

# **Student Perspectives on Academic Integrity, Winter 2021**

#### Introduction

Academic integrity and cheating became a major concern during the transition to remote instruction and the COVID-19 pandemic. As the campus transitions back to inperson instruction, academic cheating continues to pose a major challenge for students, instructors, staff, and administrators. The goal of this survey was to understand students' perspectives and experiences with academic integrity at UCSC. The survey was a collaboration between IRAPS and the Academic Orientations Project (<a href="https://aop.ucsc.edu/">https://aop.ucsc.edu/</a>), led by doctoral student Talia Waltzer and Associate Professor Audun Dahl in the Department of Psychology.

This survey was sent to undergraduate students at UCSC and received 1,110 responses. The survey was organized around five major themes: (1) student beliefs about why cheating happens and (2) what deters cheating, (3) students' own experiences with cheating, (4) students' views and experiences regarding web resources often used to cheat (e.g., Chegg), and (5) students' concerns about integrity and how integrity is handled at UCSC.

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## **Executive Summary**

#### (1) Perceived reasons that students cheat at UCSC

- Students responded that the most common reasons for cheating were that students lacked the skills, resources, or time to complete the assignment on their own, needed a certain grade, or faced external pressures (e.g., family obligations).
- Responses did not indicate major changes in the reasons why students cheat from before to after the shift to remote instruction in March 2020, with two exceptions: External factors (e.g., financial pressure) and lack of knowledge about what constitutes cheating were reported to have become more common following the shift to remote instruction.

#### (2) Ways to deter cheating

- Students believed that proctoring services, short assignment times, and pledges
  of honor were unlikely to deter cheating, while open-ended tasks and numerous
  low-risk assignments were most likely to deter cheating.
- Shortened assignment times was the only deterrent that was thought to increase cheating behaviors.

## (3) Student experiences with cheating

- Most students were worried about being falsely accused of cheating, especially during remote instruction (50% before, 60% after March 2020).
- Several students had encountered at least one situation in which they thought it would be okay to cheat (24% before remote instruction, 30% after).
- There were no major differences in responses based on student background (e.g., gender, academic level, first-generation status, ethnicity).

# (4) Resource-sharing websites (Chegg, CourseHero, Quizlet)

- Two-thirds of students (66%) said they had used resource-sharing websites.
- The majority of students (89%) believed that students use these websites as a tool for studying
- Only 39% of respondents believed students use these websites to cheat.
- 67% of respondents believed it is never okay for students to use these websites to find answers on exams (10% for homework, 3% for practice problems).

# (5) Concerns about integrity and current practices

- 95% of respondents believed academic integrity to be important, and 82% were at least somewhat familiar with UCSC's academic integrity policy.
- 69% of respondents believed a committee should decide a student's guilt, not individual instructors or provosts.

• 38% of respondents suggested that changing the format of assignments could improve academic integrity at UCSC.

#### **Conclusions**

- The findings show that nearly all students care about academic integrity, even if many students said they had deemed cheating acceptable or necessary in specific situations.
- The findings point to several factors that likely contribute to student cheating at UCSC during remote and in-person instruction. Some of the reasons rated as most common were: students not understanding the materials well enough to complete work on their own, having insufficient time, believing cheating was the only way to get the grades they felt they needed, and facing pressures from outside school (e.g., medical, financial).
- Students reported more uncertainty about what actions constituted cheating after the shift to remote instruction. Furthermore, the findings show considerable disagreement among students about when online resources are permissible.
- Most students did not like the current solution of having an instructor or a
  provost decide students' guilt in cheating cases, and instead preferred that
  decisions were made by a committee.

## **Sample Characteristics**

The StayConnected2UCSC Survey #4 was sent to undergraduate students across UCSC, opening on February 23, 2021 and closing on March 10, 2021. Students received an initial emailed invitation and three reminders. Respondents were offered a chance to earn a \$25 Amazon gift card. As a result, nearly 7% of undergraduate students (N = 1110) responded to the survey (see Table 1). 56% of respondents identified as women, 39% as men, and 3% as nonbinary.

Table 1a. Response rates by gender

	Student demographics: Gender					
	Women	Men	Nonbinary	Unknown	Total	
Invited ( <i>N</i> )	7,325	8,367	357	199	16,248	
Responded (N)	626	433	37	14	1,110	
Response Rate (%)	9%	5%	10%	7%	7%	

There was an even distribution of responses across class rank (Table 1b), and there was also an even representation of academic divisions of student major (e.g., Social Sciences is the division for Psychology majors; Table 1c).

Table 1b. Sample characteristics: Student academic level

	Student demographics: Academic level					
	First	Second	Third	Fourth		
Across UCSC (N)	4,047	3,075	4,810	5,275		
Responded (N)	251	236	289	334		
Percent of all (%)	6%	8%	6%	6%		

Table 1c. Sample characteristics: Academic division of respondents' primary majors

		Student demographics: Academic division						
	Social Science	PBSci	Engineering	Arts	Humanities			
Across UCSC (N)	5,885	4,220	4,339	1,506	1,321			
Responded (N)	378	291	242	84	78			
Percent of all (%)	6%	7%	6%	6%	6%			

#### Results

#### Section 1. Reasons students cheat

Students were asked about what they believed to be the most common reasons that students cheated before and during remote instruction due to COVID-19. Students could rate each reason on a 1-4 scale, 1 being the rarest and 4 being the most common, or opt out by answering "don't know."

Students rated *ability to complete the assignment* and *time needed to complete the assignment* as the most common reasons for student cheating <u>before</u> remote learning. <u>During</u> remote learning, *ability to complete the assignment* and *external factors* were rated as the most common reasons. At both time points, the most rare reasons were *not caring about academic integrity* and *not knowing what constitutes cheating*.

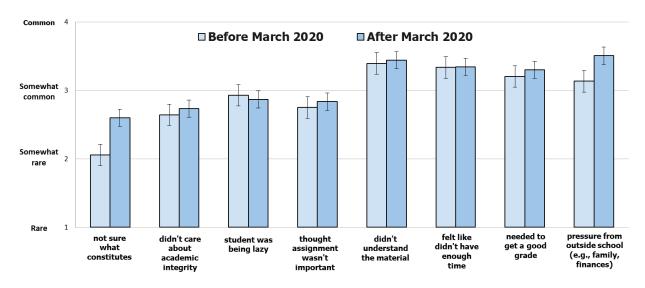
"I think if professors were more involved what specifically we can have during tests or provide formula sheets and such students would feel more confident taking tests."

After the shift from in-person to remote learning, *not knowing what constitutes cheating* and *external factors* saw the greatest increase in commonality, 2.05 to 2.60 and 3.14 to 3.51, respectively. See Table 2 and Figure 1.

**Table 2. Mean ratings of reasons students cheat before and during remote learning**Think about why a student would cheat [BEFORE/AFTER] March 2020. How common do you think the following reasons for cheating [were/are]? [only includes respondents for both times]

	Mean commo	nality ranking
	Before remote learning	During remote learning
The student wasn't sure what constitutes cheating in the class	2.05	2.60
The student didn't care about academic honesty	2.64	2.74
The student was being lazy	2.93	2.87
The student thought the assignment isn't important	2.75	2.84
The student didn't understand the material well enough to complete the assignment on their own	3.40	3.44
The student felt they didn't have enough time	3.34	3.35
The student felt they could only get the grade they needed by cheating	3.20	3.31
The student felt pressured from issues outside of school (e.g., financial, medical, family)	3.14	3.51

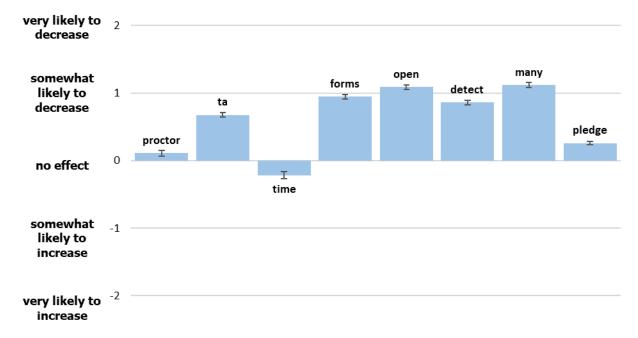




## Section 2. Effectiveness of methods to deter cheating

Figure 2. Student perceptions of effectiveness of cheating prevention methods

Among the following options, which do you think would be the most effective ways to reduce cheating?



*Note.* **proctor:** proctoring services such as ProctorU, **ta:** being watched by a TA, **time:** giving short time windows to complete tasks, **forms:** using multiple test formats, **open:** using open-ended tasks, **detect:** using detection services (e.g., Turnitin), **many:** having many low-stakes taks, **pledge:** using honor pledge

Having frequent-low-stakes assignments, creating assignments with open-ended tasks, using multiple formats for each assignment, and using detection software/websites (e.g., turnitin.com) were perceived as the most effective academic misconduct prevention methods. See Figure 2.

"Having lots of low impact assignments has really helped and it forces me to stay active with my studying and HW."

Conversely, using *proctoring services* (e.g., *ProctorU*), *pledges*, and *reducing the time allotted for each assignment* were perceived as the least effective at preventing cheating. Respondents even believed shorter times to complete assignments would make students a bit *more* inclined to cheat, the only method that was perceived in this way.

"Do not use proctoring methods that aren't free and by people students trust.

Students trust the teacher and TA."

## Section 3. Student experiences with cheating

We asked students about their own experiences with cheating, both before and during remote learning due to COVID-19 (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

**Before remote learning:** About three-quarters (74%) of students indicated cheating was never okay, but one-third (33%) still experienced having no other choice but to cheat. About half of students had been unsure whether they were cheating at least once (43%) and feared being falsely accused of cheating (50%).

**After remote learning:** After the transition to remote learning, pressures and uncertainties surrounding cheating appeared to increase. Students were more likely to encounter cases in which they felt cheating was their only option, feel unsure whether they had cheated, and worry about being falsely accused of cheating (ps < .001).

"I've heard countless stories about students being falsely accused of cheating and having no way to defend themselves."

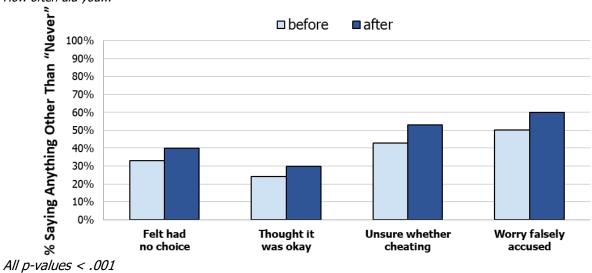
Table 3. Students' own experiences with cheating

Think about your time at UCSC [BEFORE/DURING] the shift to remote instruction ([before/after] March 2020). How often did you...

		Weekly	Once a Month	Once a Quarter	Once a Year	Never
Ве	fore March 2020 (N = 544)					
	feel that your only option was to cheat on an assignment?	2%	6%	11%	14%	66%
	think that it was okay to cheat on an assignment?	2%	5%	8%	9%	74%
	feel unsure whether what you did constituted cheating?	2%	8%	15%	18%	55%
	worry that you would be falsely accused of cheating on an assignment?	5%	10%	20%	15%	49%
Aft	ter March 2020 (N = 968)					
	feel that your only option was to cheat on an assignment?	5%	11%	13%	10%	59%
	think that it was okay to cheat on an assignment?	5%	6%	10%	7%	69%
	feel unsure whether what you did constituted cheating?	7%	12%	21%	13%	46%
	worry that you would be falsely accused of cheating on an assignment?	12%	15%	18%	13%	39%

#### Figure 3. Students' own experiences with cheating

Think about your time at UCSC [BEFORE/DURING] the shift to remote instruction ([before/after] March 2020). How often did you...



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International students, when compared to other students grouped by ethnicity, were less likely to feel unsure about whether their actions were considered cheating (33%). See Table 4.

Table 4. Students' own experiences with cheating by ethnicity

Think about your time at UCSC DURING remote instruction (after March 2020). How often did you...

	% saying anything other than "Never"							
	<b>Black</b> ( <i>n</i> = 37)	<b>Asian</b> ( <i>n</i> = 300)	<b>Latinx</b> ( <i>n</i> = 285)	<b>White</b> ( <i>n</i> = 392)	International (n = 58)			
Felt had no choice	42%	39%	40%	44%	29%			
Thought it was okay	16%	30%	31%	32%	21%			
Unsure if cheating*	59%	52%	51%	58%	33%			
Worry falsely accused	59%	60%	61%	61%	51%			

<sup>\*</sup>p = .022

# Section 4. Resource-sharing websites (Chegg, CourseHero, Quizlet)

Many educators have raised concerns about resource-sharing websites such as Chegg, CourseHero, and Quizlet, where students can upload and access questions and answers to homework and exam questions used in courses across the world. Participants were asked about their own usage of such resource-sharing websites, what they thought other students used the websites for, and when it is appropriate to use these websites.

The majority of students reported using at least one of these websites at least once in the last year (66%), with 48% of students reporting to have used them at least once a quarter. See Table 5.

Table 5. Student use of resource-sharing websites

How often have you used sites such as Chegg, Quizlet, or Course Hero?

% Response to Each Option						
Weekly	Once a month	Once a quarter Once a year		Never		
12%	19%	17%	18%	34%		

Most respondents believed that students at UCSC use these resource-sharing websites to *study*, to *double check answers after finishing an assignment*, and as a *last resort when they cannot solve problems on their own*. Those who have actually used the websites were more likely to say the sites are used as a studying tool (Table 6). Less than half of respondents thought UCSC students use these websites to cheat.

Table 6. Student beliefs about why other students use resource-sharing websites

When students at UCSC use these sites, why do you think they use them? (Select all that apply.)

	Own use of these websites		
	More than once	Never	
As a way to cheat	38%	44%	
As a tool for studying*	94%	83%	
As a way to get lecture notes or materials they missed in class	46%	48%	
As a way to double check their answers after finishing an assignment	77%	74%	
As a last resort when they can't figure out answers on their own	78%	75%	

<sup>\*</sup>p < .001

"I use the online platforms such as Chegg in order to understand how to do problems on homework that I cannot figure out on my own."

Students made distinctions between different types of assignments when judging when it would be appropriate to use these sites. Whereas most students said it was never alright to use the sites to find answers on a test, most said it was okay to use them to find answers for practice problems and homework assignments. See Table 7.

Table 7. Students' evaluations of when it is okay to use resource-sharing websites

In your personal opinion, when is it alright for students to use these sites...

	% selecting each option						
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Don't Know	
To find answers on practice problems?	3%	4%	24%	25%	41%	4%	
To find answers on homework assignments?	10%	16%	37%	20%	13%	4%	
To find answers on exams?	67%	18%	8%	1%	2%	4%	

Respondents' evaluations of whether it is alright to use resource-sharing websites on exams varied across academic divisions (e.g., Social Science, Physical and Biological Sciences [PBSci]). There was generally less acceptance of using these sites on exams among PBSci and Engineering students. See Table 8.

Table 8. Whether it is ever okay to use resource-sharing websites, grouped by division

In your personal opinion, when is it alright for students to use these sites...

	q	% responding anything other than "Never"						
	Social Science (n = 378)	PBSci ( <i>n</i> = 291)	Engineering (n = 242)	Arts ( <i>n</i> = 84)	Humanities ( <i>n</i> = 78)			
To find answers on practice problems?	97%	97%	97%	100%	97%			
To find answers on homework assignments?	89%	90%	88%	97%	89%			
To find answers on exams?*	37%a	19% <sub>c</sub>	25% <sub>b,c</sub>	48%a	34% <sub>a,b</sub>			

<sup>\*</sup>Letters in the subscripts indicate pairwise significance tests. Percentages with different-letter subscripts (e.g., Arts and PBSci) are significantly different from each other, p < .001

## Section 5. Concerns about integrity and current practices

Students were asked about their concerns with academic integrity, specifically about how important academic integrity is to them and how familiar they are with UCSC's academic integrity policy. Students were also asked about their beliefs on current practices at UCSC and ways to improve academic integrity.

The vast majority of students (95%) reported believing academic integrity is at least somewhat important, with 83% of students indicating that it is important or very important to them. See Table 9.

Table 9. Student perceptions of importance of academic integrity

How important or unimportant is academic integrity for you?

% Response to Each Option								
Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Somewhat unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant			
41%	42%	12%	3%	1%	1%			

<sup>&</sup>quot;I personally feel that honesty is important, and so I do my best to follow guidelines and rules set out by professors to uphold academic integrity."

In much the same manner, 82% of students also reported being somewhat or very familiar with UCSC's academic integrity policy. See Table 10.

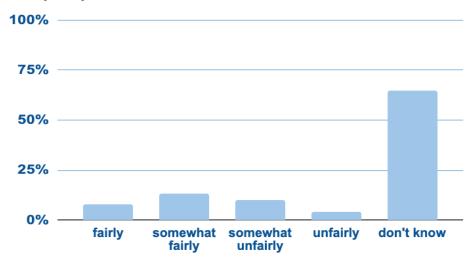
Table 10. Student familiarity with UCSC's academic integrity policy

How familiar are you with UCSC's university policy for academic integrity and misconduct?

% Response to Each Option							
Not at all familiar Somewhat unfamiliar Somewhat familiar Very familiar							
4%	13%	55%	27%				

The majority of students (65%) reported not knowing how fairly or unfairly academic misconduct cases are handled at UCSC, while 21% of respondents reported believing the process to be more fair than unfair, and 14% believing the contrary. See Figure 4.

Figure 4. Student perceptions of fairness in UCSC academic misconduct cases



When asked about who should decide guilt in an academic misconduct case, a majority of students preferred *academic integrity staff* (51%) or a *committee* (69%) to adjudicate the process. Least preferred for deciding whether a student is guilty of academic misconduct were the *college Provosts* (27%). See Table 11.

**Table 11. Student responses to who should decide guilt in academic misconduct** *Who should decide whether a student is guilty of academic misconduct? (Select all that apply.)* 

% Response to Each Option								
Student Instructor Provost AI Staff Committee								
36%	44%	27%	51%	69%				

"I would absolutely remove all staff, provost and administrators from conduct boards."

When asked about what could be done to improve academic integrity at UCSC, 19% gave suggestions specific to *remote learning* (e.g., "Not have online proctoring such as Proctor U" and "make all of the courses in person again to minimize the temptation to cheat"). 80% gave suggestions pertaining to *both* in-person and remote learning. 38% suggested *reformatting assignments/assessments*. Some of these suggestions included making assignments more frequent and/or lower-stakes, while others included moving from multiple-choice and select-all-that-apply questions to more open-ended and free-response questions on exams.

"Instead of trying to get students not to cheat using punitive, carceral tactics, group learning should be encouraged."

26% of respondents suggested *changing the overall course structure*, typically to reflect a change from valuing grades to valuing learning and mastery of the content. Several also discussed the importance of in-person learning and increasing student involvement.

Other common responses talked about *removing proctoring services* in order to reduce student anxiety during examinations and *increasing instructor flexibility* and understanding of student situations. See Table 12 for example quotes.

Table 12. Common student suggestions for improving academic integrity

		Student Responses
	Mentioned	Example Quotes
Change the format of assignments/assessments	38%	"Increase the amount of time for students to take tests." "Replacing high-stakes tests with high-stakes assignments or projects"
Changing the course structure	26%	"I think if we were on campus it would be a lot better." "Instead of changing rules or guidelines, implement a teaching strategy that values learning over grades"
Remove ProctorU or other invasive services	15%	"ProctorU increase anxiety" "I would not use proctor U because I have seen many problems, and issues arise from using such a site."
More flexibility or empathy from instructors	10%	"Make professors actually care about their students." "Giving students a little bit more grace knowing that they are currently struggling in distracting environments and technological difficulties"

# Appendix Survey Questions

1. Have you attended UCSC before March 2020?

O Yes

○ No  2. Think about why a student might have ch	oostod REEO	DE the chift	to romoto in	struction (b	oforo
z. Think about why a student might have cr March 2020). How common do you think the following re				istruction (b	eiore
	Rare	Somewhat rare	Somewhat common	Common	Don't know
The student wasn't sure what constitutes cheating in the class					
The student didn't care about academic honesty					
The student was being lazy					
The student thought the assignment isn't important					
The student didn't understand the material well enough to complete the assignment on their own					
The student felt they didn't have enough time					
The student felt they could only get the grade they needed by cheating					
The student felt pressured from issues outside of school (e.g., financial, medical, family)					
3. Think about why a student may cheat DU How common do you think the following re			ı (after Marc	ch 2020).	
•	Rare	Somewhat rare	Somewhat common	Common	Don't know
The student wasn't sure what constitutes cheating in the class					
The student didn't care about academic honesty					
The student was being lazy					
The student thought the assignment isn't important					
The student didn't understand the material well enough to complete the assignment on their own					

The student felt they didn't have enough time							
The student felt they could only get the grade they needed by cheating							
The student felt pressured from issues outside of school (e.g., financial, medical, family)							
4. Among the following antions, which do you think would be the most effective ways to reduce							

cneating?						
	Likely to decrease cheating	Somewhat likely to decrease cheating	No influence	Somewhat likely to increase cheating	Likely to increase cheating	Don't know
Proctoring services (e.g., ProctorU)						
Being watched by a TA						
Allotting a short time window for answering questions						
Having multiple test versions						
Open-ended assessments (e.g., essay, short answer)						
Plagiarism detection software (e.g., MOSS, Turnitin)						
Having frequent, low-stakes assignments						
Asking students to pledge their honor before every submission						

5. Think about your time at UCSC BEFORE the shift to remote instruction (before March 2020). How often did you...

	Weekly	Once a month	Once a quarter	Once a year	Never
feel that your only option was to cheat on an assignment?					
think that it was okay to cheat on an assignment?					
feel unsure whether what you did constituted					

				Ī						
cheating?										
worry that you would be falsely accused of cheating on an assignment?						1				
5. Think about yo How often have y		UCSC DURI	NG remote i	nstruction (sin	ce March 20	20).				
_	Week	y Or	ice a month	Once a quarte	er Once a	a year	Never			
feel that your only option was to cheat on an assignment?						1				
think that it was okay to cheat on an assignment?						1				
feel unsure whether what you did constituted cheating?						1				
worry that you would be falsely accused of cheating on an assignment?										
7. How often have you used sites such as Chegg, Quizlet, or Course Hero?  Ource a month Once a quarter Once a year I have never used any of them  8. When students at UCSC use these sites, why do you think they use them? (Select all that apply.) As a way to cheat As a tool for studying As a way to get lecture notes or materials they missed in class As a way to double check their answers after finishing an assignment As a last resort when they can't figure out answers on their own										
<ul><li>Other, please s</li><li>In your person</li></ul>		when is it a	Iright for stu	ıdents to use t	these sites					
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Don't know			
To find answers or problems?	n practice									

To find answers on

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