

Contract Cheating

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Contract cheating is a “form of academic dishonesty where students get academic work completed on their behalf, which they then submit for academic credit as if they had created it themselves.”² For example, a student may pay a third party to write an essay, take an exam, or provide answers to a test, problem, or assignment. Not all forms of this practice involve payment. Posting or sharing assignments, exam questions and/or answers online or via social media also constitutes contract cheating. Family members completing assignments on behalf of their child or sibling is another common, yet difficult to detect, example. According to a 2012 Turnitin survey, 7 per cent of U.S. students admitted to having purchased an assignment at least once.³ While the exact prevalence of contract cheating in the postsecondary education system is unknown (due to the inherent underground nature of the practice), the potential negative impact of this new form of cheating on the value of students’ credentials and the integrity of their education is undeniable.

Fortunately, there are a number of steps faculty can take to discourage contract cheating. At the forefront of these preferred practices⁴ is thoughtful assessment design. Meaningful assessments linked to clearly-articulated learning outcomes and tailored to students’ interests promote engagement and learning and may reduce incidents of cheating.

Ways to combat contract cheating include:

- creating meaningful assessments – promotes student engagement
- having students write in class – requires students to produce original work
- knowing your student’s voice – helps to identify third-party writers
- reducing pressure points – flexible due dates and other stress-reducers can decrease the incentive to cheat
- carefully proctoring examinations – prevents impersonation of students

- always using plagiarism-detection tools such as SafeAssign – it can detect “recycled” assignments
- detecting contract cheating – creates a deterrent for other students

Seneca is a member of the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), which is an American organization that focuses on combatting cheating, plagiarism, and academic dishonesty in higher education. Seneca will draw upon the resources of the ICAI and the regional body, the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario (AICO), to inform our academic integrity program. Each year, the ICAI encourages its over 290 member institutions to participate in its International Day of Action against Contract Cheating. The purpose is to spread awareness about what ‘contract cheating’ is and speak out against it.

As part of the development of Seneca’s Academic Integrity program, Seneca will be participating in this global event in October 2018 with the intent to engage faculty, students, and staff, and to ensure clarity and consistency regarding academic integrity across the college. More information will become available to the college community in the months leading up to the event.

To learn more about contract cheating, visit the resources listed below and the [Assessment resources](#) on the [The Teaching & Learning Centre](#) website.

Resources

¹Bertram Gallant, T. (2008). Academic Integrity in the 21st Century: A Teaching and Learning Imperative: ASHE Higher Education Report, Volume 33, Number 5. San Francisco, CA. Wiley-Jossey Bass.

²[contractcheating.com](#) website by Thomas Lancaster and Robert Clarke

³[Paying for plagiarism webcast](#) by Turnitin

⁴[Excellence with Integrity: Combating Contract Cheating](#) by the University of California, San Diego

View the [December 2017 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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