Proctoring Exams: Considerations and Rationale

At Columbus State Community College, we encourage expressing technology as part of our pedagogy, not simply a solution to any given classroom problem. This includes an honest and critical assessment of educational technologies that also takes into account the pedagogical environment our faculty and students work in. That environment has changed with the shift to increased distance learning, leading us to think even more critically (and creatively) about the role of alternative assessments and technology in education. Before considering proctoring tools in this environment, faculty should have clear plans as to how they will handle situations related to student access and equity.

- Considerations for Respondus Lockdown Browser alone
  - Assessments are displayed full-screen and cannot be minimized
  - Browser menu and toolbar options are removed, except for Back, Forward, Refresh and Stop
  - Prevents access to other applications including messaging, screen-sharing, virtual machines, and remote desktops
  - Printing and screen capture functions are disabled
  - Copying and pasting anything to or from an assessment is prevented
  - Right-click menu options, function keys, keyboard shortcuts and task switching are disabled
  - An assessment cannot be exited until the student submits it for grading
  - Assessments that are set up for use with LockDown Browser cannot be accessed with other browsers
  - Currently does not work for students who are using a Chromebook or outdated devices
  - Requires a system test for all students in courses to determine connectivity and usability
  - Not always compatible with certain accommodations
  - Student may use other devices to look up information

- Considerations for Respondus Monitor
  - Works with Respondus Lockdown Browser to prevent students leaving test for other website or applications on their device (see above)
  - Tool with limited AI that monitors keyboard and video behaviors of students and flags suspicious behaviors
  - Is designed more as a deterrent as it video records student during exam
  - Video recordings are available 12 – 24 hours after end time of exam
  - Currently does not work for students who are using a Chromebook or outdated devices
  - Requires a system test for all students in courses to determine connectivity and usability
  - Not always compatible with certain accommodations

- Considerations for using Collaborate, Teams, and WebEx for faculty proctoring
  - No lockdown browser can be used while using these tools to faculty proctor
  - Limits flexibility for testing. All tests must be given at a specific time and day
  - Internet connectivity issues can interfere with proctoring

- Rationale for limiting proctored exams
  - **Academic integrity:** As an academic institution, academic integrity is critical. There is no magic tool that will eliminate issues of academic dishonesty altogether but there are ways to deter including 1) Making sure you communicate your values and expectations of academic integrity in your course early and often; having open dialogues and giving students concrete examples. 2) Understanding that technology may deter but is not a fix 3) Exploring alternative assessment and using pedagogical techniques.
  - **Safety:** We are unsure as to if or when we will return to normal face-to-face operations at the college. The autumn will be low density for the safety of our students, staff and faculty. Therefore, on campus testing is not an option. Social distancing, continuous cleaning of computer/surfaces, and one-way foot traffic would be too difficult to maintain and assure.
  - **Physical limitations:** With the threat of a surge of COVID cases in the coming year, the Testing Center is not an option for campus-wide use. The social distancing that we are doing now may be the new normal for quite some time and the amount of cleaning to ensure safety between testing and if using other parts of campus would not be manageable for all courses. Many students, faculty and staff may not feel comfortable returning to prior crowded conditions if or when the number of cases of COVID decrease.
  - **Digital equity:** Many online proctoring tools are not accessible on all technological platforms. For example, Respondus Monitor works well on iOS and Windows but does not currently operate on the Chromebook/Android operating system. Even homes with high-speed internet are experiencing interruptions in service. Other times our students have slow connections or hotspots that make it a barrier to stringent proctoring situations. Alternative Assessment can help to provide options that do not create or enhance digital inequities.
  - **Accessibility:** For students with disabilities proctoring software may not meet their needs. Access to webcams that are of high enough quality for the proctoring software can be challenging. Chaotic home environments and the continued lack of child-care options leave our students vulnerable in proctoring situations where having a quiet, distraction-free environment is simply not an option. The stress and privacy issues of not having a home-life that a student feels is appropriate to having their faculty member view directly, can bring more anxiety and become a barrier to accessing educational tools, as another example.
  - **Alternative assessment:** This approach to assessment can also be an active and collaborative learning (ACL) activity. The college is committed to having ACL as a core pedagogical strategy. This is an ideal time to think about assessment as an opportunity for ACL.
  - **Data-driven decisions:** Last year the testing center proctored approximately 120,000 tests. About 1/3 of curricular offerings were using the testing center so the total number of tests, the college is currently administering, is significantly higher. The cost of using an electronic proctoring tool, like Respondus Monitor, would be extremely expensive to cover all tests. The cost of using Respondus Monitor to administer just the tests previously proctored in the testing center would be $600,000 - $800,000 per year.