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Original question sent to AAMC-OSR representatives:

My name is Michelle Howard, and I'm one of the OSR reps for Albert Einstein COM. Our administration and course directors are considering running a pilot program to give students access to their exams after taking them. This would be of huge benefit to students' learning, since the previous/current policy only allows those students who failed the exams to see their tests afterward. We are considering a model that is similar to what some other schools have: a proctored session in which students are allowed to see their test, their answers, and the correct answers. This would require students to sign some sort of pledge or affirmation that they will not pass the questions and/or answers to future classes.

My questions to you are these: What type of honor code or pledge does your school have in place? Are students required to sign this at every exam setting, or is it more of a one-time-only type of pledge? Our course directors are very interested in looking at this aspect of accountability as we (hopefully) move to a more learning-friendly policy regarding access to exams.

Answers received from fellow AAMC-OSR representatives:

University of Toledo College of Medicine

Our students sign an honor code pledge during the White Coat Ceremony, which is the Friday before the start of first year classes. This code can be viewed here: (*Acknowledging that a physician is expected to adhere to the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and professionalism, I will strive to uphold these virtues and will neither cheat, deceive, or exploit others, nor tolerate those who do.*). The honor code, while not signed when reviewing exams, encompasses all of your preclinical and clinical academic activities therefore any issue with exam review would be addressed by the honor code committee.

We receive the opportunity to review all preclinical exams (no one reviews M3/M4 shelf exams as these are NBME exams and this is not allowed, similar to the USMLE steps). How it works is that usually one week after the exam, during a designated 2-3 hour window, students may report to a specific lecture hall, turn in an ID (license or student ID) and receive their copy of their exam along with a printed out answer response sheet with their answer, and the correct answer next to it. Students are allowed to talk to one another during this time, but all cell phones, electronic devices, bags/purses, pens/pencils/paper must be in the back of the room and you may not access any of these things at that time. There are approximately 3-5 proctors in the room during these review times to monitor students, distribute exams, etc. I am fairly confident that no testing material has left the room as the proctors have your ID badge so it's not really feasible. This system has worked very efficiently for the 180 students per class that use this and students are grateful to review their exams as a learning tool.

University of California – San Diego

Our 2nd year class developed and signed our own honor code that was more inclusive than just exam honor code at the very beginning of first year and that's really the last official time there's been any discussion about it. As for our tests, we generally get to write down our multiple choice answers on a separate sheet (usually the last page of the exam that we get to rip off) and then after the exam, the course director holds a review and goes over the answer key. It varies from class to class whether they go over every single question with correct answers and explanations of incorrect answers (we had this a lot more in our 1st year basic science courses) or if they just send out the answer key with the a,b,c,d answers and if there are any questions, you can contact the course director to discuss. I can't think of a course where we aren't allowed to see the questions we got wrong in some form or another, either through a large proctored session or individually, even if we didn't fail the exam.

SUNY Downstate

Our school currently takes our tests on our computers. We are all given two options for review. First, we have 20 minutes to review our test at the end of every exam (grading each answer as we go) or we forgo those 20 minutes and review our answers at another time set by the instructors for 20 minutes. They trust that we will be honest and not lie about forgoing the 20 minutes on the test (and they could potentially check if they wanted to).

University of Michigan

Michigan has a very strong honor code. We actually take our exams online anytime over the exam period (normally 3 days) in the medical school computer lab. At the end of each exam, the last three questions ask about if you received any information, if you saw anyone else receive information, and if you upheld the honor code. Immediately after submitting your exam, you receive feedback (including the correct answers to questions you missed with an explanation).

University of Albany

We at Albany Medical College have all students go through a small group discuss about honor code (1 hour long, led by a faculty member and 2 MSIs each) and then sign a pre-established honor code when they reconvene in a large recap section immediately following. This is followed by our white coat ceremony and thus everything is basically on a "white coat" or honor code from that point on. Students only sign it once and it holds true for all 4 years. We ultimately would LOVE our faculty to also sign an honor code but there is surprising resistance here. However, I would strongly advise that you pressure your faculty to do this at your institution if there is a paradigm shift already happening there. It at least doesn't hurt to try.

As for tests:

We take all of them online on the honor code system. Basically, you show up in 1 of 2 classrooms during a pre-established time frame (usually 6am-noon) and you are trusted to not cheat. The honor code we sign states that not only will we cheat but we will also report cheating so that NOT reporting cheating also counts as a violation. There are no proctors present during the test.

To review tests, we usually have 1 or 2 designated times in the following weeks were we go to our classroom, sign in (a proctor is present during this time) and can reopen our tests and look at questions. Since it is computerized, we are able to see the right and wrong answers. We are allowed to use resources such as textbooks while we review, and are also allowed to take very brief, general notes. However, we are not allowed to copy questions and if a professor receives an email which contains a follow up question from a student that is too similar to the written question on the test the student is usually talked to and a class email is sent out warning us not to do things in the future. My first year we reviewed tests slightly differently. We had 5 copies of the test and answer sheets printed out after the exam and you had to go to our dean's office to sign out the copy. You had 60 minutes to review it and had to stay in the office. This system created a ton of work for the secretary who ultimately ended up regulating sign ups as well as a lot of our more ambitious students to complain that they never were able to review tests b/c they were always signed out. This is why we switched systems and since then there have not been any complaints.

Since our school basically runs on the "honor code" here for pretty much everything we have a committee that regulates things. It is for students and is run entirely by students. Basically, 2 reps from each class are selected, including all 4 MD years, and I'm pretty sure 2 from the PA program, 2 from the graduate program and 2 from the NA program. There is a locked mailbox that students can write letters and submit when they feel a violation has occurred. The committee meets, discusses if it warrants investigation, then will conduct an investigation if necessary.

Both our Dean and Vice Dean strongly support an honor code system and it is something that we find works well. However, it warrants your administration to have a lot of trust in students. I would suggest making it a violation NOT to report cheating and really push a change in the overall culture at your school.

University of Pennsylvania

I think it's absurd you don't have access to your exams. We do it under supervision, so unless you memorize questions, it'd be difficult to pass on questions. We sign the big honor code on enrollment and then our answer sheet has a little statement of honor to sign at each exam.

Southern Illinois University

Our school has a similar issue---except NO students, even failing students are not allowed to review their exams in any way. We cannot even review our scan-trons. Additionally, we only have 3 exams (that count) for each year so seeing exams is something that would help ALL students' learning.

As first years, we have 2 exams that only count for 10%. We are allowed to see those. We sign an honor code in the beginning of the school year and are just expected to be on an honor code for the rest of the year. Second year, there is no review of exams at all.

University of New Mexico

At UNM we have an Assessment/Learning Center where students' files are maintained. In the files are the examinations from each block, and we're allowed to check them out with our student ID's. The center has a room with glass doors, and a table that can seat six or so. We can review our tests there, along with an answer key, although we are not permitted to have any electronic devices open nor to take notes.

There's a general understanding among the students that an honor code violation (like cheating or stealing the testing material) would be so bad that we don't have a formal pledge specifically for this. We might sign something early in our first year that we have received the honor code and are aware of what is expected of us.

I hope that helps, I'm happy to answer any more questions. Many students here enjoy being able to review their assessments so they can learn from their mistakes.

Creighton University

I'm at Creighton U in Omaha. The day after a big exam our course director will schedule an "Exam Review and Comment Session" in which the computer lab is closed off for the rest of the school and the computers are locked except for a PDF file which contains the exam and the proper answers.

The purpose of the session is not only for students to see what they missed but also for students to report a question that they believe was poorly worded or wrongly keyed. We're allowed to bring in our textbooks and notes to the session, but no writing utensils are allowed in the lab.

All of the student comments are sent to the program director and the two "Unit Chairs" elected from each class; the students and course lecturers will then meet to review the exam questions together. On an exam of 80 questions I would say that an average of 1-3 questions are bonused or thrown out.

We don't have to sign an honor code before the session or anything like that; the year begins with a talk on professionalism and we're told that duplicating exam answers is a violation of academic honesty and will be treated as though we'd been cheating during the exam. It's usually a fire & brimstone conversation with something like "The #1 thing that residency programs look at isn't scores or recommendations but if you have any academic dishonesty red flags. If they're there, you can forget about matching in a competitive residency because there will be plenty of applicants with clean records."

I can't imagine that signing an affirmation would make much of a difference on student behavior here. Normally the session is only for an hour or so, which is just enough time to review the questions you've missed and to write in any comments that you've got. Students take the sessions very seriously since getting a few bad questions back can make a big difference. I think if somebody were to bring in a pen or pencil by accident they would be tackled Secret Service-style to prevent them from getting a professional misconduct documentation!

We haven't had any incidents in our exam reviews and they're very well attended; I think students know that they are a privilege and that there is too much on the line to bother passing a few questions on to the next year (especially since our questions come out a question bank and change from year-to-year).

University of Kentucky

At the University of Kentucky, we are allowed to review exams immediately following the test. We have a copy of our answers; have the opportunity to see the correct answers; and discuss with professors at that time. At the beginning of every test, we sign an abbreviated section of our honor code related to testing. Our honor code is a lengthy document dealing with all aspects of our education and clinical care. We have a non-punitive committee of students and faculty that oversees its implementation.

Rosalind Franklin University

At Rosalind Franklin University (Chicago Medical School), our exam keys are posted on our learning website after our exam. We aren't given our specific exams back but we do have a sheet during our exams where we are allowed to record our answers so we can check it with the posted key. We do need to sign a pledge during every exam and we also have an honor council (2 reps from each class that are elected) that meets to discuss any issues.

University of Texas – San Antonio

This sounds like a big deal, but hasn't been a problem at UTHSC San Antonio. At our institution, we simply schedule a couple of hours on 1 or 2 days sometime after the exam period for everyone (no matter how well or poorly they performed) to review their exams. We're not allowed to leave the room with the exam or take notes or anything like that. We are just simply given the opportunity to review what we missed. Also, when reviewing the exams, someone may or may not be in the room to "supervise" us. There's no honor code or anything like that. Out of a class of 220+ only a small minority of the class actually takes advantage of the opportunity.

University of Iowa

Most of the exams we take at the University of Iowa are online. For each of these exams we sign a sheet with the log-in information and the honor statement. We do not resign this for paper exams or when we view exams. Also, we view our exams differently depending on paper vs. computer. Paper exams- we get a very small piece of paper to write our letter answers on (very, very tiny) and then can check a copy of our test form during the proctored session. The electronic exams, we have our incorrect answers emailed to us. We can then bring this sheet in with us to check the test.

Washington University – St. Louis

The first page of every exam has a required signature saying that we will not communicate the contents of our exams to anyone else, ever. You can imagine how well that works, but we do sign it.

University of South Florida

Here at the U of South Florida we sign an online honor code agreement before each test. After the test, we are given our results and the wrong answers we gave to questions. We are then allowed to compare our answers to an answer key - the test is placed on a wall in the Office of Educational Affairs and students sign in and out of the area, basically another level of the honor code.

Wake Forest University

At Wake Forest, we have an overall honor code that we must sign when we first start, and it pertains to every aspect of med school, not just exams. We have a student honor council that evaluates and if necessary handles any honor code violations. Both the students and faculty take the honor code seriously, so it seems to work well. On the front page of every exam, we have to either sign our name (physically if the exam is in paper like it was for my class, or electronically for the classes below me) below a brief honor code statement. After the exam, every student has an opportunity to review their

test. We have to go to our student services office and sign out our exam, and we can review the test in a side room they have provided for us. We can't take notes on the exam, but it's nice to be able to review, which if anything helps typical Type A med students get some closure on the exam. This seems to work well for us at Wake.

University of Minnesota – Duluth

Your question comes at a really interesting time for us at the U. We are just switching to a "secure" exam policy where we cannot take our exams with us to review and learn from after the test. Instead, we are given the chance to look over our test in a secure room, compare to an answer key, challenge any questions that we think are out of line or have multiple answers, and then we have to give them back the test booklet so no copies will be floating around. There has been some grumbling and grouching about this change, since it was very nice in the past to a) learn from your wrong answers, and b) use copies of previous year's tests as test preparation. The administration is justifying this move by saying "secure" exams will allow them to have a question bank of solid, proven questions that are well-written. That may be the case, but since we're guinea pigs of a new completely reorganized curriculum this year as well, it's a tough sell.

We do have an honor code, but we don't have to sign any pledges at test-time. It's just part of being a UMN med student. There's the understanding that you won't cheat, and if you see anyone cheating, you will turn them in. I believe this is wrapped into our professionalism and code of ethics, since physicians are expected to be honest, ethical people, and will be held accountable if there is any deviation from those standards.

Eastern Virginia

At EVMS, we do not receive our exams back after they are graded, but we are allowed access to see them. We are only allowed to take a copy of our answer choices out of the exam room. As for access to the exam, each professor here does it a little differently. For some classes we have to email the professor to set up a time to take a look at our actual exam. For other classes the answer key is posted online, but we can still make an appointment to go in and see the questions/exam. And for other classes, the exam with the correct answers marked will be posted on a bulletin board outside the professor's office. All in all, we always have access to our exam (just have to be proactive about it for some classes), we do not have to sign anything if we want to see our exam (we are just expected to always be on the honor code), and we do not have to fail in order to have access to our exam.

Medical College of Georgia

We revamped our exam review policy last year. We make student sign the honor code at the beginning of the year and have the student run honor council go over the rules. Students are required to sign their scantron every test to assure they will abide by the honor code (failure to sign test results in student being unable view their scores/ have score released). Here is what our year 2 curriculum director sends out to the class prior to each exam review

Conditions for Exam Review:

1. Only 6 students at a time will be allowed in the room. There will be no talking among students in the exam review room.
2. Students are not permitted to bring paper, pens/pencils, cell phones or other recording devices to the exam review and may not record questions, answers or notes. Recording questions, answers or notes is an honor code violation.
3. Students will be allowed to view an exam (not their exam).
4. Students will not be allowed to view scantrons. Students should use the answer sheets provided with the exams to record answers and check this against the answer key before coming to review the exam.
5. The purpose of the exam review is to see what questions a student missed. Under no circumstances are students allowed to challenge the answers to an exam question. Exam adjustments will be based on the item statistics only. All students will receive credit for any question adjusted.

Mayo Medical School

At Mayo, we are able to review nearly all the exams we take except the NBME standardized tests that make up a good portion of our final in most blocks. My classmates and I think we should be able to review the NBME exams as well, if only to identify the areas of deficiencies that we have (in preparation for USMLE Step exams). If this could be done in a controlled situation (proctor, time limit, and no notes), that would be great.

Our honor code is as follows:

"By matriculation at Mayo Medical School, the student agrees to abide by general professional standards of honesty, integrity and mutual respect. Such behavior is confidently expected of all students at Mayo. Behavior judged by the administration, students and/or faculty to be illegal, unethical or so objectionable as to be inconsistent with assumption of the role of a physician may be cause for the imposition of probationary status or dismissal for nonacademic reasons. Examples of such behavior are harassment, lying, cheating, stealing and breach of patient confidentiality."

Columbia University

I talked to our class ethics rep, who was involved in the development of an honor code last year, but it sounds like that process hasn't continued any further than some initial meetings. In terms of exams, we have proctored, paper based exams. I don't sign any pledge, although there is a cover page that may say something about not cheating (I haven't actually read it in awhile). We usually get our grades back, along with whatever answer we put for each question (A-E), and the correct answer. There's a test review question after each exam, where students can pick up the actual test they took (each exam comes pre labeled with our name and id, we return everything after the exam), with all of their notes on it, and compare it to their grade/answer sheet. There are faculty present at the review session, and at the end students return their tests, and keep only the grade/answer sheet.

University of Tennessee

At University of Tennessee, students sign pledges each time they take an exam that they will not record or recite any questions. Additionally, if a student wants to review the test after the exam (only M1s have this opportunity), they must again sign a pledge. Reviewing the exam takes place in the student academic support services and is monitored. A student, regardless of their score, may see the exam.

University of Miami

We have a student-written honor code that everyone signs at the beginning of med school and they are supposed to sign it at the beginning of every year thereafter. Although the first and second year class does have a session where they review the answers to each question after exams, they are not currently required to sign the honor code again at each session. To my knowledge, there have not been any issues with students posting or passing around these answers to students in other classes. Overall, most people find these sessions to be very positive. The only issue we've had is some people arguing with professors to accept multiple answers as correct.

University of Washington

Most of our professors let us keep a copy of the exam (and have many past exams posted on the course website) and also provide a key shortly after the exam. There is currently an honor code in preparation, that will be signed by all students upon matriculation, but nothing that must be signed with each test.

The Commonwealth Medical College

Being a new school, we don't have an official honor code but have a group of students actively writing a code. As far as test review goes, we have a scheduled time slot that last usually about an hour and a half where students can get their scores, answer sheet, and review the exam. These sessions are proctored by the professors so that students may ask questions and clarify concerns. At this time, there is no pledge or affirmation that is signed, but rather the session functions on the assumption that students will act professionally and not copy questions and answers to questions.

Mercer University

I am a 2nd year rep from Mercer University SOM in Savannah, GA. Our school actually has a very open policy toward post-test review. We meet as a class and review our tests in a proctored setting. We have access to all of the primary reference materials for the phase and we are able to challenge test questions that we feel were erroneous, confusing, or out of the scope of knowledge for the phase. In many cases, these challenges are addressed and points are returned to students. In terms of an honor code signing or pledge, we really have none. There is an honor code at our school that prohibits the use of dump sheets or other means of academic dishonesty, but its mandate is implied in all settings and there is no need to sign or pledge anything in order to participate in a test review. We are simply required to leave all paper, writing materials, or electronic devices outside the room during the review. To date, this has been a perfectly workable system for our school, with no issues that I am aware of.

University of Wisconsin

Our current policy on the honor code is that the class itself writes it during orientation week. Thus, it varies slightly year to year but as you can imagine certain things like cheating are always included. This has been a great opportunity for students to have input on the code, work together, and meet each other during the first week. Once it is written up, everyone signs it and it gets placed on the wall in a hallway. If you want more information about this and/or our orientation week events, let me know!

As for reviewing tests, everyone can do so. There is a designated review room where students can go to review tests and quizzes. You are not allowed to bring anything in or take notes to avoid cheating. This has, as far as I know, worked well. The only concern the administration has had about this system has been people going in well after exams have finished in an attempt to "point grub." We are planning to limit the time after an exam for review for one week to help ameliorate this.

University of Louisville

Our exams tend to end mid-afternoon on Fridays. After students are finished, copies are made of each student's answer sheets and an answer key is stapled to that copy. Students come and pick up their answers/answer key and can grade themselves to get a score. Then, there is a room set up with the entire exam posted on the walls for students to look over. Students can file a "challenge" to questions at this time. This process usually takes place for a few hours during the mid-afternoon of test day and then from 8am-12pm the following day (which is usually Saturday). Other review times may be set up on an individual basis but are unheard of. Students do not have to sign any honor form to do this. It is in the honor code that students should not pass on knowledge of questions and such to younger students and that copying of any questions will result in suspension or possible dismissal. Students that have not yet taken the exam are dealt with on an individual basis, but are mostly told about professionalism in their situation and asked to honor the system. This seems to work well.

Northwestern University

Northwestern students all sign an honor code as incoming 1st year students - found <http://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/AWOME/current-students/handbook/index.html> . From my knowledge, we never formally recite an honor code. However, we do recite the Declaration of Geneva, once as incoming 1st years and again as 3rd years.

On the front page of every exam there is a statement saying something along the lines of "The work is my own and I did not cheat."

New York University

The honor code, currently, is a statement that affirms they won't cheat and that they won't do anything to compromise the exam. We used to sign this statement every time we took an exam, but now with the advent of computerized examinations, it is more of an implicit acceptance of the honor code (each time). Our school has had trouble (with electronic exams) keeping students from printing out the exam questions during these proctored reviews... But if you folks up there have paper based exams, then the signed statement may suffice.