

SHIFTS IN STUDENT BEHAVIOURS DURING COVID19: IMPACTS OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Ann Rogerson¹

¹*University of Wollongong, Australia*

Institutional data management of academic integrity cases and types can reveal patterns of both reporting and student academic integrity related behaviour. Previous institutional reporting from 2017-2019 demonstrated that cases of poor academic practice identified in the early years of higher education can be remedied by targeted and structured intervention programs (blinded for review 2016, 2019).

Results from cases logged during 2020 which were impacted by the switch to remote delivery teaching and local lockdowns revealed some differences in student behaviour when compared to academic misconduct cases from previous years. Of particular note is the reduction observed in cases from first year undergraduate students, and a marked increase in instances of collusion by students in other years. Collusion cases primarily fell into two categories – those influenced by technology and others as a result of students gathering, studying and taking exams in the same location as lockdown restrictions eased.

In the Australian COVID-19 context, the first big lockdown occurred a few weeks into the start of the 2020 Autumn study session when first year undergraduates commence their degree programs. These students had only three weeks on campus before the lockdown in Australia was implemented and higher education switched to a fully remote format. In trying to determine the reasons for the reduction, investigations are underway to determine if it was a consequence of students having little opportunity to form and build the new social connections that can influence cheating behaviours. There could also be the influence of shifting teaching

to remote formats. What was recognised is that for large cohorts it is difficult to manage large groups of students with varying degrees of poor academic practice in a process that is designed to manage a smaller number of individual cases. As a result of this recognition, our institution has introduced newer and simpler reporting for cases of poor academic practice as a way of addressing behaviour through interventions that have been demonstrated to work.

With students beyond the first year of study there was a marked shift from purchased materials to instances of collusion. This involved the effects of sharing site use such as Chegg as reported by Lancaster and Cotarian (2021) in addition to the use of gaming networks to communicate with other students during online assessment tasks. Further collusion cases became evident as lockdown restrictions eased in the Spring session (July-November 2020) where students gathered together in small numbers permitted under the COVID restrictions to undertake study or assessment tasks. This resulted in higher levels of similarity of content, and errors identified through the use of text matching available through services such as Turnitin®.

As noted by Lancaster and Cotarian (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in changes to teaching but also requires reconsideration of the way we teach and assess work. As educators we also need to reconsider that how we are explaining academic integrity and in particular the influence of social connections on collusion and sharing behaviours in light of the evidence now available on cheating behaviours that have arisen via the global pandemic.

REFERENCES

LANCASTER, T., COTARLAN, C. (2021) Contract cheating by STEM students through a file sharing website: a Covid-19 pandemic perspective.

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NB: Two other conference papers blinded for review.