# Have we taken security too far?

What's the difference between a medical student and a **convict**? The answer: A convict doesn't pay $50,000 a year for the privilege of being fingerprinted and **patted down**. I am referring, of course, to the increasingly **stringent security measures** that have come to characterize modern educational testing. As student evaluation techniques have migrated from face-to-face assessment to computer-based exams administered in dedicated testing centers, evaluators have become less and less likely to know examinees, leading to **heightened precautions** around exam security.

I recently interviewed a group of fourth-year medical students who had just taken Step 2 of the United States Medical Licensing Clinical Knowledge Examination at test-administration centers. Each of the students had paid $560 for the privilege, and had **devoted** nine hours to the single-day exam, which consists of eight sections of 40 to 45 questions each. Over the day, they received a total break time of 45 minutes. Students must pass the exam to obtain a medical license, and scoring well is an important factor in gaining admission to competitive medical specialties. So anxiety tends to **run high**.

This **inevitable** anxiety is compounded by Checkpoint Charlie-esque security measures. IDs are checked. Each student wears a unique number on his or her shoulder throughout the day. Students are fingerprinted each time they enter and exit the testing room (up to 16 times). They are patted down and asked to roll up their pants legs and pull their pockets inside-out. If they wear a jacket or sweater into the exam room, they cannot take it off. They are warned that they will be under constant **camera surveillance**.

One of the students, a former U.S. marine, said he had found the entire atmosphere of the exam **eerily** familiar. He had served in Iraq, helping to preside over the return of inhabitants to Fallujah after the city's recapture by U.S. forces. "It was weird," he said. "They were using many of the exact same procedures and equipment we used in Fallujah. It took so long for them to verify identities that you almost didn't dare leave the room, for fear you couldn't get back in time. I finally had to show one of the examiners how to do it properly." Of course, these techniques are not merely for medical students. Aspiring accountants and architects, students sitting for the GRE, and prospective employees of Silicon Valley companies are all subjected to these medieval measures.

Some might say that a high-security approach to testing students is not only necessary but **laudable**. In the case of medical testing, the health of the nation is a vital resource, and we cannot afford to place it in the hands of physicians who might have succeeded through academic

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dishonesty. Who would want a loved one to be cared for by a physician who had cheated on the medical-licensing exam? As public policy, exam hawks argue, we should demand the very highest security in all such testing.

But perhaps we have **gone overboard**. After all, the core of the patient-physician relationship is trust. The Hippocratic Oath, which has shaped the ethics of medicine for many centuries, **enjoins** the physician to respect patients' privacy and dignity and to always put each patient's interests first. We **entrust** to our physicians all sorts of matters we would not share with anyone else—private details of our health and personal relationships, access to intimate parts of our bodies, sometimes even our lives. We want to trust our physicians. No one is arguing that security is unnecessary, but perhaps we haven't quite yet found **the sweet spot.**

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**Adapted from The Chronicle of Higher Education. Richard Gunderman**

## Answer the questions:

1. **Exam security has become stricter because ...**

**a.most exams are done on computers**

**b.evaluators don't often know the examinees' identities**

**c.evaluators prefer not to know who the examinees are**

2. **The examination ...**

**a.is a privilege to take**

**b.is unnecessarily long**

**c.puts students under great pressure**

3. **When they are taking the exam, students ...**

**a.are watched all the time**

**b.must remain in total silence**

**c.must ask for permission to take their sweaters of**

4. **According to the ex-marine, ...**

**a.the staff were not competent enough**

**b.identification processes are always time consuming**

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c.it was advisable not to leave the exam room till the end

5. According to the writer, the security measures described are ...

a.peculiar

b.outrageous

c.far too strict

6. The writer concludes that ...

a.security is not necessary

b.a midpoint should be reached

c.it's getting difficult to rely on our GPs

## Vocabulary practice

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