# Best Practices for Remote Assessment and Exams

The document and resources below outline the current guidance and best practices for remote assessments and exams.  We start by emphasizing that there is no single solution to safeguarding academic integrity, and that reliance on remote proctoring software such as Proctor U and Respondus is problematic from several perspectives, the most troubling that they present serious privacy breaches for students who are required to turn over their desktop to a remote proctor who does not work for, and has not been vetted by, the university.  This has resulted in students, both here at CSUN and across the country, sharing that this creates an atmosphere of distrust, reinforces deficit-based treatment of students, and [is widely seen by students as generally “creepy.”](https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/29/21232777/examity-remote-test-proctoring-online-class-education)  In short, online proctoring may inhibit a student’s ability to perform, and may not provide a meaningful resolution to the problem of academic dishonesty.

In addition, these tools present serious equity issues for our students.  [The economic and digital divide COVID has exposed](https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/blogs/education-time-corona/covid-igital-divide) among CSUN students is very real. Many students rely on shared computers and mobile internet with limited data plans. These technological barriers are making learning nearly impossible for our most vulnerable students. Using proctoring software that require webcams, high speed internet and the most current hardware will disproportionately impact our low-income students and students of color.

Instead, the CSU and universities across the country promote the use of simple strategies that embrace strength-based solutions that may provide enhanced academic integrity while reinforcing the message to students that we believe in them (memo attached).   Campuses are strongly encouraged to consider, evaluate and discuss alternate methods of assessment, such as:

* Several timed quizzes rather than high stakes midterms and finals
* Open book exams
* Projects, papers and presentations
* Electronic portfolios that may be used to promote comparison and/or synthesis of student academic work

The guidance concludes by stating that it is expected that all departments and disciplines will think carefully and creatively about whether and how alternative assessment strategies may be used during fall 2020 to assess student learning. The memo concludes by stating that online proctoring only be used when accreditation or licensure examination require it.

## Guidance and Resources:

What we can’t do:

We cannot compel a student to use a webcam or be recorded in a class.  It is permissible to state in a syllabus that webcams are required only if students are invited to seek an accommodation if they have any concerns.  In some cases the student may have a financial or technology concern, which can be accommodated by facilitating the acquisition of appropriate technology for the student (e.g., routing the student to the [campus device loaner program](https://www.csun.edu/it/device-loaner-program#:~:text=Device%20Loaner%20Program,may%20continue%20their%20education%20uninterrupted.)).  In other cases, students may have a privacy concern, or DRES accommodation that requires an alternate solution.

What we can do:

Assess students in a format other than a proctored high stakes exam. [UC Berkeley faculty have created a useful set of tools](https://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/issues/coronavirus/best-practices-remote-examinations) that support best practices for remote examinations.  In addition, the UCB Academic Senate created a working group on online examinations and proctoring and provide [these recommendations](https://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/guidance_and_recommendations_from_the_working_group_on_exams_and_proctoring.pdf).

[UW’s College of Engineering faculty have assembled a useful list of best practices](https://www.engr.washington.edu/online-learning):

* Design questions that are similar in format and difficulty to those students have seen in instruction, practiced in homework, and received feedback on. Avoid reusing questions exactly as they were given in past exams; even superficial modifications (e.g., changing numerical constants) are helpful.
* Accept that the exam will effectively be open-resources (textbook, notes, web) and design questions accordingly.
* Consider a larger number of shorter, more focused mini-exams/quizzes, vs. one or two high-stakes exams, to reduce student stress and provide both you and students with more frequent measures of their standing in the course. This also moderates the effects of unexpected exam design/administration problems (e.g., network outages).
* Avoid grading schemes like curving that can pit students against each other and allow a small number of bad actors to negatively impact the grades of ethical students.
* As prep time permits, use a tool like Canvas Quizzes that supports randomized question variation (e.g., response choice order for multiple choice, numeric constants, question groups).
* Consider having students pledge adherence to an honor code. Note that [research recommends](https://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_informaworld_s10_1080_10508422_2011_641836&context=PC&vid=UW&lang=en_US&search_scope=all&adaptor=primo_central_multiple_fe&tab=default_tab&query=any,contains,Optimizing%20Honor%20Codes%20for%20Online%20Exam%20Administration) an honor code that is formal and detailed and references consequences of code violation.

The publication *Faculty Focus* provides [14 Simple Strategies to Reduce Cheating on Online Exams](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/fourteen-simple-strategies-to-reduce-cheating-on-online-examinations/).

Finally, the CSU is providing a wonderful series on [*Alternate Approaches to Assessment in QR Courses*](https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/why-the-csu-matters/graduation-initiative-2025/academic-preparation/professional-development/Pages/professional-development-archive.aspx), which includes posted recordings of short (30 minute) conversations of faculty experiences and success in assessing QR courses online.

We hope you find these resources useful.