

# WORKING TOWARD AN EQUITABLE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ONLINE EXAM PROCTORING ENVIRONMENT

**Daniel Woldeab**

*College of Individualized Studies, Metropolitan State University, Saint Paul, Minnesota (U.S.A.)*

## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic created tremendous challenges for our globalized world – and in all aspects of our life. For the education system globally, however, the overnight migration to the virtual space was unbearably jarring. Still, the pandemic did not affect every higher education institution in the same way. Those who were fortunate enough to have mature IT infrastructure in place prior to the pandemic - mostly Western Hemisphere institutions – were able to weather the pandemic and manage the migration with relatively ease. The situation was even more desperate for those who did not have any IT infrastructure altogether, and no meaningful online offering.

As the stay-at-home directives extended from a first to a second semester, sometimes with no end in sight, it was only natural for faculty who relied on the physical classroom for their high-stake exams to venture into online exam proctoring. Many faculty were grappling to understand unfamiliar algorithm-based proctoring software or webcam-based exam proctoring. Among many other factors, this contributed to the wave of popular media reports in the United States claiming that students across the U.S. were constantly fearful of being wrongly flagged for cheating by online proctoring services.

Online proctoring vendors provide multiple levels of service, many of which are not clearly understood by the end user: if the faculty are not fully trained in the particular proctoring service they are using, and do not receive sufficient institutional support in using them, they can end up inflating the level of monitoring appropriate for their particular exam. In the process, they may inadvertently disadvantage some of their students. Although our study found no significant difference when it comes to whether online exam proctoring disadvantages students of different ethnic and socio-economic status, if the online proctoring industry goes unregulated and keeps up its rapid and global expansion, it will present profound challenges to higher education institutions. Therefore, these institutions should pay special attention to how online proctoring may disadvantage students of different ethnic groups due to specific cultural lenses used by these vendors. This presentation draws from three research studies we conducted, over the last eight years. As such, the focus of the presentation is on the need for higher education institutions to advocate for regulations in this industry; to work toward an equitable online proctoring environment; and to aim to minimize students being burdened by unnecessary stress and anxiety that could result from online exam proctoring.

**Keywords:** *Online, exam, proctoring, pandemic, infrastructure.*

---