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Cheats face the heat

Colleges, universities crack down on high-tech deception

New software acts as 'virtual security guards' at exam time

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Forget crib notes up the sleeve.

Exam cheaters have gone high-tech. With the stroke of a laptop key, today's techno-kids can check a virtual library of cheat sheets without the teacher ever knowing.

Enter the cheat police.

"They treat exams like a game of *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire* — throwing out lifelines to experts on-line," complained Professor Franklyn Prescod of Ryerson University's School of Information Technology Management.

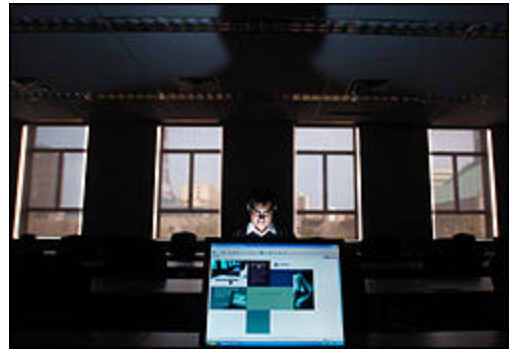
"So we've had to put in virtual security guards to stop them."

As more colleges and universities across North America require students to use laptops in class, particularly in business and computer courses, they have had to grapple with a rising tide of cyber-cheating.

Now, it seems, Google has been gagged.

Ryerson University and Durham College are two of 160 schools across the continent using a new computer program called Securexam.

It allows a teacher to lock down computer use during a test so students can't open the Internet, can't message a friend and can't peek at their course notes — all things they are tempted to do on-



CHARLA JONES/TORONTO STAR
Naushad Jamani, a teaching assistant at Ryerson University's business school, stands behind a laptop computer displaying the home page of Securexam software, a program that allows a teacher to lock down computer use during a test to prevent cheating. He says he can't imagine running a laptop exam without the software.

line.

"It's scary how creative they can get. I caught one boy in the middle of a final exam flipping back and forth between the test and a Web site that had the actual test answers," said Professor Marj Rempel of Durham College's school of technology.

"We shut him down, he failed the course and was cited for academic misconduct. We had to set a big example because cheating was becoming such a problem."

With Securexam, students sign on to an exam on identical, school-issued laptops using a special password they receive upon arrival, and find themselves in an exam program that blocks access to any other use, from e-mail to eBay.

Student Chad Saliba admits the program is necessary.

"Look, if the Internet were available, lots of kids just wouldn't prepare as much for a test. Unfortunately, they'd just get ready to Google the answers," the first-year Ryerson business student said.

"So it's noble of the school to use this software; it puts everyone on an equal platform." In fact, it was students angry at classmates' cheating who asked Ryerson's Prescod to do something to stop it.

"So we knew the level of policing had to catch up with the level of cheating," he said.

Durham College and Ryerson, as well as such institutions as Cornell University's law school and the University of Vermont's medical school, now lease Securexam software to make sure laptop exams are cheat-proof.

Like <http://www.turnitin.com>, the anti-plagiarism filter many universities use to check students' essays for echoes of other research, Securexam has been designed in response to a new generation of Web-wise students.

Security is a growing issue in new wireless classrooms, where students work on laptops in collaboration with the teacher, whose own screen is projected overhead.

Students can be tempted by what software designer Doug Winneg called "digital distractions."

"With their laptops running, you'll get kids on-line shopping, playing games, e-trading, messaging each other and doing research for another class," said Winneg, president of Software Secure, the Massachusetts-based company that produces Securexam.

"In my day, our biggest distraction was sneaking the crossword puzzle into class. These days, the student next to you may be running some Britney Spears video that's hard to ignore."

On the one hand, Winneg said, you don't want to deny students use of their laptops, especially

for critical exams, "because this generation naturally thinks and works on-screen," said the former investment banker and corporate litigator.

"But you do want to lock it down so they can't cheat."

Teaching assistant Naushad Jamani said he can't imagine running a laptop exam without anti-cheating software. But it's not that students today are deliberately more dishonest, he suggested.

It's just that the technology makes cheating so easy — and students don't always think copying from the Internet is cheating.

"They're the Download Generation — the first generation to grow up with technology from the time they were infants — and they feel it's their inalienable right to use technology to their advantage," said Professor James Norrie, director of Ryerson's School of Information Technology Management.

"They figure there's a big honkin' Web out there that's free to use without ever having to give credit."

Norrie said students often seem unaware that information on the Internet should actually be cited, rather than just cut and pasted into an essay.

"They don't get the concept of intellectual property. We're facing a huge culture shift as an entire generation of students comes of age believing in their right to download."

Fourth-year Ryerson business student Sanathan Kassiedass said, "You can see the risks of cheating all the time with students messaging each other on their laptops in class, so having this lockdown software means at least it will be a real test of what people know."