In ACC’s Policy A25, the definition of cheating includes the following: “Acquiring a paper from a commercial term paper company (or portion thereof), acquiring a paper or assignment (or portion thereof) from another person, or acquiring a copy of or information about a test or exam” (Assiniboine Community College, 2013).

Contract cheating, essay mills, and auction platforms are collectively called the Industry (Hersey, 2019) in academic integrity research. Newton (2018) specifies the act of payment as the factor which makes contract cheating “deliberate, pre-planned and intentional” (p.2). Outsourcing work, however, does not always involve formal contracts or the exchange of money (Bretag et al., 2019). At ACC, cheating has involved students asking or allowing classmates, parents, siblings, former students, tutors, and students in similar programs at other educational institutions to write their assignments for them in exchange for things such as favours or halting bullying. Sometimes these incidents of academic misconduct have arisen because of confusion or lack of awareness. At other times, students have actively sought to outsource their work to third parties.

Canada is currently tied for second place among “countries where students engage in contract cheating” (Toye et al., 2019). ACC is no exception. An initiative to first track then block access to websites offering contract cheating and plagiarism websites showed that ACC students accessed and uploaded assignments and tests to websites which market themselves to students as “study guides” and “homework help”. They also accessed sites marketed as “paraphrasing tools” which facilitate both plagiarism and contract cheating. Not only do students using these sites risk not learning the skills and gaining the knowledge their programs require, but they risk violating copyright law by uploading ACC materials, and being blackmailed by the contract cheating service provider that they pay to complete their assignments for them (see Yorke et al., 2020). Contract cheating sites are businesses whose concern is profit, despite marketing themselves to students as “study guides” and “homework help”. They are not concerned about students learning with integrity, having representative credentials, or adhering to school policies. Becoming involved with them is a risk which students do not need to take. ACC offers many academic support to students.
The ACC Learning Commons synthesizes existing and creates new research in order to bring awareness about contract cheating to the ACC learning community, be it in-class or online workshops for students, or professional development opportunities for staff and faculty at ACC locations throughout Manitoba. Contact Josh at seelandj1@assiniboine.net for more information.

**HOW IS CONTRACT CHEATING DIFFERENT THAN PLAGIARISM?**

The differences between contract cheating and plagiarism may seem confusing, and are the source of debate within the academic integrity community.

In some ways, contract cheating could also be viewed as plagiarism in Policy A25. “Using another’s words, ideas, theories or images without crediting the source” (Assiniboine Community College, 2013) would, after all, apply to situations where students are handing in something completed by another person.

The key issues in differentiation between the two are severity and intent. Students have been accused of plagiarism because they have either missed a citation or a reference. A student who does correctly cite and reference the majority of their sources, but forgets one, could be accused of plagiarism. In both of these cases, the student has interacted with their sources and worked on their assessment. In a situation where the same student simply has another person complete the assessment for them, there is no learning at all, hence contract cheating being a more serious form of academic misconduct.

The issue of intent arises in comparing the student who actively seeks to outsource their assessment to another person, and the student who has an incident of plagiarism - either accidental or intentional - in an otherwise decent assessment which they have completed themselves. It is worth citing Newton (2018) again here, in repeating that contract cheating is “deliberate, pre-planned and intentional”, regardless of whether a formal contract or payment is involved.

**EXAMPLES**

A Google search for something like “write my essay” will yield thousands of results from contract cheating providers. They market themselves to students as legitimate resources, but are not. Sometimes they will want only a payment, and at other times they will want students to upload resources in order to access others. It is worth repeating here that it is not worth the risk to a student’s academic record or future career to engage with contract cheating services in any form. Below are but
a few examples of this illicit industry.

![Professional Assignment Writer](image)

The team of Custom assignment (QC) is made of twenty Master and PHD students. Besides, QC is using professional against-plagiarism website to ensure the excellent quality and originality. It has big ranges from Business, Marketing, Economics, Management, HRM, etc. We can provide the service for essay, report and presentation.

Honesty: It is the basis of the establishment of our team. We will confirm with you about the due time of our task when we receive your confirmation, to ensure that you can receive your assignment on time before the due day. We have excellent reputation and we will never have any reason to excuse or delay it.

Originality: It is the basis of our development. All the assignments are written by Master and PHD students without cheating or plagiarism. QC is trying best to keep your assignment's originality and excellence. Many of our clients got the top score of their assignments in class.

Truth: It is the character of our development. It has been 2 years since QC established. During these 2 years, we accumulate a lot valuable experiences. We never bluff that how excellent our writers are, but we can guarantee we treat every task with professional attitude.

![Failing your Assignments? NEED HELP...?](image)

Figure 1. Contract cheating advertisement. (Kaktins, 2018).

Note the low quality of the writing.

Figure 2. Contract cheating advertisement. (Kaktins, 2018).

Again, note the low quality of writing being offered.
Contract cheating providers lurk on social media, using algorithms to respond with sales pitches to people’s comments about homework, essays, and papers. Many appear independent but are tied to contract cheating websites.
Figure 1. Website screenshot. (Eaton et al., 2019).
Note the appeals to having better things to do, and suggesting that essays are irrelevant.

Note the offer of “professional writing assistance” for students who they claim don’t have enough knowledge to complete their own assignments. Gaining this knowledge is part of the transformational experience of student life.
**PREVENTION**

Many of the same strategies to help reduce plagiarism also work to reduce contract cheating. Below is an abbreviated list. For further details, contact Josh Seeland at seelandjl@assiniboine.net.

» discuss contract cheating and academic integrity with your instructor
» keep careful research notes
» cite all sources – regardless of their format – that are not your own
» do not share tests, exams, or assignments with others
» do not upload or distribute tests, exams, or assignments to websites unless directed by your instructor
» seek help from the Learning Curve with topics such as time management, study skills, stress management, and more
» maintain regular class attendance
» if in doubt about the nature of a website, talk with your instructor or one of the support areas listed in this document

**REFERENCES**


Hersey, C. (2019). *The struggle is real! #inneedapaperfast*. Presented at the Canadian Symposium on Academic Integrity, Calgary, AB.


