

Students who cheat don't just have to worry about getting caught, they risk blackmail and extortion

December 1 2021, by Kristina Nicholls



Credit: Monstera Production from Pexels

When students use a commercial contract cheating service, getting caught by their lecturers is just one of many serious consequences that

could damage them and those who trust them. They also expose themselves to blackmail and extortion. Despite these risks, one in ten students at Australian higher education institutions have used a commercial cheating service to complete an assessment, according to [survey findings](#) presented at the inaugural [Australian Academic Integrity Network Forum 2021](#) (AAIN) hosted by Torrens University.

With sophisticated [artificial intelligence](#) and indeed sinister forces coming into play, there is a growing urgency for higher education institutions to act on this increasing threat to academic integrity. The threat isn't just to the reputation of institutions. It also places students at risk.

When students fill in their [credit card number](#) to complete a purchase from a contract [cheating service](#), they are doing business with unscrupulous gremlins. They risk heading down a sinister black hole of [extortion](#) and blackmail using the threat of exposure to their university or employer.

Remember: cheat sites for assessments are not your friends. Read this account from [@AcademicAppeals](#) of an Essay Mill's attempt to blackmail a student. <https://t.co/iT8EJBRnfI>

— Mike Ratcliffe (@mike_rat) [May 1, 2020](#)

Services have found a new income stream

Extortion is the new name of the game. Contract-cheating gremlins have turned to [blackmail](#) as an ongoing source of income from students. They threaten to tell the university the student has bought an assignment unless the student pays up.

Students can be blackmailed even after finishing their degrees when the

gremlins threaten to expose their cheating behavior to employers.

If the student refuses to pay up, then the gremlins get to work on destroying their credibility. The university can revoke the degree the student "earned." The student loses their qualification and potentially their career and suffers reputational damage and financial loss.

Contract cheating starts off as a rational approach to getting an assignment done quickly and easily. As the student descends the morality ladder, the lines between right and wrong become blurred. The student who engages in academic misconduct is laying the foundations for unethical conduct in the workplace.

There is [strong evidence](#) that cheating as a student can lay the foundations for unethical behavior in life and as members of society.

When the US audit watchdog [fined KPMG Australia](#) A\$615,000 following major cheating in its workplace, it revealed the dangers of the normalization of these practices in society. Similarly, [ASIC](#) is suing the [ANZ Bank](#) for breaching the Credit Act by allegedly paying commissions to unlicensed third parties who referred borrowers to the bank for loans. Bank representatives overlooked these actions in an attempt to achieve sales targets for bonuses.

Gremlins are smart. They advertise their services as assignment help and tutors 24/7, in an attempt to normalize the practice of cheating.

New study finds that 91.8% of students are not aware that using contract cheating services leaves them open to blackmail (although 2.4% of students know someone who has been blackmailed by a [#contractcheating](#) service—the risk is real) [#academicintegrity https://t.co/vgBp51nqH5](#)

— Thomas Lancaster (@DrLancaster) [February 26, 2020](#)

Students then unknowingly open themselves up to a raft of offenses, including misrepresentation, fraud, forgery and financial advantage from crime. When a student submits a bought assignment and completes the cover sheet stating that it's their own work, it could be considered fraud because they are making a false or misleading statement. The financial advantage from this action would be the avoidance of retaking a subject and saving on course fees.

It's potentially an act of forgery when a student submits a fabricated assignment and the university considers it to be original work, legitimately created by the student. So far no students have been charged with fraud for submitting a contract-cheated assessment in Australia.

What is being done about cheating?

The Australian government's introduction of anti-cheating [laws](#) in 2020 offers some hope of reining in the gremlins. The first [successful prosecution](#) by the higher education regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), resulted in the blocking of two illegal cheating websites.

The new law also makes the promotion and selling of contract cheating services illegal. Penalties include up to two years' jail and a fine of \$110,000.

By their very nature, these services are not exemplars of integrity and ethical behavior. They blackmail their customers and exploit the so-called "academic" writers they employ. They are now also recruiting students to on-sell their services, exposing them to the risk of a criminal record.

Blackmail is a real outcome for students who [#contractcheat](#).
[@UniofAdelaide](#) [#academicintegrity](#)
pic.twitter.com/UeKBGUeIUH

— Dr. Amanda White (@AmandasAudit) [February 27, 2020](#)

Individuals make a significant investment in their education. But if they turn to cheating, their actions can have far-reaching consequences for their lives. They also harm those around them—their families, partners, employers and society in general.

While the AAIN Forum identified some strategies to encourage students to rethink cheating, it is critical that we create a robust culture of academic integrity across our institutions. Appreciating the true value of a well-earned degree will be just as important as the law in keeping the cheat gremlins at bay.

Let the [student](#) buyer beware!

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