Contract Cheating: An Inter-Institutional Collaborative SoTL Project from Alberta

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http://hdl.handle.net/1880/109171

conference paper

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Contract Cheating: An Inter-Institutional Collaborative SoTL Project from Alberta

Presented at the 2018 Symposium on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), November 9, 2018, Banff, AB, Canada

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Session Overview

1) Introductions
2) Contract Cheating - Overview and background
3) Situating Academic Integrity within SoTL
4) Our Project
   a) Design / Methods
   b) Research Question
   c) Results
5) Recommendations and Next Steps
What is contract cheating?

“'Contract cheating' happens when a third party completes work for a student who then submits it to an education provider as their own, where such input is not permitted.” QAA, 2017, p. 1

Term “contract cheating” coined by Clarke & Lancaster
What is contract cheating?

Breaches the unwritten expectations of a contract of integrity between the educator and the student.

We use the term “educator” inclusively
Prevalence

Canada in top 4 countries from which students bought academic work online\(^1\)

2006

Canada now tied for 2nd: top countries where students engage in contract cheating\(^2\)

2018

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\(^1\) Clarke & Lancaster, 2006
\(^2\) Lancaster, 2018
Prevalence

71,000+  
(Eaton, 2018)

\[ \approx 1 \text{ in } 7 \]  
(Newton, 2018)

“A small number of offenders are responsible for a very large amount of the crime.”  
(Curtis & Clare, 2017, p. 117)
Prevalence

Contract cheating occurs the most in:

1. Business
2. Engineering
3. Science
4. Humanities
5. Education

(Curtis & Clare, 2017; Bretag, 2017)
Corporate Cheating Cartels

Parent Company owns and manages both websites

Secretly harvests Student A’s paper without their knowledge or permission.

Strips out Student A’s identifying info. Adds the paper to their merchandise database.

Free online “writing help” service

Uploads their paper.

Contract cheating storefront (e.g. essay mill)

Buys and download’s paper written by Student A.

Student A

Student B
How many providers in Canada?

A Google search of “write my essay” and “Canada” (using quotation marks) rendered 1.5 million results. (Search date: June, 2018) If even 1% of these are actual contract cheating services, that’s 15,000 businesses whose customers include our students. (Eaton, 2018) Because these services operate mostly online, it is difficult to get accurate numbers.
Conceptual Lenses for Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity often examined from one or more of three perspectives: as a moral issue; a policy issue or a teaching and learning issue (Adam, 2016).

Figure 1: Conceptual Lenses for Academic Integrity, adapted from Adam (2016).
Academic Integrity as a Teaching and Learning Imperative

Academic integrity is a teaching and learning imperati (Bertram Gallant, 2008).

The question isn’t “Why are students cheating?”, but “Why aren’t our students learning?” (Bertram Gallant, 2008, p. 6).
Situating Academic Integrity as SoTL

We subscribe to Fanghanel’s (2013) notion of SoTL as a democratic and dialogic form of inquiry inviting multiple voices (academics, administrators, student support specialists, p. 62) that “provides spaces for interdisciplinary and cross-institutional reflection” (p. 62).

O’Brien (2008) positions SoTL research as “a kind of standing back ... in order to deliberately frame and investigate what works, and what doesn’t” (p. 1).

Hubball and Pearson (2013), advocated for extending SoTL inquiry beyond individual classrooms to broader institutional contexts.

In our research, we interrogate broad institutional approaches to academic integrity in general and to contract cheating in particular.
Inter-Institutional Perspectives on Contract Cheating

Project genesis and team formation

Purpose: To compare our individual experiences of contract cheating to discover common questions, struggles and approaches to dealing with this complex breach of academic integrity.
Project Description

3 Post-secondary institutions

2 universities - University of Calgary and Mount Royal University
1 college - Bow Valley College

Perspectives from different roles

Administration
Academic Staff
Professional Staff

Qualitative research design

Narrative reflections
Institutional practices
Professional experience
Research Questions

Primary Question: How do our respective institutions address the problem of contract cheating?

Sub-Question: How might a teaching and learning lens be explicitly used to engage in an inquiry on contract cheating?
Method

- Qualitative, action research design, with an exploratory focus
  - “Exploration is a valid and important mode of scientific inquiry...vital for discovery” (Gernsbacher, 2018, p. 3).
  - Action research as reflective inquiry for professional development and educational practice (McNiff, 2010, 2013, 2014)
- Data source: Narratives of researcher-participants
- Collaborative and interactive thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2016).
Critical reflexivity in action-based SoTL Research


Action-based SoTL research through collaborative reflexive process (Simmons, Eaton, McDermott, Jacobsen & Brown, 2017)
Findings

Key themes:

1. Types of contract cheating
2. Students
3. Awareness
4. Evidence and policy implications
5. Educational development
Types of Contract Cheating

1. Paid Source
2. Contract Collusion
3. Loyalty
Students

Motivations
- feeling overwhelmed
- time pressure
- pressure to succeed

Previous learning experiences
- sharing through internet
- cultural experiences of academic integrity
Awareness

International Day of Action Against Contract Cheating - October 17, 2018
Evidence and Policy Implications

“But I can’t prove it”

“How do I talk to the student?”

“What’s our policy?”
Educational Development

Students

Faculty
Limitations

Alberta perspective
Urban institutions
Only included staff perspectives
Recommendations and Next Steps

1) Start the dialogue
   a) With your students (with examples, if you have them)
   b) With colleagues at your institution
   c) Beyond your institution
2) Include in institutional policy. Also create student-friendly support documents.
3) Develop supports for faculty and staff.
4) International Day of Action - October 16, 2019
April 17-18, 2019

https://go.ucalgary.ca/Academic-Integrity.html
References and Resources


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