

The Process Behind Creating a Process, Procedure or Policy

Example:

My professor reuses old tests. I have no idea why she told us this, but she did. In class today I noticed someone reviewing last year's test, with the answers circled, on their computer in google drive, along with several other tests for this course that have not occurred yet. The test is in two days, and I know that this person will most likely have the answers memorized so it will be impossible to prove anything unethical is happening during the exam to a proctor's perspective. Not only does this student have the exams, though, but many others. Apparently, fraternities hold onto these and share them amongst each other.

When posting about this on Yik Yak, and my irritation with this, I received many yaks back threatening me should I turn people in, saying they would find me and hurt me. I have no reason to believe anyone knows what class I noticed the cheating in, or who I am, but this has me unsettled.

I have been studying and will continue to study for this test, and I find it infuriating that others don't need to bother with studying at all. I work hard for everything, and I do not want to get screwed over for this. The tests are curved so that the mean score for every test is a C+, and a large group of students who score well through cheating will undermine those who did not cheat on the curve.

What do I do?

Responses

"The professor is free to decide to reuse questions from previous exams. It's a bit sloppy, but it's her business." I'm very sorry but this is simply not true. See the part of my answer where I refer to the Code of Academic Conduct at my institution, which says clearly the professor has a duty not to create opportunities for cheating. You have a valid point that memorizing past exams is a gray area and arguably isn't cheating, but repeating past exams, and certainly telling the class that you're going to do so, is more than "a bit sloppy" and IMHO crosses the line into unethical behavior. – [Dan Romik Sep 15 '15 at 7:25](#)

Yes, you should report it, although given the threats against you and other related concerns of retribution or ostracism, it may be understandable if you choose not to. Certainly, reporting it would benefit you personally by allowing your work to be evaluated fairly compared to that of others, similarly benefit other honest and hardworking students in your class, benefit your institution's academic reputation, and benefit your own conscience. I feel there is a strong case for reporting.

As for how, there are various means, each with their own pros and cons depending on how involved you want to get in this story, how much certainty you want to have that you can remain anonymous, and how much time it would take for your complaint to be acted upon.

For the most rapid response (which seems important given that the exam is in two days' time), I would draft a polite email to the instructor, along the lines of:

Dear Professor ExamRecycler,

I am writing to express my concerns that some students in our class have been memorizing solutions to your class exam from last year after you indicated that you plan to give the same exam to our class. I saw some students doing this and have suspicions that the phenomenon could be a lot more widespread. As an honest student who studies hard, I think I have a right to expect that my performance be graded based on a comparison with the true performance of other students, rather than a fake performance attained through dishonest means. I would greatly appreciate it if on Wednesday you can give us an original exam that does an honest job of testing our knowledge. I also know that there are many other honest students like me in the class and I'm sure they would all share my sentiments about this.

By the way, thanks for a great semester! I really enjoyed your course and learned a lot.

Sincerely,

[your name]

You can make some small variations to the email depending on how much you trust the professor to follow up on your request (and how receptive she would be to the shameless flattery at the end...). For example, if you feel she is not likely to bother preparing an original exam despite your request, cc'ing the email to her department chair could greatly increase the chances that she would comply. Alternatively, you can indicate as diplomatically as possible that you are considering complaining to your university's Student Judicial Affairs office, etc.

Another possibility, if you really don't trust the professor to take kindly to the request, is to go directly to the department chair (or undergraduate program chair or advisor), or to Student Judicial Affairs. Note that this would likely mean a delay in getting the problem addressed, so in particular it's unlikely that anything would get done before your exam on Wednesday.

There is also the question of whether you want to expose the names of the students who you believe are cheating. I don't have good advice to offer about that. Note that they can reasonably claim that looking over old exams is not cheating but a form of studying. It is really your professor who is behaving somewhat unethically by reusing the same exam and openly declaring that fact. In my institution, the Code of Academic Conduct explicitly says that faculty have a responsibility to "Use examination formats that discourage academic misconduct". As a member of my institution's Campus Judicial Board, I attended hearings for students accused of misconduct, and on more than one occasion felt that the faculty had been negligent of that responsibility and therefore bore part of the blame for what happened. I have an impression that this may be the case in your situation as well.

Finally, although you didn't ask about this, I must say I am very strongly bothered and concerned by the fact that you received threats (of what sounds like physical violence or other serious harm) on Yik Yak. This behavior is much more disturbing and egregious than the cheating, and if I were you I would immediately report it to Student Judicial Affairs or another unit on campus that could provide you counseling about keeping yourself safe, protection if needed, and who would be strongly motivated to seek out the people who threatened you and take disciplinary action against them. Such behavior has no place on a university campus and must absolutely not be tolerated. **Dan Romick**
Sep 14 '15 at 22:59

Want to read more?

<https://academia.stackexchange.com/questions/54342/should-i-report-cheating-to-my-professor-if-so-how/54349#54349>