

CONTRACT CHEATING: WHAT DO STUDENT ADVOCATES THINK?

Wendy Sutherland-Smith, Phillip Dawson, Helen Walker

Abstract: In the Australian context, contract cheating has been the topic of media outrage and regulator investigations (TEQSA, 2015), and has led to students being expelled from university (Jacks, 2016) and degrees being revoked from students. To date, a number of voices have entered the discussion on contract cheating, in addition to the media: students—largely through self-reported studies (Carrell, 2008; Cheung, Wu and Huang, 2016; McCabe & Trevino, 1997); academic researchers and ghostwriters (Sivasubramaniam, 2016; Tomar, 2012). However, one voice is missing from the overall picture: that of student advocates, or student representatives. These people advise, support and sometimes accompany students through academic hearings. As advocates need to find out what happened, they are more likely to gain a clearer understanding of students' motives to cheat and how they went about it. Additionally, student advocates see the consequences of outcomes and the human cost involved.

In this paper, we outline the experiences of 40 student advocates representing 21 universities around Australia. We thematically analysed the 80 pages of data using N*vivo coding. Advocates suggest a range of reasons for students engaging in contract cheating including time-poor, perceptions of others engaging in it and fear of failure. They also suggested a number of solutions at the individual subject level, the program level and the university level. A number of their suggestions have been implemented at Deakin University in order to reduce contract cheating.

Key words: contract cheating, student advocates, reasons for contract cheating, assessment, university policy

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