

Excellence *with* Integrity

University of California, San Diego

A Preferred Practice Series for Faculty

Combating Contract Cheating

Contract cheating occurs when one person completes academic work that another submits for academic credit. Contract cheating occurs on small homeworks, on assignments, term papers, draft papers, exams, theses, dissertations, or even in entire courses. The contract cheating business is expansive, prompting groups like the

institutions around the world, so it's best to assume that it's happening on many campuses.

Thus, this preferred practice document to help faculty prevent, detect and respond to contract cheating. Keep in mind, not every preferred practice will work for every discipline or class size – so take from it what you can and ignore the rest.

“The best way to prevent contract cheating is to get to know your students – their abilities, their writing style, and their names and faces”

UK's Quality Assurance Agency to release a report about the danger it poses to higher education. Although we are not confident about the extent of the contract cheating by students, a 2016 investigative report by Brad Wolverton of the Chronicle of Higher Education suggest that business is good for contract cheating companies. Indeed, there have been identified cases of contract cheating at

Preferred Practice #1: *Create Meaningful Assessments*

Students may be more likely to arrange for contract cheating if the assessment seems too hard, too boring, too mundane, than if the assessment is personal and meaningful. Easier said than done because what one student finds meaningful, another will not. However, the basic premise undergirding this preferred practice is this – more

The Preferred Practice Series



At UC San Diego, we do not simply want students to “excel” (an achievement often measured by GPAs, time to degree completion, awards, and honors). We want them to excel *with* their integrity intact.

The Excellence with Integrity Preferred Practice Series for Faculty is an initiative of the UC San Diego Academic Integrity Office to help faculty implement practices and strategies that will help UCSD students excel *with* integrity.

If you have ideas for a future Preferred Practice article, please send it along to integrity@ucsd.edu

learning (rather than cheating) will occur if you articulate your learning objectives and demonstrate to students how completing the assessments will help the students reach those learning objectives. Also consider allowing students to have some choice over their topic, rather than you dictating the topic on which they must write. Finally, consider devising alternative assessments to the traditional research paper, which is fairly cheap and easy to secure from a contract cheating provider.

[Preferred Practice #2:](#)
Have Students Write in Class

When students do some of their writing in class, on paper, they are given the opportunity to write without googling. In other words, they are given the opportunity to think about what they already know about the topic. This can provide sufficient confidence and inspiration in students so that they will want to write the paper. In addition, if some writing is done in class, you can: provide just-in-time assistance AND you then have a baseline understanding of the students' writing competencies and their voice.

[Preferred Practice #3:](#)
Get to Know Your Students' Voices

If you get to know your students' voices, you can then sense when a student hasn't written the paper being submitted because the voice is different, the writing is more sophisticated, or the language is particular. So, get to know your students' voices through in-class writing, through drafts, and through oral interviews about their ideas and papers.

[Preferred Practice #4:](#)
Reduce Pressure Points

Students are more likely to engage in contract cheating when they are pushed against a deadline. Although students largely create their own deadline conundrums, instructors can consider adopting a different kind of "late work" policy. Perhaps, for example, you allow students twice a term to submit their work up to 2 days late. And perhaps you require that if students can't make any of the available deadlines, they meet with you to create a plan to enable them to succeed with integrity. This kind of practice is more work for the instructor, but teaches students valuable lessons

about planning their time, and mirrors the flexibility many of us face in the world of work (albeit not all deadlines can be flexible).

[Preferred Practice #5:](#)
Carefully proctor examinations

In classes where writing is a major component, and not all of the writing can occur in class, include an in-class, proctored exam as one of the grade components. The exam itself doesn't have to amount to a high percentage, but passing it should be a requisite for passing the class. When giving any exams, whether in a writing intensive class or not, but especially final exams, student IDs should be verified to ensure that the person taking the exam is the person enrolled in your class. See the Ensure Integrity in Testing Preferred Practice document for more details about this practice.

[Preferred Practice #6:](#)
Always use Turnitin

Although the "good" contract cheating companies don't plagiarize, they may reuse their own material. Every time a paper is submitted to Turnitin, it can now be compared to future papers submitted. So, if we build the

database of papers, we may be able to detect more contract cheating than we could otherwise.

Preferred Practice #7: *Detect Contract Cheating*

Graders of assignments must be trained to keep an eye out for signs of contract cheating. The most common signs are:

- the assessment is “too good to be true” because it is written at a higher level than expected
- the language, ideas and/or readings used in the assessment were not covered in class
- the specific word choices used in the assessment are

unusual or particularly sophisticated

- the assessment doesn’t address the prompt
- When this occurs, call the student in for a meeting and pose these questions to them:
- tell me about your process for writing this assessment. How did you begin?
 - It’s a very interesting topic/theme/angle you chose to explore, how did you go about choosing it?
 - In the assessment, you used X word and it was just a unique choice. Can you tell me more about your use of that word and how you decided to use it?
 - I was very impressed with the quality of your work in this assessment. You’ve made such improvements

since the first assessment. I’d love to hear how you managed to make such progress in such a short amount of time!

- Your use of language and your writing ability are surprising for someone at your level, can you tell me your secrets so I can share them with other students?

Final Thoughts

In the end, it is most important that you follow up with any suspicions of contract cheating. Contact the Academic Integrity Office for a consultation or advice.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact the UCSD Academic Integrity Office at <http://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu>, integrity@ucsd.edu, 858-822-2163 or in person in 301 University Center.

Resources & Useful Readings

Clarke, R. & Lancaster, T. (July, 2007). Establishing a Systematic Six-Stage Process for Detecting Contract Cheating. The Second International Conference on Pervasive Computing and Applications (ICPCA07). Birmingham City University.

Lancaster, T. & Clarke, R. (April, 2012). Dealing with Contract Cheating: A Question of Attribution. First Annual Higher Education Academy Conference in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. London: Imperial College.

Newton, P. & Lang, C. (2016). Custom Essay Writers, Freelancers and Other Paid Third Parties. In T. Bretag (Ed) Handbook of Academic Integrity (pp. 1-16). Singapore: Springer.

Wolverton, B. (August 28, 2016). The New Cheating Economy. Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved October 8th, 2016 from <http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-New-Cheating-Economy/237587>