
Cheating Online Versus Face-to-face

Initially, it would seem that it's relatively easier to cheat online versus face-to-face classes given the innate absence of physical environmental conditions in a virtual online setting. From a purely environmental perspective, for example, there's the lack of physical presence of professors with no set of eyes directly watching over one's every move and the lack of direct physical and social interaction with peers. This may also lead people to assume that the chances of getting caught for any cheating or academic dishonesty in online courses is lower. However, when considering the continuous advancement and wider availability of tools and technologies to combat online academic dishonesty, some aspects of online cheating may no longer be that easy after all. For example, Haynie & Moody (2019) mentioned the use of 1) online test proctoring and webcams to monitor online exams, 2) plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin, that can be integrated as a plugin in Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Moodle, and the much more advanced 3) Keystroke recognition, IP tracking, and Biometric scanning techniques to catch those who cheat through substitutes, impostors, or paid tutors. Again, ease of cheating also becomes relative to the levels of investment made by an educational institution in adopting and implementing these technologies.

On another viewpoint, It can be assumed that the relative ease of online cheating can be correlated to its actual prevalence or occurrence that has been examined on a number of studies, e.g. higher occurrence would suggest easier means to cheat online. For most cases, ease and prevalence are often used interchangeably or in conjunction with one another. In the grand scheme of global education as a whole, the evidence for whether online students are more inclined to cheat compared to face-to-face students is contradictory and thus inconclusive, as also mentioned by Pilgrim & Scanlon (2018).

Out of 7 different studies or sources (listed below in chronological order) found during the course of this research, it's rather surprising to discover that only 2 studies (2007, 2009) came to the conclusion that cheating in online courses is easier or more prevalent than in traditional ones. On the contrary, the findings from the other 5 later studies (2008 to 2018) demonstrated that cheating levels is no different, and in some cases, even lower online than in face-to-face courses. This trend may suggest that researchers are developing a much better understanding of the issue that more accurately represents reality that in turn challenges the old-fashioned misconceptions about online cheating. The studies mentioned above are as follows:

First, a study by Lanier (2007) that surveyed a relatively large sample of 1,262 students at a state-funded university found that cheating is much more pervasive online. This is corroborated by a second study by King, Guyette, & Piotrowski (2009) which found that 73.6% of the 121 undergraduate business students from a university in the South perceived that cheating online is easier compared to traditional courses.

Third, another study by Kidwell & Kent (2008) on an Australian university with a broad distance learning program found that students enrolled in distance education are much less likely to commit academic misconduct violations.

Fourth, another study by Stuber-McEwen, Wiseley, Hoggatt (2009) on 225 students from

Friends University found that students enrolled in online classes were less likely to cheat and engage in academic misconduct than those enrolled in traditional, on-campus courses.

Fifth, another study by Watson & Sottile (2010) involving 635 undergraduate and graduate students from Marshall University found that there were no significant differences in cheating for face-to-face and online courses. For example, 32.1% of respondents admitted to cheating in a face-to-face class while 32.7% admitted for online; it can be noted that the difference between these 2 percentages is rather small and insignificant. Also, 6 out of the 9 surveyed topics resulted in higher numbers in face-to-face versus online. The only topic that resulted in a significantly higher number for online is with the receiving answers from another student during an online exam.

Sixth, another study by Young-Jones and Miller (2012) on 531 undergraduates and 108 graduate students from 2 Midwest universities found varying results based on the combination of online and face-to-face classes. The researchers found that cheating has a higher occurrence when students are enrolled in both online and face-to-face classes; however, students who are enrolled exclusively in online classes are less likely to cheat than those students who are enrolled exclusively in face-to-face classes.

Seventh and lastly, a very recent study by Peleda et al (2018) that by far involved the largest sample size of 2,475 students (841 US students and 1,634 Israeli students) found that online courses are not a predominant factor in predicting academic dishonesty and misconduct among students.

It should be noted that each of the studies above have stated differing scopes and resulting limitations such as sample size, distribution, academic non-disclosures, demographics, student profiles, geographical locations, maturity of online programs, and courses among others. These findings may not necessarily apply and hold true for every educational institution given the differences in circumstances. But in general, these findings are definitely beneficial for both students and education systems as it sheds light on the relative state of online cheating on a given set of conditions and context.