Ensuring the Academic Integrity of Online Tests and Assessments: Findings from the 2015 Integrity and Authentication Survey

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This white paper explores recent research findings on the integrity of online course testing, focusing on the following from the perspective of distance and continuing education leaders and managers:

- Do students cheat more when taking online courses than they do when taking on-campus courses?
- What problems may deter institutions from offering online courses or set them back in their development?
- What are the most common techniques used for authentication of students during tests and formal assessments in online courses?
- Are institutions using or considering using a remote proctoring service?
- What are the most desired features of a proctoring service?

Key Findings

One of the most interesting findings of the 2015 Integrity and Authentication Survey is that the potential for student dishonesty is only a minor consideration for institutions offering online courses. Most institutions rely heavily on the honor code as a deterrent to dishonesty, but do acknowledge that cheating behavior is likely to occur, unless deterrents such as authentication technologies and processes are put in place. The leaders completing the survey also acknowledged the potential damage to the institution's reputation should reports of cheating and dishonesty run rampant.

A majority of survey respondents had yet to adopt new techniques for online tests and assessments. Fewer than half of the institutions surveyed are fully engaged in using proctoring services for their online courses. For those institutions currently using or considering using proctoring services, the simplicity, ease of use, integrity and reliability of a system in its ability to deter dishonesty are the most important features. Running authentication programs locally on students' computers and video recording are seen as the least desirable features of these services.

Methodology

Leaders from UPCEA member institutions identified a number of issues or challenges regarding student integrity and authentication pertaining to online students. In partnership with WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), UPCEA's Center for Research and Consulting implemented a survey of both organizations' membership. The survey was fielded from January to May 2015.

In total, 141 leaders or managers in online education or technology within higher education participated in the study. The study has a margin of error of approximately plus or minus 8% at 95% confidence.

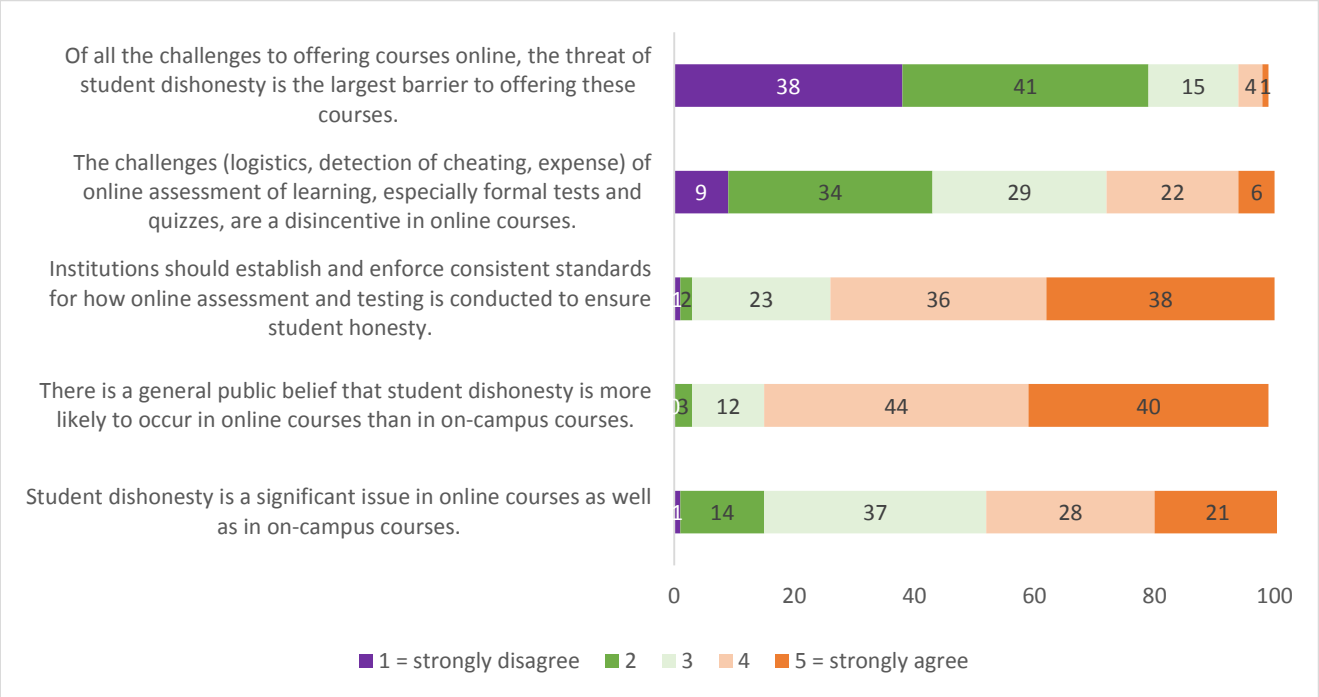
The survey was originally design by Jay A. Halfond, Ph.D., Professor of the Practice and former Dean of Boston University's Metropolitan College; and Dennis Berkey, former President at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Russ Poulin provided consultation and representation for WCET.

Research Results

The 141 leaders and managers were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. The results show that in terms of their perception

- Online courses are more likely to be perceived as having greater issues related to dishonesty. Many leaders did not believe that the possibility of dishonesty is the largest threat to offering online courses or degrees. It is likely that leaders believe they can prevent or minimize dishonesty and that other issues may be more pressing regarding the adoption or launch of online degrees or programs.

- There is strong agreement that enforceable standards and policies should be developed that ensure student honesty.



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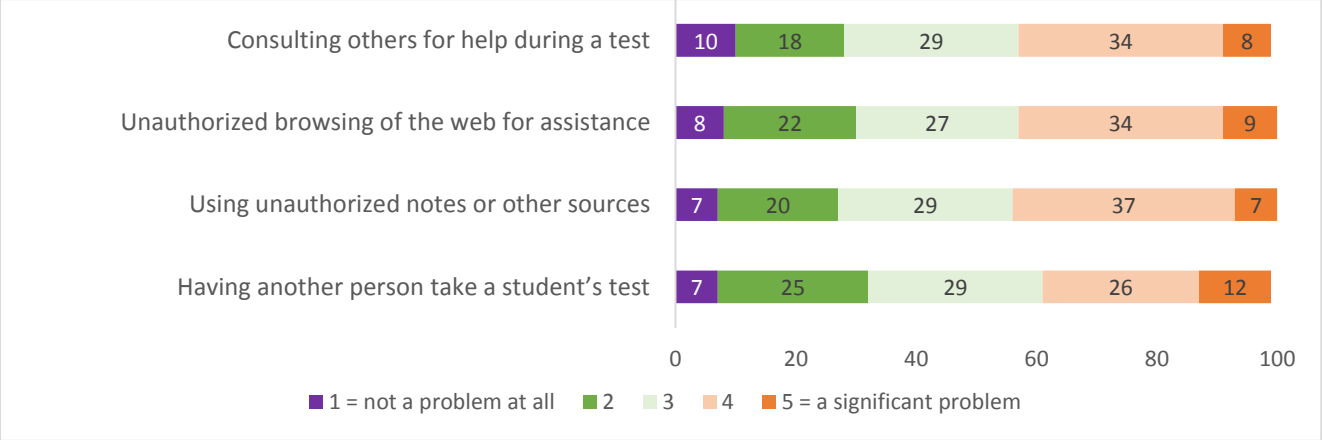
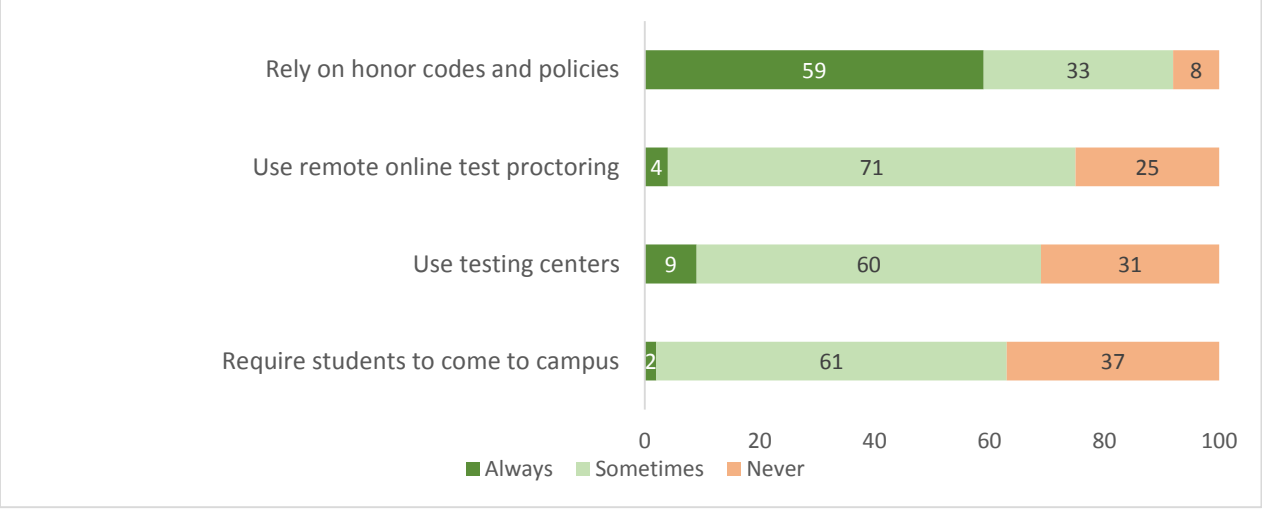
In terms of identifying where the problems may lie, leaders stated that the greatest potential problems may come from using unauthorized notes or sources (44%), unauthorized use of the web (43%), and consulting with others during a test (42%) followed by having another person taking a student's test (38%). These percentages are perceptual and not actual occurrences.



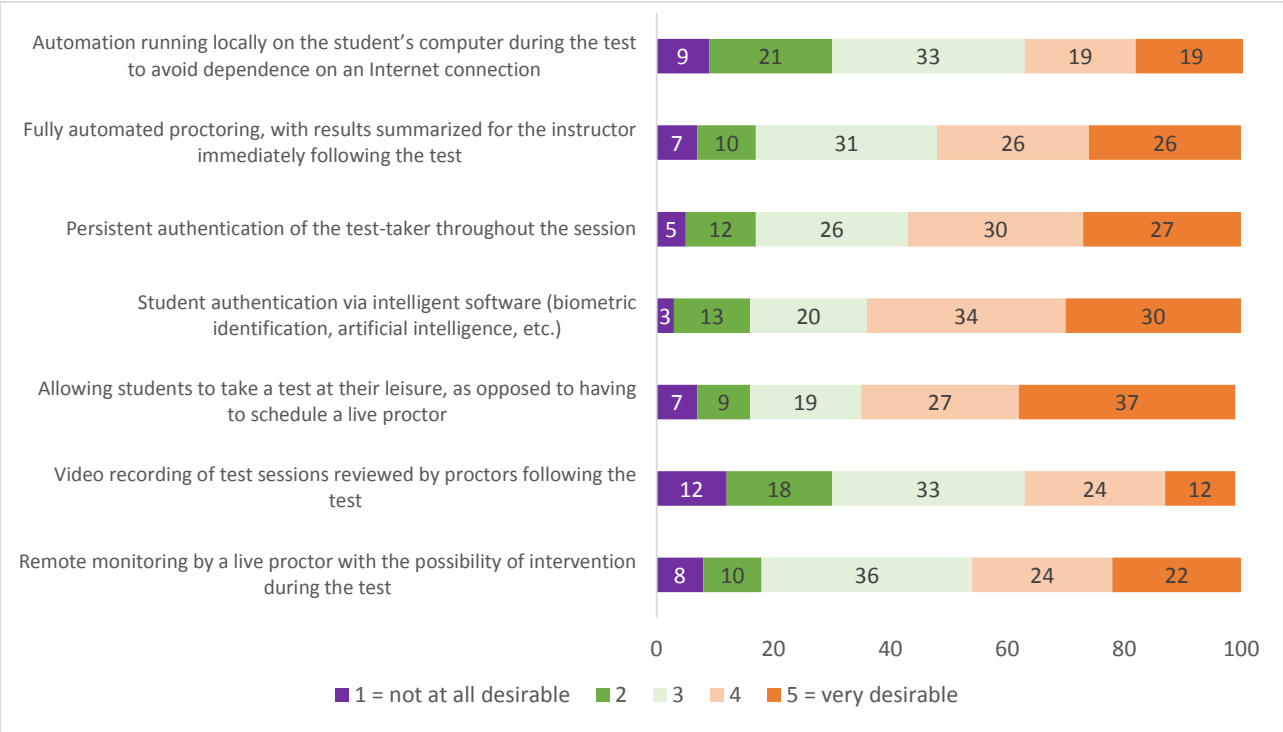
When asked what other problems exist, other comments included identifying proctors that could be trusted, budgeting for and having appropriate monitoring technologies, authenticating the student/test taker, the administration of tests, the instructional design of the course may be more open to dishonesty, collaboration between multiple test takers, and addressing special requests from individuals with special needs or disabilities.

To combat dishonesty or to maintain integrity in the process, 59% said they rely heavily on honor codes or policies and 33% said they do sometimes. Although only 2% always require their online students to come to campus, 61% do sometimes.

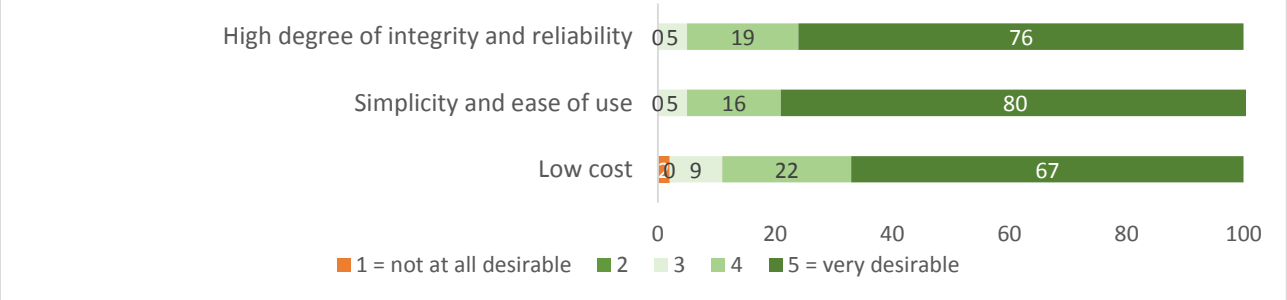


When asked what other techniques they use, those identified included IP address checks, use of an outside proctoring services, creation of courses not dependent on closed materials or resources, browser lockdowns, timed testing, biometric identification, use of eLearning software, use of node-based mentors, and other processes, techniques or technologies.

These institutions sometimes make use of testing centers or remote online proctoring, despite the fact that many have remote monitoring as a service they offer. Forty-three percent make use of a service, while 29% have said they either have not considered using a service or have made the conscious decision to not use one. Just over one-quarter are evaluating whether to use one or not. In terms of technological uses or tools to combat dishonesty, techniques used by providers include the use of webcams monitored by proctors, video recording of test sessions and screen capture technologies. In terms of what technologies or services are most desirable, being able to offer students an asynchronous experience to test taking, as well as the use of authentication software such as biometric identification or artificial intelligence were most valued. Also valued were persistent authentication and fully automated proctoring.



While these features were very desirable, simplicity and ease of use was most important (80%), followed by having a high degree of reliability (76%) and low cost (67%).



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