

In an era in which so much content is readily available to purchase with the click of a button, individuals may find themselves tempted to consider contracting someone to complete an assignment for them or even offer up their own work for compensation.

While these actions may provide a short term gain to the individual(s) involved, they can prove to be more harmful to our academic community in the long run. Actions like these undermine the trust our community has sought to build and create an environment that is both inequitable and unfair to those within it.

The University views purchasing and/or selling an academic assignment or other inappropriate services as a violation of academic integrity.

Consider the following example submitted to the Office of Student Academic Affairs, as it relates to Contract Cheating:

*Example #1*

A student is hoping to go on a vacation to the beach with their friends during Spring Break, unfortunately they do not have the necessary funds in order to do so. But with each passing day, the warm sun and the ocean breeze continue to call to them.

One day while working at the library, a friend asks them for assistance on a paper they are writing. After a few helpful suggestions, the friend indicates that the student is really good at this. They joke that the student is almost like a professional ghostwriter.

This gives the student an idea. What if they were to offer up their services to other students in exchange for cash? Then they could afford the Spring Break trip they'd been dreaming of. They offer up their services first within their friend group, but as the "business" expands they begin to offer up their services on various websites and message boards.

Eventually, an instructor notices some striking similarities between four students' papers in their course. Although in different discussion sections, they suspect the students know each other and worked collaboratively to complete the assignment. They report their findings and provide all the evidence to the Office of Student Academic Affairs (SAA).

The SAA meets with each of the students suspected of inappropriate collaboration, and one of the students confesses that they purchased the paper from another student online. They contacted them after seeing their initial offer online and received a copy of the paper via email before it was due. They share an image of their venmo payment and the email they received the paper from.

The Coordinator for Academic Integrity reaches out to the student who is suspected of writing the papers for the other four students. They share the information and evidence they have collected linking the payment to the student's venmo and their university email address. The student accepts responsibility for contract cheating.

*What could the students have done differently?*

1. Consider the ramifications of these decisions. For the students who purchased a paper from the writer, they are missing out on an opportunity to sharpen their writing skills and/or build upon their existing knowledge in that field. The student who wrote the papers could face limited career opportunities because employers value honesty, fairness, and trust especially when it could damage their reputation.
2. Communicate! Perhaps that students were struggling with the material in the essay prompt and resorted to purchasing a paper because they couldn't figure it out. Reaching out to the instructor to discuss what the assignment requires and ways to go about structuring an argument would have been more beneficial.
3. Understand University Resources. For the student who wrote the papers, finding financial resources for their Spring Break trip proved difficult. Connecting with different offices on campus to see what kinds of resources are available to support them is this goal can be helpful. Who knows? Maybe they could have gotten a job working as a writing consultant.