Contract cheating and academic integrity in higher education:

What can universities, governments and quality assurance agencies do to understand, prevent and respond to the challenge?

Dr Myra E. J. B. Williamson
drmyrawilliamson@gmail.com
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
CONTRACT CHEATING & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Meet... Abdullah

Photo credit: Lotus on Pinterest
68% of undergraduate students admit to any kind of cheating on tests or on coursework
43% of graduates admit to cheating on tests or on coursework

Is the Internet to blame? Cheating is often blamed on the Internet (89% of students in a Cornell study blamed the increase in cheating generally on the rise of the Internet)

Don McCabe: there is a growing apathy toward school and cheating amongst today’s students

Attitude + opportunity
How big is the problem?

- 15.7% of the student population globally admits to contract cheating*
- 31 million students globally
- 1 in 7 graduates may have paid someone to do an assignment for them during their degrees
- It might be even worse?

* Source: Professor Philip Newton, Director of Learning and Teaching, Swansea Medical School, Swansea University,


* In Newton’s study this figure is based on research from 2014
What is “contract cheating”? 

◦ “The submission of work by students for academic credit which the students have paid contractors to write for them”
  ◦ (Clarke and Lancaster, 2006)

◦ Some definitions include work done by family and friends

◦ “Contract cheating ... is a basic relationship between three actors: a student, their university and a third party, who completes assessments for the former [i.e. the student] to be submitted to the latter [i.e. the university] but whose input is not permitted
  ◦ (Draper and Newton, 2017)
Where 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”

Rentacoder...now Freelancer
Hire expert freelancers for any job, online

Millions of small businesses use Freelancer to turn their ideas into reality.

I want to Hire  I want to Work
## Legitimate jobs on Freelancer.com...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VIRTUAL ASSISTANT NEEDED TO HANDLE EMAILS.</strong></td>
<td>6 days left</td>
<td><strong>Hi,</strong> I am in need of a virtual assistant for email work: - sorting through emails and assigning the right email to the right team member - replying to emails based on specific guidelines - additional administrative tasks I am looking for a virtual assistant I am able to hire and delegate a few specific tasks to. I'm...**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jobs Portal - Job Board Laravel Script</strong></td>
<td>6 days left</td>
<td><strong>I need an Android and iOS app built for this script. <a href="#">Login to view URL</a> It should be able to sync with website and work together so whatever information is on the website will be pulled to the app.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Build Custom Website - Chinese Payment Integration (Adyen/Unionpay)</strong></td>
<td>6 days left</td>
<td><strong>VERIFIED</strong> <strong>III</strong>Note*** I will only hire an experienced website developer who has knowledge on Adyen/Nihao/Unionpay integration. Do not apply if you are a time waster. I need a - Skilled developer - Fast &amp; Reliable - Good ability to communicate in English - Lateness/excuses will not be tolerated**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Looking for react native developer - Hourly</strong></td>
<td>6 days left</td>
<td><strong>I have a long term project(3~6 months) should be built by React Native. I am from china, looking for a react native developer who can work for me. We can keep our good relationship if your result looks good. Main skills: React Native CII, GraphQL, Redux, Hook API, Node(AWS is plus). Eastern Europe will...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Build a custom Website</strong></td>
<td>6 days left</td>
<td><strong>VERIFIED</strong> <strong>Build a custom Website</strong> <strong>6 days left</strong> <strong>$568 Avg Bid</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Not so legitimate jobs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Days Left</th>
<th>Bid Amount</th>
<th>Bids</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I need an expert essay writer</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$56</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource development (HRD) plays a key role in developing human expertise, which underpins organizational capabilities such as talent management, innovation and collaboration. As such, HRD is associated with change, learning and improved performance at an individual and organizational level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Writing, Creative Writing, Essay Writing, Management, Research Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Need Help with Writing</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need someone who has excellent writing skills and grammar. I'm not asking for an essay to be done so no high bids will be considered.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Writing, Copywriting, English Grammar, Report Writing, Technical Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>essay writing</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$104</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need two short essays to be written in academic APA style for a Psychology and clinical language sciences course. The questions will be regarding language development in a genetic disorder. I can send the questions upon request. I need this by this Saturday 27th. Is this something you would be able to...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology, Report Writing, Research, Research Writing, Technical Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Write an essay</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write an 1200 words essay, more details in chat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Writing, Blog Writing, Report Writing, Research Writing, Technical Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essay: The image of Ivan the Terrible in Russian history and culture.</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$57</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic: The image of Ivan the Terrible in Russian history and culture. The essay should not be plagiarized. It should be 3000 words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Writing, Copywriting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Title</td>
<td>Hours Left</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>business law and law of tort</strong></td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>Academic Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the aspects of tort law, the legal principle. the provision of consumer protection legislation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Images of White and Black Femininity in the Vogue Magazin</strong></td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>Research Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... Word count or equivalent: 3000 words (+/-10%) You are required to write an Essay where you will critically address and discuss the place and relevance of the study of politics as a gendered discipline within the field of International Relations and Governance. This essay should (a) integrate the relevant ac</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immediate and Serious Writers Needed</strong></td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>Article Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are looking for Content writers and technical writers for these positions: 1. Creative essay - .40ppw/page (275 words per page) 2. Humanities or Liberal Arts 40ppw/page (275 words per page) 3. CPP for complex technical assignments (SPSS, MatLab, JavaScript, etc.) - $7 per page ( 250 words pe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law Firm Dynamic website</strong></td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>Blog Install</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need a new website. I need you to design and build a website for my small business.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>European Law Research Needed</strong></td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>Research Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
European Law Research Needed

Looking for someone with an ****LLB from the UK**** who has experience researching and writing. The topic would be regarding EU Law situation.

Must state where you completed your LL.B and if possible an academic writing sample.

Must be available second week of May 2019.

**Skills:** Legal, Legal Research, Legal Writing, Research, Research Writing

**See more:** eu research funding, research and innovation, eu science commission, eur lex, eu research europa, eu r&d funding, eu research policy, european union, web research needed, market research needed, marketing research needed, research needed current markets, additional market research needed, areas additional market research needed, administrative law research services, paid webcam model needed looking, situation business research needed, business research needed, business research needed needed, educational area research needed

**About the Employer:**

[0 reviews] Regina, Canada

- Registered US based Lawyer Needed ($30-250 AUD)
- Shareholders & Directors agreement for a new startup CIC company (£20-250 GBP)
- LAB REPORT REQUIRED. Petroleum Engineering ($30-250 USD)
- Need a law writer to write me 2500 words (£30-250 EUR)
Ghost-writing sites

- Writemyessay4me.org
- Edubirdie.com
- Domywriting.com
- Writemyessayonline.com
- Studybay.com - “From a high school essay to a PhD dissertation”
- Law essays help.co.uk -
- And many more…
Click on “How it Works” ....

How it works

WriteMyPaper4Me offers a fast and simple order process that will take you from point A to point Z in just a few minutes. In fact, there will be just points A through D as our order placement only consists of 4 short steps before you get your final assignment delivered.

We are proud to be offering our customers a new flexible system of customer-writer direct communication that improves the quality of our service as well as helps maintain healthy, mutually beneficial relationships between the writers and those who need their guidance and support.

1. FILL IN THE ORDER FORM

The first step is almost the most important. Especially here. In the order form, you are asked to mention the deadline and select the complexity level of your work as well as provide as many details about your assignment as possible.

Make sure to be accurate with the job description: in case you have feedback on the final product and request revisions or refund, the writer and the Customer Service representatives will always go back to the initial job description to see if the final product aligns with it.
2. MAKE A PAYMENT

To secure a writer, we require that our customers make payments prior to receiving the final products. This way we ensure that our customers have serious intentions and are ready to purchase the right on the final product.

We guarantee a full or partial refund in case the final product doesn’t meet your expectations. To learn more about refunds, read our Refund Policy.

3. MEET YOUR WRITER

Once the payment has been processed, our Customer Service team will assign a writer to your job. It usually takes from 24 to 72 hours to assign the writer that best fits your writing criteria. Again, we guarantee a full refund in case we cannot locate a writer that can complete your job.
4. FINAL TOUCHES

Polishing written assignments is a vital part of our job. Our Quality Assurance team proofreads, edits, and scans all jobs for plagiarism before releasing them to the customer. This way we guarantee the highest results and feel confident that we used all our resources to deliver a quality product.

You will have your written assignment delivered to you via email. You can also access all materials associated with your job through your personal dashboard on WriteMyEssay4Me.org.
In consideration of the complexities above, Law Essays Help has employed multiple experts who are specialised in various fields of law. While working at our organisation, these professionals assist the students by providing them with intellectual law essays in reasonable, economical prices. Furthermore, as we have experts working for us, we can deliver the ordered content before the client’s date of submission.

Students often have restrictions before they place an order at our service as they are functioning on a low budget. However, Law Essays Help has accordingly designed an economical price structure that permits students to place an order without thinking twice.

Essentially, we integrate the highest quality content to please the customers. Our research team goes through multitudes of sources to select the research that best compliments the client’s essay. Our writers are native speakers of the English language. Therefore, they easily translate their thoughts both professionally and formally.

Take a first look at our cheap law essay writing services:

- Qualified and experienced essay experts.
- Adequate knowledge.
- Unique And Plagiarism Free Essay.
- Delivery before you hit your due date.
- Opportunity to have many revisions/reviews.
- Proofreading and editing.
- Reasonable prices.

Our service is available 24/7 for our customers. You can chat with our customer service representatives via 24-hour chat or contact us through a call at 0203-034-0180. Furthermore, you can email us at info@lawessayshelp.co.uk.
My chat with “lawessays.co.uk” on 27 April 2019

My messages in grey

Hello

When do you need it back by?

17 May

This will cost you £95.90.

Hello

??

so i have to write it

We can also write it.

whats the price if you write it

What standard of paper are you looking for? First Class, 2:1 or 2:2?
May I have your name, email address and phone number to enroll you?

The fee for 2:1 will be £145.90.

And for 2:2 it would be £135.90.

May I have your name, email address and phone number to enroll you?

I don't know if I'm going to go ahead yet, getting a quote from a couple of sites.

Well if quality matters for you then you should go for it now.
do you run essay through plagiarism checker after its finished? Or how do you know it will be plagiarism free essay?

Yes, there are companies that are going to offer you this in cheap prices but they cannot deliver the quality that we promise.

Yes we will provide you the plagiarism report as well.

What if it doesn't get the grade agreed on or what if it fails completely?

Refund?
Customer Service:

or what if it fails completely

refund?

www.lawessayhelp.co.uk/refund-policy.php

You can see that.

Mathew sheldon

the refund is for an F but only if there is more than 30% plagiarism. But I might get an F for other reasons. E.g. lecturer might not think I wrote it. So no refund in that situation.

im not sure about it. need to think about it more.

See we are actually dealing with thousands of students we never face such issues

im not sure about it. need to think about it more.

But I'm not to force you for this

You can think about it.
Is this a problem?

1. Contract cheating is hard to detect
2. It is completely intentional – there’s nothing accidental about this conduct
3. It’s easy
4. It’s a growing problem - globally
5. Contract cheating undermines the individual student’s degree
6. Undermines the institutions’ degrees, harms its reputation
7. Contract cheating could undermine the higher education sector in a country if contract cheating becomes widespread
8. Contract cheating results in graduates who do not have the skills and knowledge they are supposed to have: do you want a doctor or a nurse or a pilot or a lawyer who cannot perform skills to a required standard?
9. It doesn’t stop at graduation: Numerous studies show that students who cheat at school or university are much more likely to engage in or permit corrupt practices in the workplace
Is contract cheating different?

- YES!

- Contract cheating is different from plagiarism (citing other people’s work without acknowledging the source) or whispering an answer on a test.

- Plagiarism is sometimes accidental, exam cheating is sometimes done on the “spur of the moment”.

- Contract cheating is pre-mediated, intentional and it usually involves a whole assessment item.

- It damages the academic integrity of an institution on a far greater level – reputational damage can be severe (e.g., the *Pens for Hire* scandal in Australia in 2015).
WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Understand, prevent and respond
Three-pronged response – no single solution

1. Universities
2. Governments
3. Quality assurance agencies

- My framework: understand, prevent, respond
UNIVERSITIES
1. Universities: what can they do

- Universities should try to understand why students cheat:
  - Remember Abdullah?
    - Language other than English Status (LOTE)
    - Dissatisfaction with the learning environment
    - Opportunities to cheat
    - Other factors….being male, being an undergraduate, etc. can’t be changed but its good to be aware of them
Universities can **prevent** cheating

- **Changes to the teaching and learning environment**
  - Teach modules in research ethics and academic integrity
  - Teach how to footnote, how to create a bibliography/list of references
  - Introduce an “Honor code”
  - Explain the Academic Integrity policy

- **Assessment Design**: meaningful, reasonable, timely & closely linked to learning outcomes
  - Oral presentations for written assignments
  - Unique assessments – don’t roll out the same assignments/questions each semester
  - Tailor the assessment closely to the course
  - Not too many individual pieces of assessment – they mount up over 4-5 courses – no conflicts

- **Teaching and learning practices**: get to know your students! This is the most important factor in detecting contract cheating (Bretag and Harper, 2018)

- Academic integrity: discuss it, have a policy, teach it (see recommendations)
Universities must **respond** to cheating

- A comprehensive **reporting system** and database
- To deal with **ALL complaints of cheating**, including contract cheating
- Australian research showed that when a lecturer suspects contract cheating:
  - More than 1/3 of lecturers (36.5%) deal with suspected contract cheating themselves with a range of penalties
  - About 55.8% referred it to an academic integrity decision-maker
  - And 7.7% ignored it

- Out of the 36.5% who “dealt with it themselves”:
  - Warning/counselling – 41.9%
  - Zero for the assignment 37.1%
  - Reduced mark - 28.3%
  - Is this a problem?
What do lecturers do when they suspect a case of contract cheating?

Bretag & Harper et al. (2018)
How do they “deal with it themselves?”

Bretag and Harper et al, 2018

- Zero for the assignment
- Reduced mark for the assignment
- Warning/counselling
Is this a problem?

Yes, because:

1. The university does not have a record of which students are engaging in contract cheating
2. The university does not have a record of which assignments/courses need to be revised
3. The university can’t ensure consistency of penalties

*Think about the police: what would happen if every police officer decided every case on the spot?*
GOVERNMENTS
Governments: what can they do?

◦ **Pass a law to make contract cheating websites and offices illegal**

◦ New Zealand has done this already – Australia, the UK and Ireland are in the process of considering their options

◦ Every country should consider making it illegal to sell work to students when the provider likely knows that the work is for school or university credit

◦ Get the Ministry of Higher Education to work with the Ministry of Education: cheating starts in school
New Zealand law - contract cheating is a crime

- s292E Offence to provide or advertise cheating services

- A person commits an offence if the person provides any service specified in subsection (4) with the intention of giving a student an unfair advantage over other students.

- A person commits an offence if the person advertises any service described in subsection (4) knowing that the service has or would have the effect of giving a student an unfair advantage over other students.

- A person commits an offence who, without reasonable cause, publishes an advertisement for any service, described in subsection (4).

- The services referred to in subsections (1) to (3) are as follows:
  - Completing an assignment or any other work that a student is required to complete as part of a programme or training scheme;
  - Providing or arranging the provision of an assignment that a student is required to complete as part of a programme or training scheme;
  - Providing or arranging the provision of answers for an examination that a student is required to sit as part of a programme or training scheme;
  - Sitting an examination that a student is required to sit as part of a programme or training scheme or providing another person to sit the exam in place of the student.
QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES
Quality assurance

- “Maintaining and enhancing academic integrity can be viewed as part of the quality assurance cycle within an institution, to ensure that it comes under regular scrutiny”
  - QAA “Contracting to cheat in higher education” (2017), p24

- There should be an explicit process for a faculty member to follow when they suspect a case of contract cheating:
  - Who to report it to
  - How to report it

- Evidence collection
  - Samples of the student’s normal writing style
  - Notes from a viva voce examination
  - Meta-data collected from a word doc - authorship

- Viva voce examination of the student
  - Vivas should be a normal part of the assessment process
  - Chaired by someone independent of the allegation
Quality assurance agencies

◦ The QAA has written 2 reports and made recommendations to the higher ed sector
◦ QA agencies can undertake research across the whole sector
◦ QA agencies can make recommendations to all higher ed institutions:
  ◦ Create an Academic Integrity Office
  ◦ Create and Academic Integrity policy
  ◦ Raise awareness of contract cheating with faculty and students on a regular basis
  ◦ Recommend all universities look at their assessment policies
  ◦ Ensure that there is a comprehensive database to deal with ALL cases of cheating in every university
  ◦ Introduce requirements into national QA frameworks
◦ QA agencies can ensure that changes are made across the sector in a way that individual institutions cannot – for fear of being singled out or for lack of institutional capability
◦ Database using an overall system to see trends across all institutions
QAA “Contracting to cheat in higher education” – (2017)

- Sets out **best practice towards achieving academic integrity in higher education**
- **Education for students**

- Training and information for faculty
  - Authentic Assessments:
    - Authentic
    - Face-to-face
    - Peer assessments
    - Don’t recycle each semester

- Blocking essay mills and those who advertise them
MY RECOMMENDATIONS
Recommendations: (see pp35 of my paper)

1. **Act now** – don’t wait for a scandal
2. Start a conversation on your campus about academic integrity and academic misconduct
3. **Establish an Academic Integrity Office** – staff it with people who have knowledge of pedagogical issues like assessment
4. Policy – get your AIO to create an Academic Integrity Policy with a wide mandate
5. Focus groups – faculty and student, to understand current attitudes and behaviours
6. **Research: do it, read it, understand it, implement it**
7. Definitions and understandings of what academic integrity is
8. Mission statement and values – review?
9. **Educate staff and students**
10. **Create a Database** – comprehensive, secure, for complaints and penalties…
Continued…

11. **Penalties: transparency, consistency**, across the university: graduated in severity. Job references? Admission to professional bodies?
12. Disciplinary Committee – clear and transparent process
13. **Honour Code** – students cheat less when they sign up to an agreement about academic integrity e.g. Stanford, McCabe research
14. **Academic honesty education**
   11. Every under-graduate and post-graduate programme needs to have a module on academic integrity and ethics
   12. Instructors must **explicitly** define why a practice is unacceptable
15. **Teach citation techniques** – no one is born with the ability to cite properly
16. **Teach students computer skills** – how to use Word, create a PowerPoint
17. Enhance detection – Turnitin? Other software solutions?
18. **Social media** – monitor it for advertising of cheating services
19. Tutoring services – it’s a fine line between tutoring and cheating
20. **Secondary schools** – all your students come from them: 99% of cheating students in Canada cheated at school
21. **Accreditation and quality assurance**
22. International connections – **join ICAI**
23. 19 October 2019 – mark the International Day Against Contract Cheating (ICAI)
24. Lobby your Minister of Higher Education for a law change and action at all levels of education against cheating
25. **Legislative change** - support universities – penalize students??
CONCLUSION
Takeaways...

- Contract cheating is a problem – for every university – it is happening on your campus!
- It is a growing problem
- A range of solutions are needed to address it: there is no silver bullet
- Set up an Academic Integrity Office/Unit without delay and give them a list of tasks
- There must be cross-sector co-operation to address it – no institution can fix it on their own
- The government should get involved: it’s a key stakeholder in higher education
- Every university needs to design an action plan to determine what it will do: short-term and long-term
- Don’t wait for the scandal or the undercover journalist to expose your institution and risk institutional damage
- Act now – create a culture of academic integrity on your campus
THANK YOU

Correspondence to: drmyrawilliamson@gmail.com