



Challenging cheating?

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EDITORIAL



Challenging cheating?

The papers in this special issue were tasked with challenging cheating. We were motivated to propose this special issue because we believed that the discourse around cheating had become sensationalised, polarised, and most importantly, stuck. We wanted radical new perspectives on cheating, and that is what we got. The papers in this special issue represent a broad, and arguably contradictory, set of perspectives on what should be done about cheating and how we might think about it. Collectively, they provide ways of helping cheating get un-stuck.

The special issue begins with a much-needed literature review of the current research focused on challenging cheating in higher education by Malcolm Tight (Tight 2024). The review reveals the sustained and global interest in the topic, as well as engagement from a diverse set of scholars, both epistemologically and methodologically. His review further outlines five broad subcategories within the research area to date including institutional policy, training, changing assessment practices, identifying at-risk students, and the use of technology, with the latter being of heightened interest due to the recent spread and use of GenAI. Yet across his review, Tight reveals a lack of notable innovation or successful strategies to reduce cheating. And he concludes by positing a need to refocus efforts on building strong student-teacher relationships which can develop academic integrity and shift emphasis to student learning.

In the next piece Cath Ellis and Kane Murdoch (Ellis and Murdoch 2024), like Tight, frame their work in the context of a lack of successful strategies to address student cheating. Yet in their work they frame a potential solution through a new framework: the Education Integrity Enforcement Pyramid. This pyramid serves to go beyond the adversarial versus cooperative debates that often accompany the cheating discourse, and instead advocates that both approaches are needed to address cheating properly. They then describe how the conceptualisation of the pyramid could help drive institutional practice, encouraging students to move away from the lens of avoiding academic misconduct and towards greater understanding (and the pursuit of) academic integrity. In doing so, they suggest a balance between academic penalties with trust and leniency for students to create effective strategies to reduce cheating.

The third article from Katy Dineen and Loretta Goff (Dineen and Goff 2024) further challenges assumptions of cheating by stressing that the conceptualisation of academic integrity and academic impropriety is largely an unhelpful binary to understand the phenomenon. To provide greater conceptual clarity, the authors then introduce a new taxonomy to understand cheating, making use of virtue theory, which conceptualises the interrelatedness of virtue with vice. Like other scholars in the issue, they call into question the complexities of equating cheating with a moral issue and distinguish between moral and *intellectual* virtues. Through practical examples of students' situations and stories, they conclude by showcasing how academic integrity and academic impropriety are two sides of the same coin.

Martin Daumiller et al. (2023) then harness the special issue's invitation to challenge cheating to focus on the oft-overlooked area of second-party cheating or the aiding and abetting of cheating behaviours. Using a longitudinal survey administered in Germany, their findings highlight both the prevalence of second-party cheating, as well as drawing interesting correlations to the act as a pro-social activity. In other words, their findings are in stark contrast to the research

on individualist cheating motivation, and instead suggest that for students engaged in second-party cheating the goal is perhaps to find or maintain strong social connections or to act in cooperation with others. They find that participation in second-party cheating is only loosely correlated with the cheating behaviours of the students themselves, suggesting this cohort contrasts with those who cheat to gain an advantage for themselves. The implications of such a study call into question strategies and approaches to combat this specific subset of academic misconduct to reduce instances of cheating across the student cohort.

Sarah Elaine Eaton (Eaton 2024) then contributes through her critique of current institutional strategies in regard to the important efforts to decolonize academic integrity. She begins with an introduction for those new to the significant impact of colonialism on education, and the great breadth of work, both in research and in practice, that should continue to be supported to address its effects. She then compellingly walks the reader through the underlying 'assumptions of cultural neutrality' (Weasel Head 2023, p. 1273) that accompany discussions of both academic integrity and of excellence, shedding light on historical and systematic marginalisation in both. Drawing parallels with the colonisation of our knowledge systems and educational institutions, Eaton then suggests a series of actions needed to begin decolonisation and create space for Indigenisation. Recommendations include greater attribution of Indigenous knowledge, stronger connection with Indigenous research methodologies and ethical frameworks, and centring marginalised voices and perspectives in knowledge production. In her work, she further highlights the work of Gladue, which states 'Indigenisation can only be done by Indigenous people', but 'decolonization is the work of all people' (Gladue 2020, timestamp 35:26).

Juuso Henrik Nieminen and Sarah Elaine Eaton (Nieminen and Eaton 2023) carry on the thread of examining how existing university structures and policies exclude diverse students through their piece on student accommodations. They provocatively tackle the perspective that assessment accommodations, for example those for students with disabilities, are a form of cheating. Through a documentary analysis of 15 Canadian university assessment accommodations, their findings highlight that many universities do, perhaps inadvertently, maintain this stance. To illustrate, almost all the universities in their dataset emphasised the assessment accommodations in relation to academic misconduct, and how accommodations should not come at the expense of academic standards. Aligned with this was the discourse that students may fake their disability or may use accommodations such as extra time or private space to cheat. The authors conclude by calling on greater institutional equity that frames accommodations not as a risk to assessment security, but as a mechanism to advocate for academic integrity and promote equitable learning.

In the following article from Jo-Ann Larkins and Katherine Seaton (Larkins and Seaton 2024), the attention then turns to disciplinary differences in the discourse of cheating. As two mathematicians they discuss how the bulk of research and practice to investigate cheating has focused on writing, for example essays or short text responses, which have little relevancy to the field of mathematics. They stress that while many of their peers are concerned with how GenAI will impact students' cheating behaviours, software to enable cheating in mathematics has existed for some time now. Through their article they suggest that, like 'signature pedagogies', new discussions of cheating should also pay greater mind to 'signature assessments' and 'signature misconduct'. As they have found usefulness in group problem solving of equations as an appropriate mechanism to assist student learning through appropriate collaboration, they too encourage other disciplines to consider what means would suit their contexts best.

Finally, to close our special issue we introduce an article written by the editorial team, along with colleagues Margaret Bearman and David Boud. In this work (Dawson et al., 2024), we, like our special issue authors, 'challenge cheating' and attempt to reframe the argument through the lens of validity. We argue that the current dominant framing, mediated through the lens of cheating, academic integrity and plagiarism, has only in roundabout ways tackled the true heart of the issue, which is are students learning, and if so, how do we know? We

then contend that by framing the topic through the lens of validity we can shift focus to a standards-based system, where only students who have demonstrated all the learning outcomes of the course can graduate. This absolves complexities of moral education, or the rabbit hole of a suitable punishment, to highlight to both staff and students that learning should be the heart of what we do.

Where to next for cheating? We would like to see the same sort of challenging that occurred in this special issue applied to the current discourses around generative artificial intelligence use and misuse by students in assessment. We note that the introduction to one of the first special issues of this journal, *Challenging Assessment*, concluded with McDowell (McDowell 2010) commenting that:

At a broader level, there are challenges running through this collection which are about what it is that we want to assess, and actually do assess, in our programmes. This is at the core of assessment validity. As Wiliam (2008) points out, many of the dilemmas we face are not about assessment per se but are at heart 'debates about what should be assessed'.

This sort of challenging was necessary for assessment in 2010, and it will be necessary for artificial intelligence into the future, lest we fall into the same sensationalised, polarised and stuck discourse that has plagued cheating.

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