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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Cheat Proof Your Final Exam, Guaranteed*

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It's that time of year.

Yes, it's the season where professors often find themselves dealing with breaches of academic integrity. The explosion of online learning, alongside everyone's massively expanded access to information, has further complicated this issue. Exhausted professors, I've got a special holiday gift for you: the secret to writing the ultimate cheat-proof exam. Are you ready? Here it is:

Let them cheat.

I'm not referring to those miserable, blindness-inducing, 2-inch notecards that your chemistry



"Dear student, yes, we are aware of this method."
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheat_sheet#mediaviewer/File:-Cheating.JPG

teacher let you use for writing equations.

I'm talking about real cheating.

To begin, I teach biblical studies classes, so I always let students use their Bibles. If they have Bibles, then I should let them use the maps in the back. Some of the clever ones will ask about study Bibles, so I might as well let them have more substantive commentaries, throw in encyclopedias, lexicons, and everything else in print. I suppose it makes no difference to let them use ebooks and online journals as well.

From there, it's really a short step to let them use the entire internet. Wikipedia, Bible Odyssey, electronic concordances, Patheos, iTunes U... all of these resources are fair game for my seminary final exams. I use these tools in my own studies. Why shouldn't they?

Obviously, full-scale cheating forces a different type of exam. Traditional questions such as the following will no longer suffice if I let them use every resource imaginable:

- *What are the three stages of the Deuteronomistic History according to Weippert?*
- *How does the epic of Gilgamesh help to inform our reading strategies for Genesis 1-11?*
- *Describe four theories for the origins of the Dead Sea Scrolls.*

I wonder about the long-term effectiveness of these traditional questions for seminary level students. Why should we test their short-term memory for information that they can access with their phones within six seconds?

In line with the institutional mission of George Fox University, I would prefer to assess their abilities to think critically with the mass of information at their fingertips. So instead of loading their brains with facts, how about creating exams that test their abilities to think critically? For example:

- *In what sense is the Exodus historical? Explain.*
- *The US Population will have no majority ethnic group by 2050. How does Third Isaiah*

help the church think through this reality? How does Nehemiah 9-10 further complicate this?

- Is the Holiness Code relevant to the current global ecology crisis?



Up to now, the only stipulation that I have placed on the students is to work independently, but is that even necessary? How would a study group of four students spending an evening discussing the church, ethnicity, and the message of Isaiah be detrimental to their learning? Don't we want to encourage the formation of communities of learners as we engage in theological matters? In doing so, perhaps the final exams can do more than just *measure* learning, but they themselves will become pivotal learning experiences.

Don't get me wrong. I think that learning Weippert's three redactional stages can really help students understand the context of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings. But my university's institutional objectives are much broader than mere cognition. We want our students to lead their communities of faith in this changing world. Shouldn't our final exams accurately reflect these educational objectives?

*not really

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