Item: Best Practices on Invigilated Examinations

Recommendation: Faculty should reduce emphasis on invigilated examinations and instead consider open-book examinations or other methods of assessment. Limited use of invigilated exams may still be needed in some circumstances.

Rationale: Invigilated exams in an online environment can be problematic for both the course instructors and the students.

Context: Traditionally, StFX has had a strong reliance on invigilated examinations, a fact that is reflected in the academic regulations around the percentage of the grade that comes from such examinations. This reflects the in-person experience that we normally have and provides assurance that the person receiving credit for the course did the work. In the present case, this will be more difficult to justify.

In the past, for most courses outside of Continuing & Distance Education (CDE), the occasional example of an off-campus invigilated examination was facilitated by finding an appropriate proctor, such as a school teacher. Doing this for large numbers of students would be impractical, both in terms of finding sufficient numbers of proctors and finding appropriate locations. There is the additional concern of security of the examination itself. Proctoring by non-employees carries with it the cost of either StFX or individual students paying such proctors or having them do our work for free.

Commercial proctoring services, such as ProctorU, are available and is currently used by CDE. It has the advantage of providing what amounts to traditional invigilation but requires the installation of software on the students' computer, specific (although not onerous) technical requirements, and reasonably reliable internet.

- The question of reliable internet access is a concern for us. Although internet access is a given in the online education model presently proposed, interruptions in service during an exam are much more consequential than during a class, and many of our students live in rural areas with spotty internet.
- There are also privacy issues with monitoring the examination, and the question of whether all students could find an acceptable space.
- Broad adoption of this service would require significant technical support. This support would have to be provided by ITS, which is already heavily burdened.
- In order to use the service, students need to arrange well ahead of time for a proctor and time slot, and sometimes not all students writing a specific exam can be accommodated at the same time.
- Finally, ProctorU charges about US$34 per proctored examination, which would be a heavy burden for a student writing several final exams, even if any other exams were not included. This burden would not be equally shared, since it depends on the choices made by individual professors. For example, one professor might have two term tests and a final all proctored in this way, while another in a similar course might not use the service at all. For StFX to ameliorate this concern by assuming the cost would be prohibitive.

We recognize that in some situations, faculty may still choose some form of invigilation. Some faculty may choose to use ProctorU or a similar service. Also, faculty could use "home-made" solutions such as having the students write while being observed by way of MS Teams or other software, but this has

similar privacy and internet issues, and there is no certainty that the student does not have access to other resources on this or another device.   If faculty could arrange for in-person proctoring, that could also be a solution, but problematic if the whole idea is to reduce interpersonal contact.

Assignments or examinations that require students to complete them in real-time could be used on the grounds that limitations in time reduce the opportunity for cheating, but consideration would have to be given to how some students might react to the time pressure.   In addition to exams, other forms of assessment such as presentations, class debates, or class, group, or individual, could also be used

Finally, none of the technological solutions of which we are aware can handle an exam on which solutions need to be written or drawn, and then scanned in or photographed to be submitted.

Moving Forward:

 Given that there is no acceptable technological solution to the problem of invigilation, faculty should use other methods of assessment where possible. The most obvious is the open book examination, but there are others, which are the subject of another recommendation from this group. In addition, the practice of invigilation has its origins in the problem of academic dishonesty, which is considered in still another recommendation.