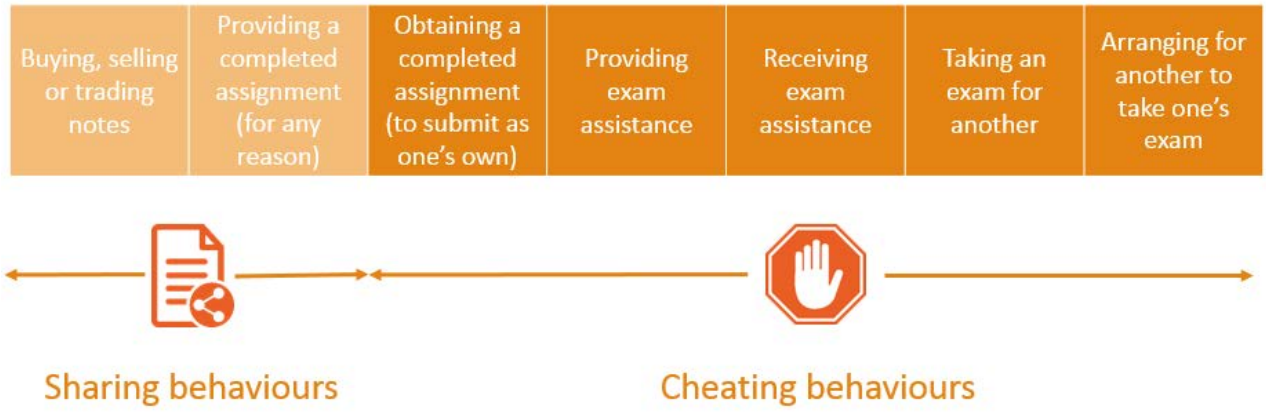
contract cheating and assessment design

Students share their work a lot
(and this may lead to contract cheating)

Findings from a survey of 14,086 Australian university students found that students frequently share their academic work with others (Bretag & Harper et al. 2018). Fifteen percent of students reported buying, selling or trading notes, while 27% had provided someone else with a completed assignment (for any reason). In general, students are sharing work with people they know – friends, other students, partners and family. The data indicated that students saw the benefits of collaborating and of obtaining assignment exemplars to assist with the completion of assessment tasks.

Spectrum of student 'outsourcing' behaviours (see Bretag & Harper et al. 2018)



> *We share past and current notes and assignments to **work out issues with the current module that's being taught**; there're always discrepancies, especially when it's a different lecturer. We **learn from the mistakes** made in the past, **details to look for** and **gauge the standards required** (Student 119, Non-cheating Group).*

A 'slippery slope'?

The risk inherent to sharing (even when done with altruistic and good intentions) is that some students may copy or adapt the work of others, and then submit it as their own work. Students who reported engaging in cheating were more than *twice as likely* to also report engaging in some form of sharing. In addition, they were more likely to have paid money, used a professional service, or used a file-sharing website for this purpose.

What can be done?

1. Provide teaching staff with adequate time, workload and professional development to ensure that:
   a. Assessment instructions are clearly articulated and annotated exemplar assignments made available
   b. There is sufficient time in class to discuss the potential pitfalls of 'sharing'
2. Engage support units (eg academic development, library) to assist teachers to develop curriculum and pedagogy which reflects 'real world' sharing based on ethical collaboration.
3. Develop disciplinary guidelines and examples about appropriate sharing in assessment.
4. Use marketing campaigns to caution students against online websites offering sharing *and* cheating services.

References

Bretag, T., Harper, R., Burton, M., Ellis, C., Newton, P., Saddiqui, S., Rozenberg, P & van Haeringen, K. (2018). Contract cheating: A survey of Australian university students, *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1462788

Harper, R., Bretag, T., Ellis, C., Newton, P., Rozenberg, P., Saddiqui, S., & van Haeringen, K. (2018). Contract cheating: a survey of Australian university staff. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1462789

Further resources available at www.cheatingandassessment.edu.au
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