

Based on responses from 14,086 Australian university students and 1,147 Australian academic staff, it is clear that academic staff and students have very different concerns about contract cheating. Most staff (76.5%) reported being moderately to extremely concerned about contract cheating, while a majority of students were only slightly or not at all concerned (Harper & Bretag et al., 2018).

Scenario

Brad Smith teaches a second year social science research subject that is offered in multiple locations and online. Brad is concerned about contract cheating and wants to reduce opportunities for his students to cheat, and increase the likelihood he will detect contract cheating if it happens. Brad asks students to write a research report for a 'senior policy advisor'. Each student is given a unique research question and dataset, with which they must write a report and draw conclusions. The students are asked to submit the report in stages, so Brad can see their progress and give feedback: introduction (10%), introduction, methods and results (20%), introduction, methods, results, discussion and conclusions (30%). The final assessment for the subject is an exam of 50 MCQs (40%).

Brad does not re-use research questions or datasets from one subject offering to the next. Brad uses text-matching software so all student submissions are checked and saved for future comparisons. Every year, Brad identifies a range of academic integrity breaches. This year: two on-campus students colluded to complete the written assignment; five students (a mix of on-campus and online students) copied diagrams for use in the report, and one student used an assignment from a previous year – detected because the research question and dataset were different to the one she was assigned.

Points for discussion

1. To what extent does changing the contextual features of an assessment task deter students from engaging in cheating behaviours?
2. Are there any forms of cheating that Brad would be unlikely to detect through this assessment?
3. Could Brad have improved on his assessment plan?
4. Is the assessment task 'authentic'?

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/

Supported by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training.



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