RESEARCH BRIEF

HONESTY AND CHEATING: THE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY OF ASSESSING LEARNING
INTRODUCTION

Students are likely to be honest when education environments emphasize the learning process. Positive learning environments proactively address students’ fear of failure and set them up to try their best, knowing that they will be taught as opposed to ranked and ordered. As technology has advanced, new styles of cheating are available. Even with the best supports in place, cheating still occurs both on and offline. Much of this online cheating is low-tech, such as sharing answers across a group of friends, gaining unauthorized access with a bought or stolen login and password, dividing up course parts in a group, or hiring someone else to complete a course. The freedom of information and ability to copy, share, and save it have become widespread. As information sharing has grown, so too has the need for academic organizations to take extra precautions to safeguard their content and maintain academic integrity. This Research Brief will answer the following questions:

- How widespread is cheating?
- What does Odysseyware do to promote academic honesty?
- How can educators partner with Glynlyon to promote academic honesty?
HOW WIDESPREAD IS CHEATING?
Cheating in both face-to-face and online courses is widespread (Crittenden, Hannah, & Peterson, 2009; Ma, Wan, & Lu, 2008; Tolman, 2017). This academic dishonesty comes in various forms including plagiarism, posting of test questions or answers online, test-taking by proxy, copying an unknowing or knowing accomplice, and so on. While widespread cheating is known to occur, there is disagreement on the prevalence of academic dishonesty in online courses. Researchers agree that more studies need to be completed. Specifically, new research should aim to understand reasons why students cheat, the various methods of cheating, the differing test environments (supervised, proctor, unmonitored) and types of assessments, in addition to gaining more accurate insight by eliminating cofounding variables, lessening the focus on higher education (including more K-12 research), and finding out what works to reduce cheating (Ladyshewsky, 2015; McAllister & Watkins, 2012).

While there is concern among educators that students may be more likely to cheat in online courses, research has found otherwise (Ladyshewsky; Tolman, 2017). Studies have repeatedly shown that students enrolled in online courses are less likely to cheat on a test than students in face-to-face classes (Black et al., 2008; Beck, 2014; Eshet et al., 2014; Grijalva et al., 2006; Miller & Young-Jones, 2013; Spaulding, 2009; Stuber-McEwan et al., 2009; Watson & Sottile, 2010). While further research needs to be done, the reality is that the environment (online, blended, or face-to-face) is probably less important than the strategies that organizations like Odysseyware and educator partners put in place to support the learning process and protect academic integrity.

Odysseyware content comprises hundreds of courses, tens-of-thousands of lessons, and hundreds-of-thousands of assessment items. With awareness of the prevalence of compromised academic integrity, we consider the safeguarding of these assets a very important part of what we do. So how do we do it? We do it in partnership with educators.

WHAT DOES ODYSSEYWARE DO TO PROMOTE ACADEMIC HONESTY?
As an organization we do many things to partner with educators to prevent cheating. These steps include both proactive and reactive methods to control for academic integrity categorized into four areas:

1. Product Development – The actual building and coding of our content and learning management systems.
2. Instructional Design – The creation and organization of our curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
3. Quality Assurance – The actions we take before and after content or software enhancements are released.
4. Implementation – The work we do together with you to plan a successful program.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
Beyond developing rigorous high-quality curriculum, instruction, and assessments, we engineer several technical control parameters that minimize the opportunity to cheat. These practices are supported by a broad research-base that suggests product development methods (Maguire et al. 2010; Prince, Fulton, & Garsombke, 2009; Trenhom 2007) and best practices (McAllister & Watkins, 2012).

1. In multiple choice tests, the algorithm randomizes the questions so that they do not always appear in the same order for every student; additionally, the selected response is randomized.
2. A test may draw upon a pool of assessment items or forms designed to measure the same learning objectives. This means one student may receive a question or form A to measure a learning objective, while another student may receive a question or form
B to measure the same learning objective.

3. A settings feature allows educators to control students' login so that access can be managed.

4. Using the Proctored Assessment feature educators are able to control time and place of testing.

5. Odysseyware Dashboard communicates current score, relative score, and score-to-date. This feature clearly articulates pacing and progress, which supports research on communicating clear academic performance to learners.

6. The Assignment Weighting feature, which can be set at the school, individual student, and enrollment levels, allows educators the ability to weight exams as desired. While grading is widely controversial, research shows that decreasing exam weight allows teachers to focus on written work, which reveals originality making it easier to identify cheating, while also increasing weight of non-exam assessment types.

**INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN**

The instructional design of lessons and courses follows research-based best practices in both educational psychology and curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

1. Instructional design includes a variety of assessment item types or multiple measures and virtual simulations, which reduce cheating by providing more subjective and personal assignments (Styron & Styron, 2010).

2. Pacing guidance avoids confusion by communicating clear deadlines. This may reduce cheating caused by time pressure by promoting planning and time management. (Mc Allister & Watkins)

3. Providing guidance within the learning management system educates learners and promotes honesty (Mc Allister & Watkins).

**QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Routine monitoring and maintenance occurs so that quality is not compromised. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. Technical security ranges from attempting to hack our own system to insure security, to preventing students from opening additional browsers to search for answers while engaged in a test.

2. Monitoring social media websites known for posting copyrighted curriculum, instruction, or assessments owned by Glynlyon.

3. Using keyword searches that may reveal other web-hosted copyright violations.

4. Verifying infringement is not occurring on the behalf or against Odysseyware through running content through IP processes that will identify such issues.

5. Directing copyright violators to delete the stolen assessment, test item, screenshot, or other.

6. Taking legal action when copyright violations occur.

7. Seeking counsel and implementing ideas from the Odysseyware Advisory Board, which consists of school educators and leaders across the United States.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Odysseyware partners with districts and schools by collaborating on implementation and overall goals. Part of our partnership is focused on providing guidance in determining appropriate methods to ensure academic honesty. Our consultants work directly with the districts to create plans, contracts and/or honor pledges that align with the current policies of the district. These practices have been found to be effective (Gurung, Wilhem, & Filz, 2012). It is also important when implementing an instructional technology program to discuss how the virtual environment is different than the traditional classroom. Addressing these unique scenarios and proactively planning for situations that may present themselves sets up the district for success and prevents concern regarding academic integrity of the program. Odysseyware is committed to guiding in-depth discussions with our partners to review all aspects of the program to set up the overall implementation for success. Research Briefs such as this one are excellent
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beginning points to understanding the complexities of promoting academic integrity and minimizing dishonesty.

HOW CAN EDUCATORS PARTNER WITH ODYSSEYWARE TO PROMOTE ACADEMIC HONESTY?

In addition to best practices implemented by Odysseyware, the assurance of academic integrity rests in the partnership between provider and educator. No one wants to “police” the Internet. However, the readily available software which replicates, copies, screenshots, saves, or otherwise manipulates digital content requires us to work together. The best practice that educators can apply is “See Something, Say Something.”

If you believe that Odysseyware content (verbatim, exact replication) has been posted on the Internet (e.g., YouTube, Yahoo! Answers) or otherwise compromised, please report this by including the website location and content in question at feedback@odysseyware.com or by phone: 877.251.6662. Your concern will be documented and prioritized, and follow-up will occur to advise you of action taken to address such concerns.

CONCLUSION

We all have a responsibility to work together to proactively prevent cheating as well as educate students about academic honesty. While academic honesty is typically enforced by educators at the class-level, Odysseyware is a partner in promoting high-quality, rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessments that discourage opportunities to cheat. We suggest each organization consider local Board of Education Policy that deters cheating, academic honesty policies, or honor pledges to proactively address cheating.
REFERENCES


***This article does not consider standardized assessments used for online high-stakes testing. Such assessments typically have established procedures which use statistics and algorithms to identify unusual test results, indicating suspected cheating.