Recommended Techniques for
Assuring Online Student Authentication and Integrity

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) legislation, as it currently stands, requires institutions that offer courses or programs through distance education to have processes in place that verify or authenticate that the student who registers in such a course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and who receives the academic credit.

Below are methods for CCCC faculty to help ensure that our online courses meet and exceed the basic accreditation standard while offering best practices to address the broader issues of cheating, plagiarism, and other course authentication / integrity concerns.

The Pedagogy and Technology Committee recommends that online faculty select and incorporate some combination of the following strategies to meet the needs of their specific online or hybrid courses. These recommendations will help assure the authentication of a student in one's course, and will also help minimize cheating and plagiarism. In addition, incorporation of these techniques will demonstrate to the accreditation review board that CCCC incorporates best practices in our online course / hybrid course environments.

1) **Use multiple assessment techniques**

   a) Design assessments to be frequent, varied, and authentic to the application of learning.

   b) Rely on interactive discussions, writing assignments, quizzes, capstone projects, and group work in place of high-stakes exams.

   c) Provide rubrics, or detailed grading criteria, for all assignments at the beginning of the course so that learners can know and understand how they will be scored.

   d) Provide assessments early in the course to allow students an accurate gauge of their progress and/or preparedness for the course.

2) **Become familiar with students' writing style**

   a) Compare student writing on the discussion board with that on assignments and papers.

   b) Compare writing at the beginning and end of a paper with that of in the middle of the paper – language, sentence length and reading level.

   c) Be wary of student writing that reads like an encyclopedia, newspaper article or expert in the field.

   d) Provide and foster a discussion environment that promotes an open, honest, and positive communication experience for students that make them less likely to engage in academic dishonesty.

3) **Use anti-plagiarism techniques**

   a) Use proctors for tests

   b) Use a tool like Turnitin to prevent plagiarism.

   c) Read all papers on the same topic together.

   d) Do not allow last minute changes in assignment topics

   e) Employ a lockdown browser system to prevent students from exiting the exam and surfing the web for answers.

   f) Modify assessments often when possible.

4) **Use test banks and timed test delivery**.

   a) Design test questions to be randomly drawn from banks of questions and shuffled, so each student gets a different set of questions.

   b) Design tests to be open-book but with a limited amount of time to complete.

   c) Require forced completion on exams so students cannot re-enter a test.

   d) Set a short window for testing completion, i.e. one or two days to take an exam rather than a whole week.

   e) Show questions one at a time rather than all at once.

   f) Use Moodle's "Full Screen Popup w/some Java Script Security" tool which is a browser lock down system that can be used to minimize a students' ability to print the screen, cut and paste,& exit the browser or the test.

   g) Create a password to enter exams and email it to students.

5) **Raise awareness among students about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate academic behavior in an online course.**

   a) Include the college's academic integrity statement and a link to campus policies in the course syllabus.

   b) Provide a description of academic dishonesty and information on repercussions in the syllabus or in the course site.

   c) Provide links to plagiarism information as well as acceptable sources, and descriptions of permissible and non-permissible collaboration.

   d) Ask students to reflect on the academic integrity policy and how to create a community of integrity in the discussion board.

References

WCET: Briefing Paper February 2008; Are Your Online Student Really the Ones Registered for the Course…"

WCET: Best Practices to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education, Version 2.0 June 2009.

MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching Vol 5, No.2., June 2009, "Communities of Integrity in Online Courses: Faculty Member Beliefs and Strategies."