Contract cheating: the state of the art?

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My focus is on those that seek profit...

1. Sophisticated business models
2. Risks to students
3. The issue of blackmail
Students enlist MyMaster website to write essays, assignments

By Amy McNelis and Lisa Visentin
Updated November 12, 2014 — 1.05am, first published at 12.15am

Thousands of students have enlisted a Sydney company to write essays and assignments for them as well as sit online tests, paying up to $1000 for the service. Their desire to succeed threatens the credibility and international standing of some of our most prestigious institutions.

A Fairfax Media investigation has uncovered a sophisticated online business, which has produced thousands of university assignments and turned over hundreds of thousands of dollars since it began operating in May 2012.
MyMaster – November 2014

- Business: 17.5
- Accounting: 8
- Management: 5
- Marketing: 3.5
- Economics: 2
- Human Resources: 1
Exposure draft – new legislation 2019


Tackling contract cheating

The Government has released an exposure draft of legislation that will make it an offence to provide or advertise academic cheating services in higher education (often referred to in higher education circles as 'contract cheating').

Contract cheating activity, if left unchecked, poses a significant threat to the integrity and reputation of Australia's higher education sector both domestically and internationally.

The draft legislation is aimed at those who provide cheating services and not at students. Students who cheat will continue to be subject to institutions' own academic integrity policies, processes and academic sanctions. These institutional policies are not affected by the new legislation.

Jail time, website blocks for uni cheating services

Draft legislation calls for $200,000 fine or 2 years jail.

Federal Education minister Dan Tehan has revealed draft legislation over the weekend that would punish those providing or advertising cheating services to university students, a growing issue among Australia’s academic institutions.


Moral Panic: The Contemporary Context of Academic Integrity

The impetus of the contemporary academic integrity movement in colleges and universities can perhaps be traced to the 1960s, when a multi-institutional study declared academic dishonesty to be rampant.

But... Newton (2018) identified historic cheating rates of 3.5% rose to 15.7% when dataset restricted to 2014 onwards.

Outsourcing is the modern way...

How it works:

MyMaster service advertised on university toilet doors and social media.
Student lodges an assignment request online and uploads the outline and lecture notes or readings.
Student pays 50% deposit.
Up to 100 writers log onto website searching for jobs.
Writer accepts job and completes half the assignment.
If student is satisfied, payment is complete and writer finishes job.

smh.com.au/national/education/students-enlist-mymaster-website-to-write-essays-assignments-20141111-11k0xg.html
It is startlingly easy to outsource your work

Source: freelancer.com

Setting up your account < 5 minutes
Getting replies/help = within an hour
Assignment complete = within hours/days
I am not the smartest student in the class so please make the paper believable (a 80%-90% grade range)

Sophisticated e-commerce models

• Early vendor sites were simple…

• Off the shelf e-commerce packages now available

• Editorial quality control

• Hierarchy of authors

The professional essay writing service for students who can't even.

Get your essay written starting at just $23.60 a page

Choose Your Writer

- Exceptional Tutor
  - #1 in global rating
  - 100% success rate
  - 94 finished papers, 69 customer reviews
  - Hire

- Superb Essays
  - #18 in global rating
  - 100% success rate
  - 251 finished papers, 176 customer reviews
  - Hire

- Prof. Goodwill
  - #4 in global rating
  - 96% success rate
  - 449 finished papers, 301 customer reviews
  - Hire

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What can we do?

This is probably not the answer.
(some of the) major risks to students

- Disagreement between supplier and purchaser in setting up
- Post-hoc supplier/purchaser disagreement as a consequence of submission and marking
- Supplier data storage is insecure
- Trusted parties (friends, etc) share the information
- Disclosure requirements for professions
- Issues can arise YEARS later – more to be lost
And another thing.
Blackmail.

https://www.weeklystandard.com/eric-felten/youve-got-blackmail
If education is key, what do our students know?

And… (how) do we teach them?

Influencing Factors

- Risk of being caught versus reward (Rigby et al. 2015)
- Dissatisfaction with the educational environment, LOTE and international status (Bretag et al. 2018)
- Time factors, laziness and lack of understanding (Foltýneck and Králková, 2018)

**New Perspective**

General Student Population
Does the awareness of the possibility of blackmail change students’ attitudes and behaviours toward outsourcing assessments to contract cheating websites?

**Blackmail**

- Individual
  - Student receives communication demanding further payment and threatening exposure

**How?**

- Individual
  - Student contacted by contract cheating website

- Individual
  - Student assigned a pass or fail grade

- Individual
  - Period of time elapses (weeks, months, years)

- University
  - Cheating detected
  - Individual
    - Low vulnerability to blackmail

- University
  - Cheating undetected
  - Individual
    - High vulnerability to blackmail

Individual
- Student submits bought assessment as their own work
Two very similar scenarios, with additional information about blackmail leading up to (and in) Scenario 2.

Additional questions (adaptive, dependent on responses).

1. What do students know?
2. How do they react?
3. What can we learn?

https://www.weeklystandard.com/eric-felten/youve-got-blackmail

Ethics Approval Reference Number HRE2019-0080 at Curtin University
## Scenarios 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
<th>Option 3</th>
<th>Option 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price of assessment</strong></td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possible academic consequence</strong></td>
<td>Repeat the unit, receive academic warning</td>
<td>0% for unit, receive academic warning</td>
<td>Repeat the unit, receive academic warning</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk of being caught</strong></td>
<td>1 in 100</td>
<td>1 in 1000</td>
<td>1 in 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade you are likely to receive</strong></td>
<td>First class pass</td>
<td>Upper second class pass</td>
<td>Third class pass</td>
<td>Dependant on your work and ability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings: Are you familiar with the term CC?

- Familiar: 75%
- Not familiar: 21%
- Not sure: 4%

n = 587
Findings: What do you think about CC? Right? Wrong?

- it is OK: 1%
- not sure: 2%
- it is wrong: 97%

n = 587
Findings: Why is CC OK?

The reason that I cheat is mostly because I didn’t study. I am confident if I studied I would have the answer. I just wanted good marks.

Everyone cheats on online exams so how is this any different?

 Doesn’t affect anyone other than yourself.
Findings: Other comments

Cheating devalues my degree, and it devalues the institution.

Entry to Honours is competitive and it is unfair if I don’t get in because others cheated.

Cheaper to cheat than to pay for a repeat of the unit.
Findings: Do you know of any cases of blackmail?

- direct/indirect knowledge of person: 2%
- heard in the media or other source: 6%
- not heard: 92%

n = 587
Findings: What happened?

I was appalled…

Firstly, that my friend would consider a method of cheating that could get her expelled.

Secondly, that the website had the audacity to ask for more money despite the spoken contract of $100.
Findings: What happened?

Company required an additional fee from friend to keep quiet regarding cheating.

Once they graduated the site threatened to expose them and make sure their graduation certificate gets taken away from them.

Basically they asked for consistent micro payments from students.
Findings: Which is worse, and what would you do?

Getting caught by my institution is **worse** than being blackmailed (68%)
Findings: How many chose to contract cheat in the Scenario?

14 in Scenario 1, about 2.4%

All 14 were Domestic students
All 14 had English as the language spoken at home

7 cheated in Scenario 2 (after blackmail mentioned).
Findings: Why did you still cheat after blackmail mentioned?

The blackmail could be a bluff and it most likely won't happen to you.

...a smarter idea would be false email address and names, and alternate payment methods to avoid the blackmail situation all together
The only thing more expensive than education is ignorance.

- Benjamin Franklin

https://medium.com/@mleung1/education-reform-is-school-choice-the-answer-6d792acae15