NEWS RELEASE

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ACM US Technology Policy Committee Releases Statement on Remote Test Administration Systems

New York, NY, August 19, 2021 – The Association for Computing Machinery's US Technology Policy Committee (ACM USTPC) recently released a new Statement on Principles for the Development and Deployment of Equitable, Private, and Secure Test Administration Systems. In what's apparently the first document of its kind, the ACM USTPC Statement proposes guiding policies and principles for the design, use and oversight of Remote Testing Administration (RTA) software of the kind widely used to proctor the exams of perhaps tens of millions of students globally.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, K-12 schools and universities around the world have offered online instruction, along with remote testing, to ensure that students could fulfill their educational requirements. As online education offers both convenience for students and lower operational costs for institutions, analysts believe it will become pervasive in the coming years.

At the same time, many are concerned that remote testing allows students to more easily cheat on exams. Others are concerned about the ability of RTA systems to keep personal student data secure, and question whether these systems are equitable and accessible to all. Given RTA technology's potential to cause tremendous harm and injustice, the Statement speaks to critical educational, cybersecurity, and social concerns ... and it does so just as millions of students of all ages return to their classrooms.

Remote test administration systems (RTAs), are software systems developed by private companies. In addition to designing the interface for students to take tests, as well as built-in tools for grading exams, private RTA companies advertise their systems as having the same level of test security and respectability as tests that are administered "live" in classrooms with in-person proctors. RTAs use a variety of methods to detect cheating from video applications that monitor a person's gaze during the test to ensure they are not looking at notes or another computer, to taking screenshots of the student's desktop during the exam, to specialized AI applications.

The growing use of RTA systems raises a range of important questions, including efficacy: Are these systems really effective at detecting cheating?; accessibility: Are these systems useable for someone with a disability, or with inadequate access to the internet? and privacy: Will these systems be able to access and share a student's personal data in an unauthorized manner?

Recognizing the growing prevalence of RTA technology, as well as the fact that important concerns about its development and use have not been comprehensively addressed, the ACM USTPC Statement outlines several guiding principles for those who develop and provide remote test administration software. The guiding principles are organized along five main areas: equity, privacy, security, accessibility, and efficacy. Among its tenets, the USTPC Statement recommends that developers and providers of RTA systems must:

- ensure equitable outcomes for marginalized learners;
- use end-to-end encryption;
- guarantee that data collection must be targeted, minimized, and transparent;
- not access the local data on the test-taker's computer;
- voluntarily share all pertinent information when determining that someone was involved in academic misconduct;
- assure that their systems are accessible to all potential users, including users with disabilities, and those who have limited equipment or weak internet connectivity; and
- develop uniform benchmarks and certification procedures to assess and document the comparative effectiveness of RTA systems in identifying students receiving unauthorized help

"Automated test monitoring technology that observes a student's behavior has become widespread," explains ACM USTPC Chair Jeremy Epstein. "However, such technology is opaque, and may introduce additional bias as well as privacy risks. The ACM USTPC is ahead of the curve in putting forth principles that can be applied to test-taking software. Our goal is to help school systems and universities know what questions to ask in acquiring and using such systems, and to help providers of such systems think about characteristics to include in the design of their products."

About the ACM US Technology Policy Committee

ACM's US Technology Policy Committee (USTPC) serves as the focal point for ACM's interaction with all branches of the US government, the computing community, and the public on policy matters related to information technology. The Committee regularly educates and informs Congress, the Administration, and the courts about significant developments in the computing field and how those developments affect public policy in the United States.

About ACM

ACM, the Association for Computing Machinery, is the world's largest educational and scientific computing society, uniting computing educators, researchers and professionals to inspire dialogue, share resources and address the field's challenges. ACM strengthens the computing profession's collective voice through strong leadership, promotion of the highest standards, and recognition of technical excellence. ACM supports the professional growth of its members by providing opportunities for life-long learning, career development, and professional networking.

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