

Contract cheating and blackmail

TEQSA

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Focus Area: Contract cheating

What is happening?

Recent research has revealed an emergent issue in the quickly developing world of contract cheating, indicating that some service providers are now resorting to blackmail to ensure that they retain their financial hold on students (Yorke et al., in press).

How does it happen?

Students purchase bespoke written assessments from contract cheating service providers for submission to educational institutions as the students' own work. Our research indicates that some of these contract cheating organisations are then threatening to provide details of the student cheating to the university if the student does not pay the cheating service additional money (see Figure 1). These providers are requesting additional money or repeated micro-payments from students to keep their information from being exposed to the institutions. Contract cheating service providers have also used this threat in cases where students have expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the assessment.

What do students know about it?

Approximately 90% of students surveyed were unaware of the potential extortion risks related to contract cheating. A small number of students elected to cheat in a scenario within this study, but when they were provided with information about the potential extortion risk related to contract cheating, half of this group reconsidered their decision and decided to write the paper themselves due to the potential costs and risks being too great.

What can institutions do about it?

Nearly 70% of students indicated that they believed it would be worse to be 'found out' by the institution than to be blackmailed by the cheating service. This indicates that universities need to communicate with students and develop a comprehensive plan to manage these types of cases in such a way that encourages students to disclose the situation, rather than choosing to navigate the path of extortion.

Key lessons

- Some contract cheating services are now resorting to methods of extortion to increase profits.
- Although 75% of students knew about contract cheating, students are largely unaware of the possibility of extortion from using these services.
- Universities should develop comprehensive plans for helping students in this situation, as currently students indicate that they fear repercussions from the university more than they fear the possibility of extortion.

Reference:

Yorke, J., Sefcik, L., & Veeran-Colton, T. (2020). Contract cheating and blackmail: a risky business? *Studies in Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/03075079.2020.1730313

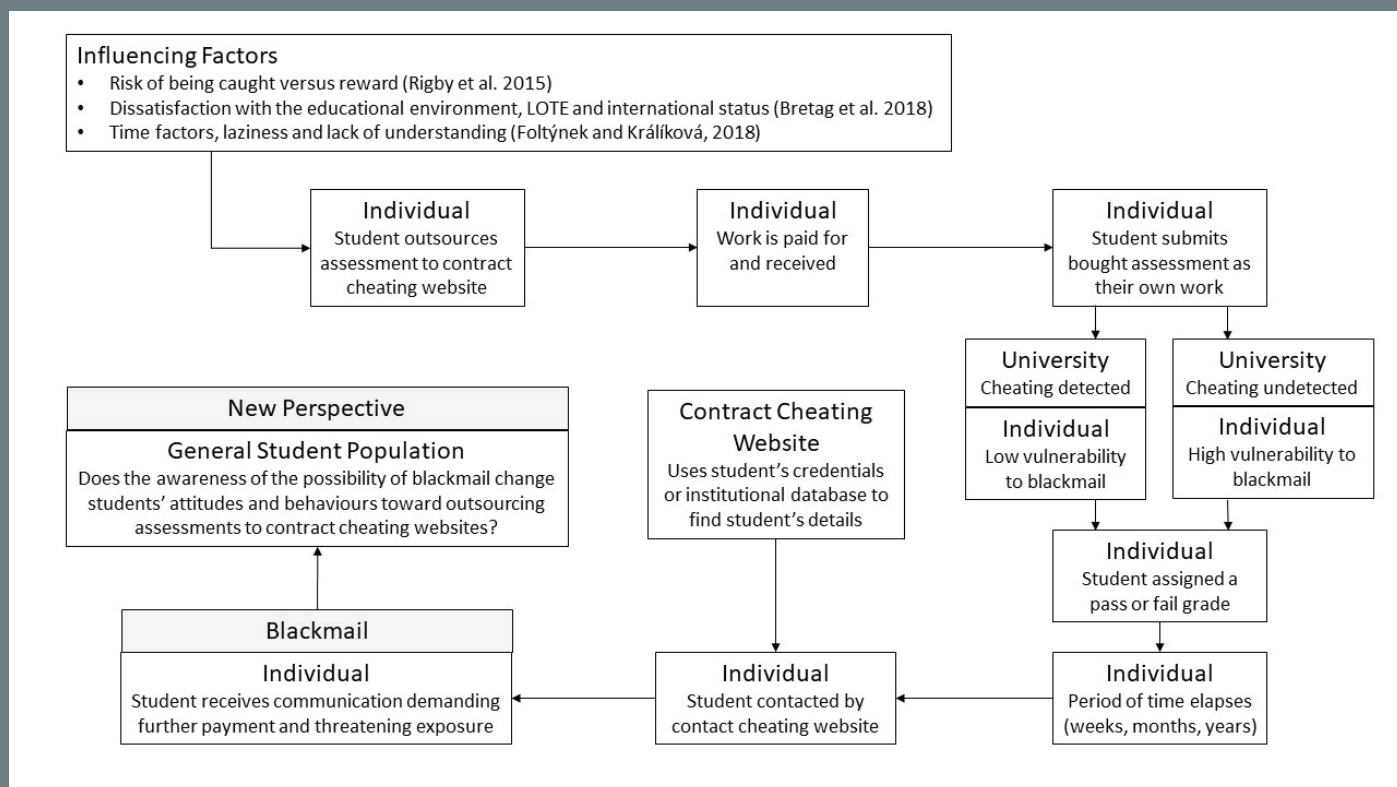


Figure 1. Framework for contract cheating and blackmail (Yorke, Sefcik and Veeran-Colton, 2020)