DISTANCE EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING

April 9, 2015 · Carrington 203
<u>Minutes</u>
Attendees: Patti Blanton, Deanne Camp, Lacey Geiger, Lora Hobbs, Gary Iman, Jeff Morrissey, Joye Norris, Gary Rader, Stacy Rice, Rose Utley

Review of minutes from 3/19/2015

- Seconded and approved.

Certified Distance Educator Press Release –*Lacey Geiger*

- Ms. Geiger shared the DEC press release for the committee. It was examined and there were no suggested edits. It, and the connected website, are ready for dispersal.

New York Times: Online Test Takers – *Joye Norris*

- Dr. Norris shared an article from the New York Times regarding online test-taking issues. (*Handout attached*).

Report on Compliance Issues -- *Gary Rader*

- Dr. Rader shared three documents – Student Grievances, Grade Appeals, and Complaint Procedures. It was discussed whether the documents were in agreement with the faculty handbook, which they are.
- It was suggested that the line that states students can bring "complaints" to the Help Desk be amended to, "can bring *issues* to the Help Desk."
- It was suggested that the line stating that students can "write a formal letter" to their instructors be amended to, "submit a written request."
- "Present the appeal first" should be amended to, "First, present the appeal…"
- The line that states "MSU students residing outside the State of Missouri can file a complaint…" was requested to be reviewed for accuracy.
- **Dr. Rader will make the above changes and email these documents to the committee.**

Preliminary Findings of EvaluationKit
- A phone conference was held between a representative of EvalutaionKit, Lacey Geiger, Gary Rader, Debra Tippen and Jaime Ross. They discussed how other schools have improved their evaluation response rate.
    - **Cultural:** Drilling into the student that it is their responsibility to provide this information. Increasing awareness (possibly by getting the Student Government to endorse and encourage it) increases participation.
    - **Encourage Faculty**: Let department heads know what's going on, what's going out, and that they should encourage their faculty to remind students about EvaluationKit.

- o **Disrupting Routine:** There is a pop-up option that can be enabled in Blackboard, reminding students to take the survey.
- o **Punitive**: It's possible to lockdown blackboard if you haven't taken the survey by the last three days. It's suggested this might be too dire for our circumstances, and that hard enforcement of this will result in undeserved negative evaluations for instructors.
- o **Solid Communication**: Just make sure that communication with the students is solid.

- Ultimately, the recommendation being made is that we work to disrupt the routine, encourage faculty, and make sure the interface is as clean as possible. Punitive measures are, for the moment, ruled out.

Training for New Distance Instructors
- There was a brief discussion of what training will be required for Distance Instructors.
- Stacy Rice reported that Kristi Oetting is building a "jumpstart" course that would prepare instructors for teaching online, and that it takes two hours to complete.
- It was recommended by the committee that this should be required for all new hires – potentially starting in Fall 15 or Spring 16. Dr. Norris will discuss this with the Provost.

Next Meeting
- **Typically, the DEC does not meet during the Summer months. However, due to the necessity of reviewing the membership and the possibility of bringing on new members, a summer meeting might be necessary. This will be reviewed by the chair.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

Jamie Hall
Executive Assistant III
Missouri State Outreach

Online Test-Takers Feel Software's Uneasy Glare

By NATASHA SINGER

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. — Before Betsy Chao, a senior here at Rutgers University, could take midterm exams in her online courses this semester, her instructors sent emails directing students to download Proctortrack, a new anti-cheating technology.

"You have to put your face up to it and you put your knuckles up to it," Ms. Chao said recently, explaining how the program uses webcams to scan students' features and verify their identities before the test.

Once her exam started, Ms. Chao said, a red warning band appeared on the computer screen indicating that Proctortrack was monitoring her computer and recording video of her. To constantly remind her that she was being watched, the program also showed a live image of her in miniature on her screen.

Even for an undergraduate raised in a culture of selfies and Skype, Ms. Chao found the system intrusive. "I felt it was sort of excessive," she said.

As universities and colleges around the country expand their online course offerings, many administrators are introducing new technologies to deter cheating. The oversight, administrators say, is crucial to demonstrating the legitimacy of an online degree to students and their prospective employers.

Some schools use software that prevents students from opening apps or web browsers during online exams. Others employ services with live exam proctors

BRYAN ANSELM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Betsy Chao, a Rutgers student, began a campaign against software used to monitor students taking online tests. The school said the software was not mandatory.

Online Classes' Test-Takers Feel the Uneasy Glare of Anti-Cheating Software

who monitor students remotely over webcams.

But the rise of Proctortrack and other automated student analysis services like it have raised questions about where to draw the line, and whether the new systems are fair and accurate.

The University of North Texas Health Science Center, for instance, is partway through a two-year pilot test of Proctortrack involving the 160 students enrolled in its online public health master's degree program.

"If you are going to offer online learning, you need to find ways to ensure the integrity of the course, the test-taking and the degree," said Jeff Carlton, a university spokesman. "For us, this is high-stakes."

These schools are not simply trying to protect the academic integrity of their brands. They are seeking to stay competitive in a rapidly expanding industry. The market for online higher education could reach $32 billion in the United States this year, up from $25 billion in 2012, according to estimates from Eduventures, a research firm in Boston.

And the increased oversight of test-taking only intensifies a college experience that is monitored and analyzed more than ever.

More than 3,500 institutions of higher learning, for instance, use an automated plagiarism detection system called Turnitin, which scans students' papers for copied passages. And at Utah Valley University in Orem, the school developed its own early warning system, called Stoplight, which uses academic and demographic details about students to predict their likelihood of passing specific courses; as part of the program, professors receive class lists that color-code each student as green, yellow or red.

Proctortrack works along similar lines. The software, developed by Verificient Technologies, is marketed as "the world's first automated remote proctoring solution." Although some schools are still evaluating Proctortrack, Rutgers has already deployed it among several thousand students, the company said.

Tim Dutta, Verificient's chief executive, said his company's chief technology officer came up with the idea for the service after he worked on a project for the Transportation Security Administration which involved scanning airport security video footage for abnormal facial expressions. Proctortrack uses algorithms to detect unusual student behavior — like talking to someone off-screen — that could constitute cheating. Then it categorizes each student as having high or low "integrity."

Mr. Dutta said the program was not so much intended to identify cheaters as to authenticate the identity of students enrolled in online courses.

"We are really about ensuring
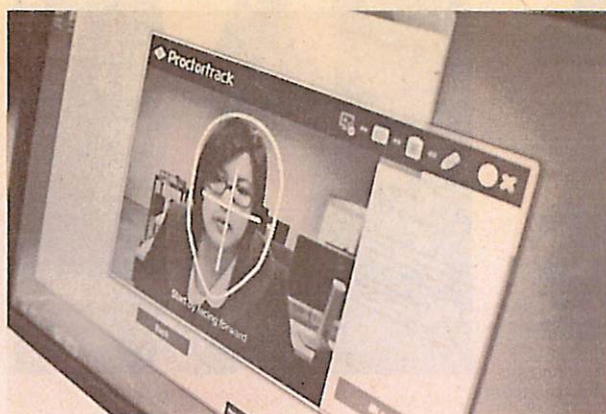
BRYAN ANSELM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Betsy Chao on Proctortrack's facial-recognition software. It requires students to sit upright directly in front of the webcam.

Students must stay glued to their seats for the duration.

the integrity of that online credential," he said.

Proctortrack, however, seems to impose more onerous strictures on students than a live proctor would. Among other things, it requires students to sit upright and remain directly in front of their webcams at all times, according to guidelines posted on the company's site.

"Changes in lighting can flag your test for a violation," the guidelines say. And, "Even stretching, looking away, or leaning down to pick up your pencil could flag your test."

Once students finish their exams, their instructors can log on to a server to review video clips of the incidents the system has flagged as possible infractions.

Jeffrey Alan Johnson, assistant director of institutional effectiveness and planning at Utah Valley University, compared Proctortrack's approach to a controversial T.S.A. airport security screening program intended to identify terrorists; the government's list of suspicious behavior included gazing down and excessive yawning, according to a document obtained by The Intercept.

"We are seeing similar things with Proctortrack," said Mr. Johnson, who has conducted research on information technologies and social justice. "It's built on this belief that human behavior can be reduced to an algo-

rithm and, if you deviate from that behavior, it's a problem."

Peter Gambino, a Rutgers sophomore, first heard about Proctortrack after he had enrolled in an online music theory course. His professor emailed the class saying that Proctortrack was "a brand-new requirement this semester" for certain online courses and that students would have to pay a fee of $37 to use it.

Mr. Gambino said he would not have taken the course had Rutgers informed students of the details in advance.

"It would be a much different thing if this surveillance was being imposed on anyone other than the students, effectively with no notice," Mr. Gambino said. "I'm pretty sure that teachers would quit outright if they had to grade papers in the privacy of their own homes and be monitored and be forced to pay for it out of their own pocket."

Ms. Chao even started a petition on Change.org asking Rutgers to rescind the program. Two days later, a university spokesman told a local New Jersey newspaper that Proctortrack was not mandatory for students.

Ms. Chao said administrators had since offered to provide her with a live human proctor for a fee of $40 per exam. But seeing as she is taking two online courses with both midterm and final exams, she said the $160 proctoring fee — on top of the $100 tuition surcharge the school imposes for each online course — would be cost-prohibitive for her.

Rutgers itself seemed to disavow responsibility for the ad-

ministrators who originally required students to use Proctortrack.

"From an institutional point of view, use specifically of Proctortrack is not mandatory, and traditional face-to-face proctoring has been an acceptable alternative all along," Richard Novak, Rutgers' vice president for continuing studies and distance education, said in an email. As for charging privacy-minded students a higher fee for live proctors, he wrote, "This decision was made by the academic unit charging the fee."

In hopes of alleviating students' concerns, Verificient recently posted a pledge on its blog saying that Proctortrack did not share students' data with third parties; that it typically deleted students' data after 30 to 60 days; and that students could remove the software from their computers once they had uploaded their test data.

But the company has not changed its privacy policy — which states that it may unilaterally amend its policies at any time and that it may disclose users' personal information to third-party service providers or in the event of a company merger, sale or bankruptcy.

Students like Ms. Chao say they hope university administrators will consider the civil liberties implications of emergent tracking technologies, not just the expediency.

"They are trying to make recording students a regular part of online courses," Ms. Chao said. "You don't know what new norms are going to be established for what privacy is."