Let Slip the Dogs of War: The current e-proctoring dilemma

Published 12/3/2020 by Ashley Ribbel

by Amy Lin, the Teaching & Learning Centre

in the December 2020 issue

Recently, I brought home our new puppy. This required many adjustments in my life and most of all, a great deal of teaching. So much of the training is about building a relationship with him – one that is built on trust and respect. It's not always perfect – proof in the chewed amp cords, holes at the bottom of my sweaters, and some modified slippers.

He's starting to know what to expect from me and me from him. I am reminded that teaching and integrity starts with these foundational values and a learning environment that is both engaging and encouraging. This increased interest in using e-proctoring or remote proctoring for tests and exams has prompted me to write this article. I hope to generate some food for thought on the topic.

What is e-proctoring?

e-Proctoring is a third-party online test/exam proctoring service. Both live proctoring and technology (AI) is used to monitor students as they write their tests or exams in any private location of their choosing. There needs to be an internal or external camera. Either auto or live authentication takes place at the start of the exam. The test taker and the environment they are writing in are monitored for sounds, motions, and systemic changes. Either the student is then videotaped from start to finish of the exam and is later reviewed or the student and surroundings are monitored by a live proctor to look for potential testing infractions as they occur. There are fees associated to both types of proctors.

Why e-proctoring doesn't promote a culture of academic integrity.

The fundamental values of academic integrity are honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. Let's think about these values in the light of e-proctoring.

Being honest means always telling the truth and is encouraged through an open environment and strong communication between the professor and the student. This leads to trust, which is built by being consistent, listening, giving feedback, and being kind and helpful.

The use of e-proctoring tools goes against these fundamental values. You not only show that you do not trust them, you create a test-writing environment where students will be more anxious with a camera watching them and knowing that movements of any kind could be flagged as suspicious and lead to a false academic integrity infraction.

Respectful relationships in the online classroom are built upon honesty and trust. Creating a climate of respect means appreciative feelings for one another. It involves listening and caring about how students think and feel. Some students with disabilities who rely on specific screen-reader software find out that it is now incompatible with e-proctoring software. Students with darker skin tones have reported having problems where the application doesn't recognize their faces and are told repeatedly to move to where there is better lighting or that their identification cannot be authorized.

We want our students to be responsible and accountable. Using e-proctoring means asking students to allow their information and videos/photos to be stored on a third-party site. We are responsible for protecting them from these privacy concerns.

With e-proctoring, it may seem that you are being fair, but in fact, you are asking so much more of your students in addition to knowing the content. You are asking them to have a webcam and an internet connection that doesn't drop. They are showing where they live, they must have a quiet space with bright lighting, no interruptions, and maintain consistent eye contact with the camera while keeping still and being silent. How is this fair or equitable?

If e-proctoring presents these problems, then what alternatives can we use to ensure that our students are not cheating when we can't see them? Consider what you are trying to achieve with your more traditional assessments. Is the focus of your assessment on actual deep learning and application of knowledge and skills, or is it more about how to "beat" the test? Try implementing assessments that are more meaningful and relevant to your students. Create performance-based assessments that have students using the information they know in real life contexts. Personalization and products will reduce the opportunities for students to cheat. (To learn more about types of assessments that are meaningful and relevant to your students, see the Authentic Assessment session from Teaching & Learning Day Fall 2020.) We need to start trusting our students and work on approaches with them that rely on intrinsic motivation instead of surveillance technologies and suspicion.

Let's continue to encourage students to be honest, build trustworthy relationships, respect

our work and others, take responsibility for our actions, and be fair and expect to be treated fairly. This is how we continue to promote a culture of academic integrity without the use of e-proctoring.

This is to clarify Seneca's position in regard to the use of proctoring solutions for the administration of online and/or recorded student assessments/exams.

Seneca actively discourages the use of proctoring solutions for the following reasons:

- They do not meet accessibility needs.
- Students have privacy concerns over the information collected.
- Students will experience higher anxiety and stress which will impact their success on the assessment/exam.
- The faculty time and resources required to implement and deploy the assessments/exams.
- Equitable practices are not possible (for example, not all students have a webcam, stable internet connection, a private room where they will not be interrupted, etc.).
- Lack of technology assistance for students during the assessment/exam.
- This approach is not compatible with our current educational focus in the academic integrity policy.

Currently, Seneca endorses the use of proctoring solutions for exceptional purposes only; for example, when a proctored exam is a required component of an externally accredited program. Respondus Monitor and LockDown Browser are licensed by Seneca and can be used in these situations with assistance from the Teaching & Learning Centre and ITS. At no time should faculty use a non-sanctioned proctoring solution as these types of platforms collect a significant amount of personal information (for example, during recording). As with other platforms that collect, store, or process a considerable amount of personal information, Seneca requires an enterprise-level contract be in place to extend privacy and security obligations and to ensure both the solution and its associated contract are compliant with privacy legislation (FIPPA).

View the December 2020 issue of the Academic Newsletter.

December 2020 issue

tags : academic-integrity, december-2020, teaching-and-learning, the-teaching-and-learning-centre