens and professionals and we can do that, in part, through the promotion of integrity.

What advice would you give to faculty to maintain academic integrity during this unprecedented time?

2020 Integrity Champions

We are pleased to announce the UC San Diego 2020 Integrity Champions, organized by the Research Ethics Program and the Academic Integrity Office in collaboration with the Executive Vice Chancellor's Office.

[Read More About 2020 Integrity Champions »](#)

The UC San Diego Academic Integrity Office has [developed and compiled resources](#) to help educators create class cultures of integrity, even in a remote environment. Building that sense of community and connection is first and foremost. Engage with your students in a conversation about what type of classroom environment they want and what behaviors they want to see from each other to uphold integrity. When possible, redesign the class and assessments to focus on mastery rather than performance—this takes a lot of preparatory time. Ensure standards and expectations are very clear and choose the right assessments for your class in this remote environment. Connect with your students regularly about integrity, their progress, their welfare and their learning. Check for the integrity of all of your assessments before you grade, and report all suspected integrity violations per your university policy.

To learn more, faculty are invited to access our [Going Remote with Integrity webinars](#) UC San Diego developed in collaboration with the International Center for Academic Integrity.

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