

## A case study on class based (SCALE-UP) approach to counteract contract cheating

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**Type:** Synopsis

**Section:** Academic Integrity projects and applications

**Abstract:**

Contract cheating has become a threat to academic integrity. Academic institutions are trying different approaches to deter this. This study was designed in 2014 to suite second year biomedical/pharmacology module with 174 students. The activity was split in two 3-hour sessions. In the first session, students were allowed to research on a particular topic in groups of four. Each group were assigned one research topic with four sub titles (one for each member of the group). They were allowed to use web-based and other resources. This was assisted by the academics giving “feed-forward” leading questions assisting them to critically evaluate their topics. By this way the students were (a) actively researching the topic, (b) involving in peer-assisted learning, and (c) not given a chance to buy essays from outsiders. The students completed their essays in the second session. By making the students work together within the classroom setting and submit the work at the end of the session, the chances of them using essay mills were stopped/minimised. The performance of this exercise and the exam performance were compared with that of previous years. Although there were no significant changes in the overall performances in this particular course work, there was a statistically significant increase in the exam performance from a mean of 37% ( $\pm$  STD 17.7) to 58% ( $\pm$ STD 10.1). The reasons for not observing any increase in the course work is not known. However, the statistically significant increase in the exam performance should mainly be due to the fact that the SCALE-UP exercise has improved students’ revision techniques, as all other factors (such as the format, style and expected outcomes) of the exam remained constant. Moreover, after this intervention, the Gaussian distribution of student performance was shifted from its peak at third-class classification (40 to 50%) (in previous years) to second-class lower division (50 to 60%). Despite the fact that student were allowed to use information from books and web-based resources, no incidence of plagiarism or bad academic practice were detected. This suggests that SCALE-UP methodologies not only help to reduce the opportunities of contract cheating but also enhance students learning process and overall performance.

**Keywords:** Contract cheating, feed forward, integrity, SCALE-UP.