

Based on responses from 14,086 Australian university students, it was found that three key factors influence contract cheating behaviour: Language other than English (LOTE) status, the perception that there are 'lots of opportunities to cheat', and dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment (Bretag & Harper et al., 2018). Most contract cheating occurs between students and their friends/family members, with commercial services used relatively rarely.

Scenario

Stephen Walker is a first year student in Educational Studies. He is a mature student in his 40s who used to work as a security guard but wants to 'better himself', having struggled at school. He keeps his personal life private, unlike his fellow students. He started well, and was bright and engaged in class, but struggled with assignments. Stephen ultimately failed the first year. He is now retaking the first year while his fellow students have progressed. He is extremely dissatisfied with the teaching and learning and environment. Stephen's new classmates perceive him as bitter and surly; he blames everyone else for his predicament. He frequently complains that the academic staff are not supportive and that his fellow classmates are 'childish' and 'immature'. As his lecturer, you notice a dramatic improvement in the standard of his written work towards the end of the year. The rumour amongst his classmates is that he talks of 'paying for a little extra help'. Eventually two of the students come to see you to complain that they think Stephen has been using contract cheating services to complete his assignments. This is causing resentment in the class and the students who have come to see you are worried that others are going to start contract cheating 'because if Stephen doing it then we might as well too'.

Points for discussion

1. How could you determine whether Stephen is doing his own work?
2. What evidence would you collect before proceeding with an investigation, and how?
3. What other explanations might there be for the change in Stephen's performance?
4. How likely do you think the different explanations are?
5. In either case (cheating or an alternative explanation) how would you address the disquiet within the class?

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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