# Contract cheating:

# What educators can do when their students are getting third parties to undertake their assessments

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# Objectives for today

1. Share what I have learnt about contract cheating
2. Offer some ideas about how to combat it in your papers
3. Experiment (it's my first time!) with the xorro.com audience participation tool
4. Invite you all to actively participate in my session using your device (encouraged, not compulsory) – if you don't have a device, please consider sharing with someone near you

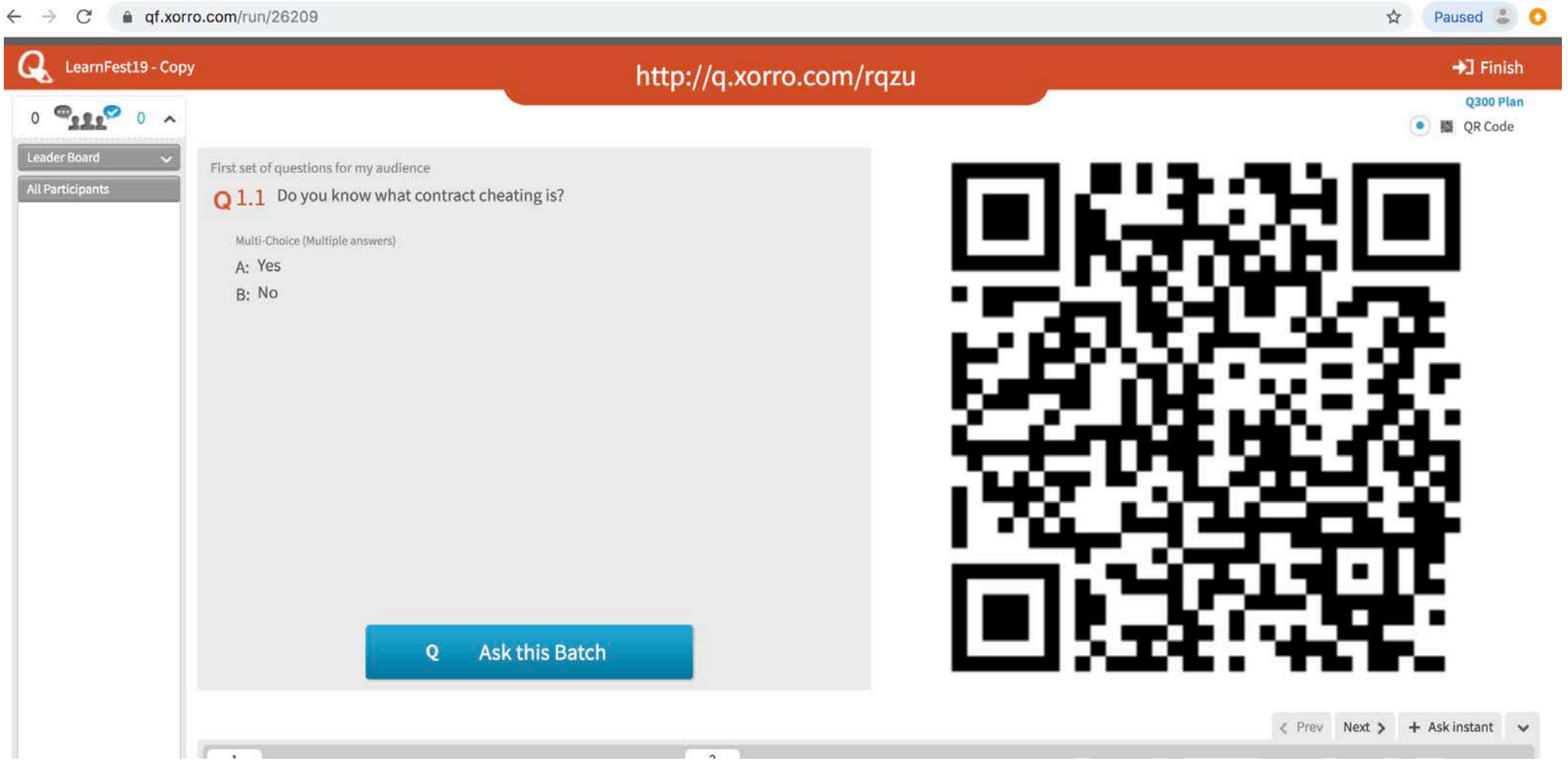
*I'll have 5 minutes of question time if xorro doesn't work for me as planned (if xorro works, there might not be time for verbal questions and comments)*

We are using xorro.com for audience participation
Please hold your camera over the QR code…or type the URL into your internet browser
Create an alias (nickname or made-up name) – then Log in
Answer the 4 questions

XORRO

http://q.xorro.com/rqzu

# Run the first batch of questions on xorro….finish the batch…see the results



Q1 Do you know what contract cheating is?

Q2 Does money have to change hands?

**“…when a student submits work that has been completed for them by a third party, irrespective of the third party’s relationship with the student, and whether they are paid or unpaid.”**

- - Rowena **Harper,** T **Bretag**, C Ellis, P Newton, P Rozenberg, S Saddiqui and K van Haeringen (2018) “Contract cheating: a survey of Australian university staff” Studies in Higher Education, 1.

Payment?

It doesn’t matter whether the student pays a fee or not (in Harper and Bretag’s definition)

# What does “contract cheating” look like?

- Student finds a website & pays a fee to have someone write an essay for them
- Student asks a family member to create an assignment for them for free
- Student asks a fellow student to do an online test for them

- “Contract cheating” includes exam impersonation –

  Check out the SBS documentary “Pens for Hire” available on Youtube if interested

- My session/research is mainly concerned with **contract cheating** when it involves **obtaining an assignment from a third party**

# Some other terms you might have heard…

- Commercial contract cheating
- Outsourcing of assessment
- Ghostwriting – work tailored to the student's requirements
- Essay Mills
- Cheat sites

# Who?

- **Providers:**
  - Custom assignment services
  - Websites
  - Friends & family
  - Private tutors
  - Student services shops/centres

- **Customers**: students
  - International
  - Domestic
  - Undergraduate
  - Postgraduate
  - Potential students (applicants for scholarships, postgraduate places)

# What?

Source: Lines (2016, p898)

- Essays
- Theses/dissertations
- Term papers
- Research papers
- Help with coursework
- Book reviews
- Assignments
- Reports
- Literature reviews & bibliographies
- Law essays
- College admission essays
- Research proposals
- Articles

# Who is concerned about contract cheating?

- Universities
  - See universities like Waikato University who have an ”Academic Integrity Policy” visible in paper outlines
- Accreditation agencies
  - The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK has been active in this area
  - Australia’s Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has released guidance notes
- Non-profits
  - See the International Centre for Academic Integrity at www.academicintegrity.org

# Is contract cheating a problem?

- Harder to detect than plagiarism – software for detection is in its early stages
- Higher quality work than before
- Large classes, less personal interaction/knowledge about students
- **7% of students in higher education self-reported having purchased an assignment**
  - (Wallace and Newton 2014)

- 2014-2018, Newton found that **15.7% of students admitted to paying someone else to complete work for them (ie 31 million students globally):**

  - https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2018.00067/full
  - Newton (2018)

- The bad news is…
- The other bad news is…

# Discuss Xorro Q3:
# Have you ever received work that you suspected was not the work of your student?

In the next few slides,  please think:

How does your answer compare with some of the research…

# Research: what does it tell us?

- Research project in Australia – Contract Cheating and Assessment Design
  - 8 Australian universities: 14,086 students + 1137 educators
  - 2 years duration
  - Funded & supported by Australian Government Office for Learning
  - To develop an evidence-based framework for assessment design to minimize contract cheating

- They published their findings in two papers and a website: https://cheatingandassessment.edu.au/

Rowena Harper, T. Bretag, C. Ellis, P. Newton, P. Rozenburg, S.Saddiqui & K. Van Haeringen "Contact cheating: a survey of Australian university staff" (2018) *Studies in Higher Education*

Tracey Bretag, R. Harper, M. Burton, C. Ellis, P. Newton, P. Rozenburg, S. Saddiqui & K. Van Haeringen "Contact cheating: a survey of Australian university students" (2018) *Studies in Higher Education*

# Some key findings from Australian research

- Nearly **70% of faculty survey suspected, at least once, that work submitted had been written by someone other than the student**
  - Of those, nearly 40% suspected this on more than 5 occasions

- The most common signals that alerted them to this fact were:
  - Their knowledge of the students academic ability (70.6%)
  - Their knowledge of the student's linguistic abilities (62.2%)
  - Use of technology matching software, a high text match (49.4%)
  - Assignment was off-topic (36.3%)

Source: Rowena Harper, T. Bretag, C. Ellis, P. Newton, P. Rozenburg, S.Saddiqui & K. Van Haeringen "Contact cheating: a survey of Australian university staff" (2018) *Studies in Higher Education*

# Fake history essays: how did they fare?

- Lisa Lines (2016) surveyed the quality of ghostwriting services available to students by the 30 top-ranked ghostwriting websites on Google
- 2 essays were purchased from 13 businesses (in answer to the same 2 questions):
  - a 2000-word undergraduate history essay
  - a 2000-word Masters coursework history essay
- Essays were graded by three academics from history departments in the Group of Eight universities
  - Note: they thought they were grading real papers for a benchmarking study
- KEY FINDINGS…

- The quality was higher than expected
- Majority of essays were given a passing grade
- Two essays were awarded a High Distinction
- One was awarded a distinction
- Out of 13 undergraduate essays: 2 received an F
- Out of 13 Masters papers:  6 received an F
- Turnitin did not detect plagiarism in any of the undergraduate papers
- Turnitin detected plagiarism in 3 of the 13 Masters paper
- The plagiarized papers often scored well with Turnitin
- **No essays were failed because of suspected contract cheating**

# 3 factors that increase contract cheating

1. Dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment

2. A perception that there are “lots of opportunities to cheat

3. Speaking a language other than English (LOTE) at home

Faculties where there was a perception of a higher likelihood for cheating:

- Commerce and engineering

“…statistics suggest that the use of ghostwriting services is endemic and largely undetected by universities…”

**Lines (2016, p894)**

# Lots and lots of websites offer essay-writing services… some examples

# EDUBIRDIE.COM



Chrome File Edit View History Bookmarks People Window Help 96% Fri 2:32 AM Myra Williamson

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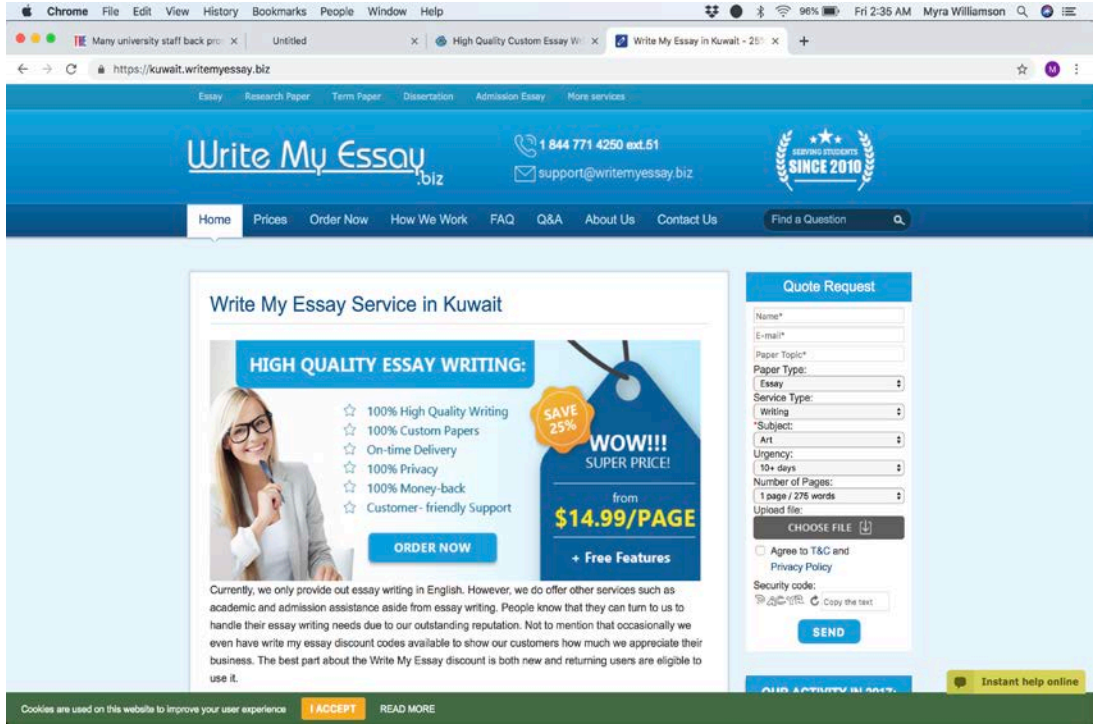
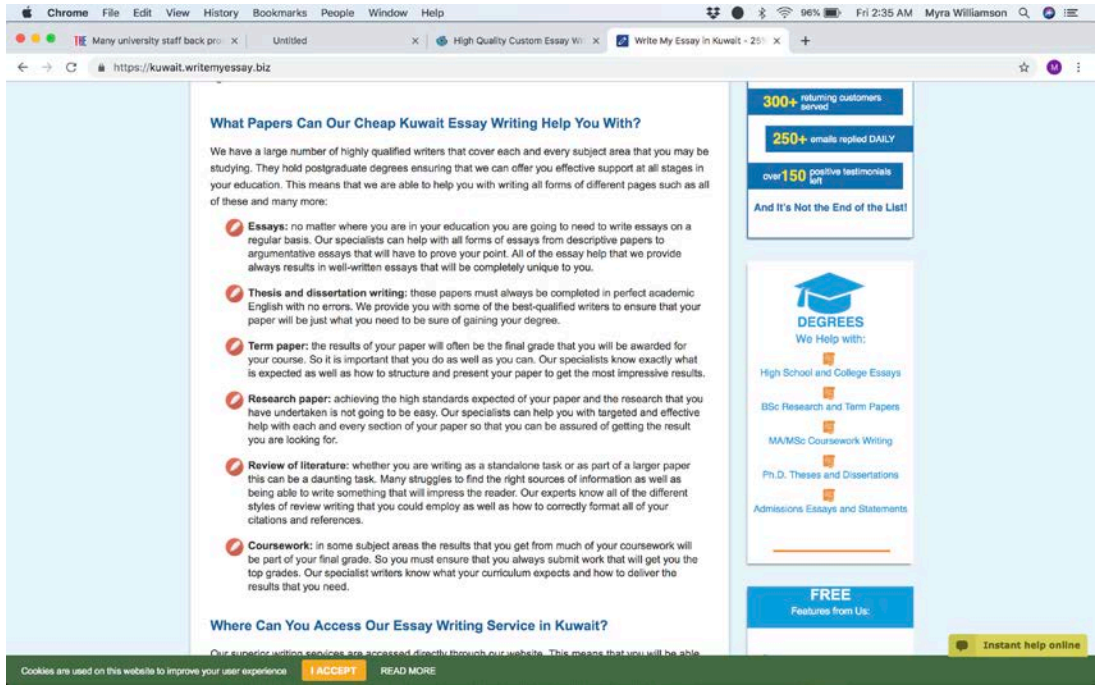



**You can order anything!**

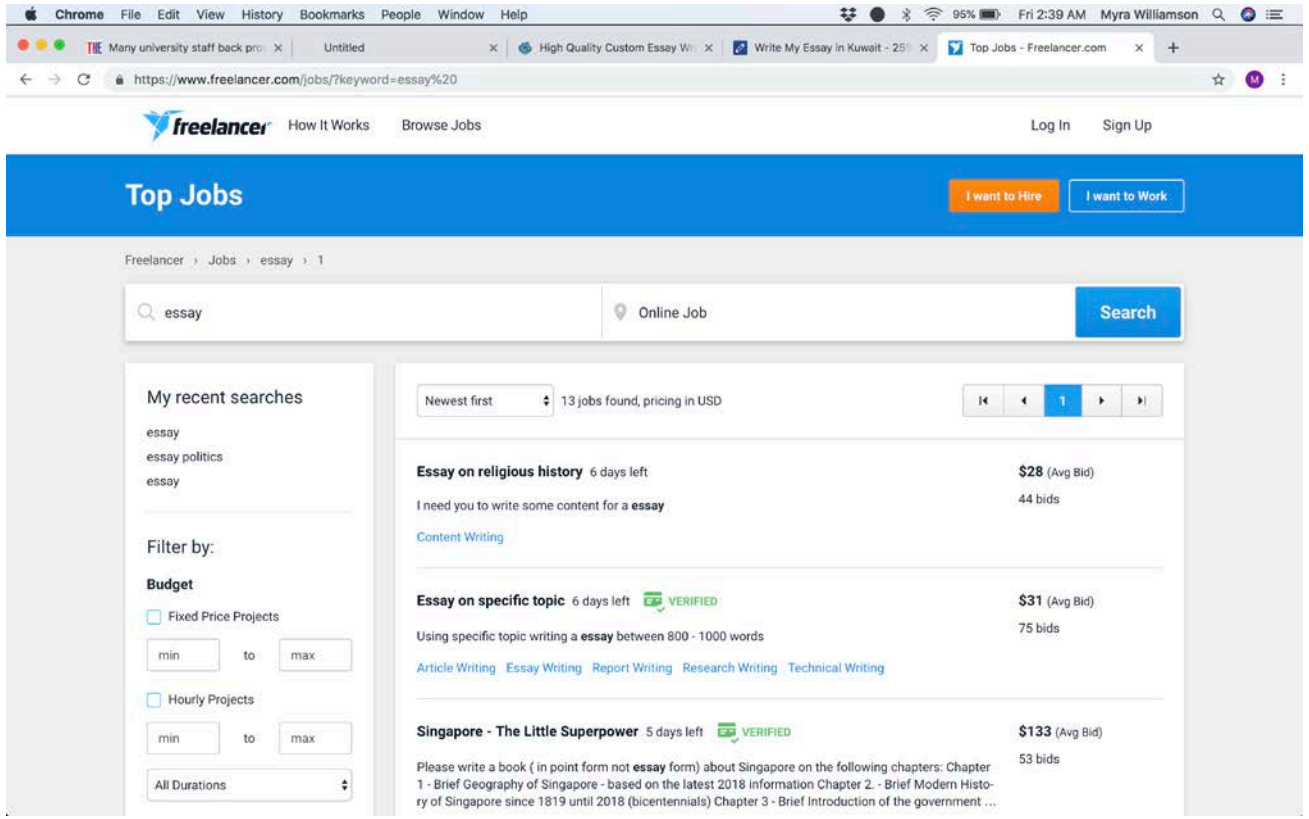


# www.freelancer.com/jobs

This website lets anyone post a project

Others can bid to do the project and state how much money they want

Searches show that many projects are likely for university or school purposes



# What can you do right now?

**Think about your answer to Q4 in xorro.com – “Do you feel that you have enough strategies in place to deal with contract cheating?”**

## Assessment design:

- Ask yourself: can your students use contract cheating in this assessment?
- 4 types of assessments that students are **least likely to use contract cheating in** relation to:
  - In-class tasks
  - Personalised and unique tasks
  - Vivas
  - Reflections on practical placements
  - Series of small graded tasks
- Have a supplementary oral presentation for all substantial written work
- Get to know your students! Know their ability (especially their language ability) early on (class-size permitting) – lack of English skills in research, analysis and thinking tasks is a problem
- Obtain samples of in-class writing to use as a base-line/comparison
- Don’t reuse the same questions (the “essay bank” issue) – originality is important in tasks
- Compulsory pass on the final exam? (University of Sydney, Peter McCallum – former Chair of the Academic Board)

# Turnitin – clues to look for

- Unusually low scores (usual score is 10-20%) so very low scores ring alarm bells
- One word or phrase changed within a direct quote & meaning is changed
- Prompts (name, course, date) that haven't been changed by student (eg cover page) or unusual
- File name indicates a different author to the student
- Use of American English (e.g. American date format, phrases, punctuation, spelling)

# What else can you do?

1. Teach academic integrity & literacy in all courses
   - Don't assume students know what **you** mean by "academic integrity" – teach it in classes
   - Talk to your students frequently about academic integrity
2. Have a strong penalty for proven cases.
3. Communicate the penalty to students clearly, frequently
4. Have a uniform system for reporting Raise awareness – e.g. J
5. Participate in international academic integrity day
6. Use students' associations – peer pressure
7. Work with other universities – have a nationwide strategy
8. Honour codes?
9. Academic Integrity Policy – how clear, visible is it?
10. Define contract cheating in the academic integrity policy

ICAI
International Center for Academic Integrity

# Xorro again…Run the second batch of questions on xorro….just 3 more and you're free!

http://q.xorro.com/rqzu

# Thank you very much!

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Please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss anything mentioned today