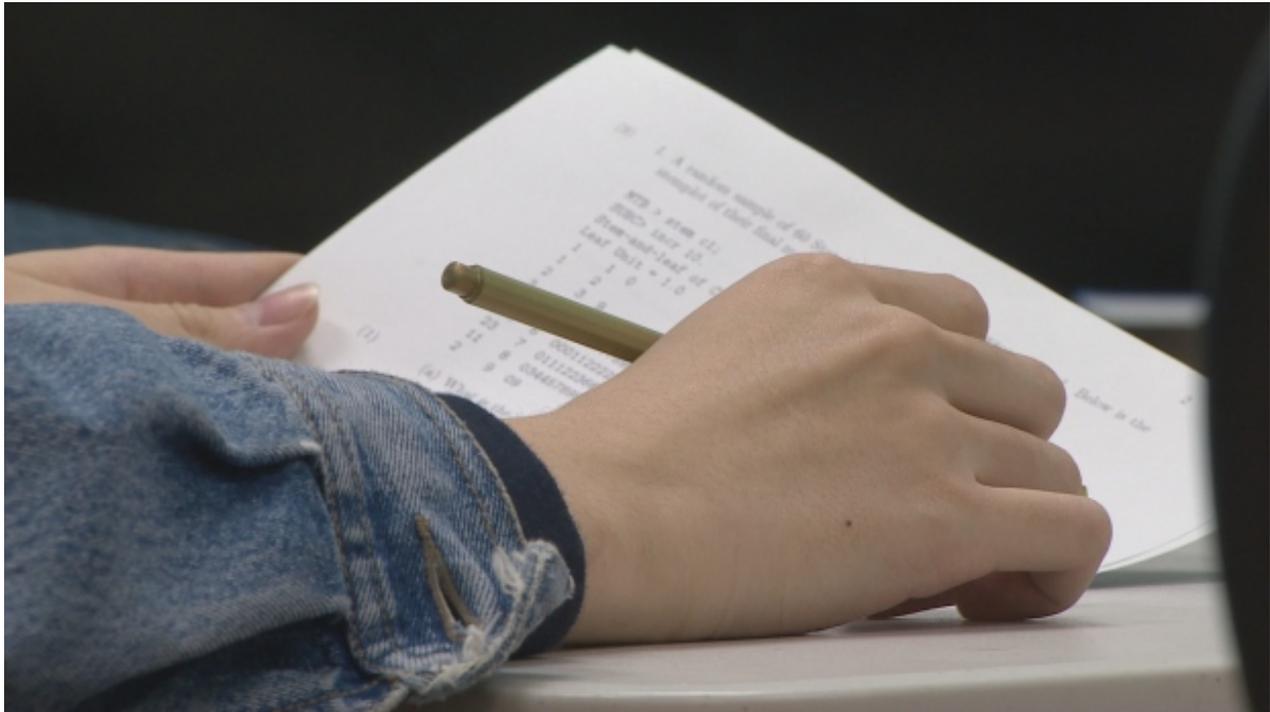


# Students' use of contract cheaters who auction off homework to dark web ghostwriters rising, professor warns

 [cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/contract-cheating-international-day-of-action-contract-cheating-1.4360193](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/contract-cheating-international-day-of-action-contract-cheating-1.4360193)



There's been an increase in university students doing "contract cheating" — hiring out ghostwriters or someone to take tests, warns a University of Calgary professor.

Both services are widely available on the internet, says Sarah Eaton, who is the acting associate dean of teaching and learning at the Werklund School of Education.

On Wednesday, the second International Day of Action against Contract Cheating called for increased awareness against firms that aggressively market contract cheating services to students on campus.



Sarah Eaton, acting associate dean of learning and teaching at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, hopes to raise awareness about the phenomenon of contract cheating. (Sarah Eaton)

For those unfamiliar with the term, Eaton said to think of a popular television character as a reference point.

"Contract cheating falls into three main categories," Eaton said on the [Calgary Eyeopener](#). "People like Mike Ross on [the TV series] *Suits*, who take tests, people who do homework for others, and people who write essays or theses.

"Basically, it's academic work — for a fee," she said.

It turns out that hiring someone to write your philosophy essay that's due in three days requires not much more than a Google search and a valid credit card number, said Eaton.

"There are entire websites where students can go and basically pitch the job," said Eaton, "and contract cheaters can bid on the job, and then the students can decide who they want to work with, and how much they want to pay them.

"The contract cheaters will set up different prices, so students basically auction off their work online. They can upload the assignment to the website, and decide, through conversations with potential bidders, who they want to work with, depending on the price, their level of English, etcetera."

The screenshot shows the Bid 4 Papers website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the logo "Bid Papers" and links for "How it works?", "Prices", "Latest orders", "Support", "FAQ", and "My Account". Below the navigation bar, there are four main service steps: "Individual Approach" (chat with writers), "Manage Your Order" (track progress), "Communicate" (ask questions), and "Enjoy the Result" (get order done on time). The central logo reads "Bid 4 Papers" with the tagline "one-on-one writing solutions". Below this, there is a "Place New Order" form with fields for "Your E-mail", "Select type of paper", "Pages" (set to 1, 275 words), and "Deadline" (select date). To the left of the form is a "Current activity" section with statistics: 9.54 out of 10 average quality score, 107437 visitors, 576 writers active, and 130 writers online now. To the right is a "Why choose us?" section with four bullet points: highest satisfaction rate based on 107437 customer testimonials, reasonable prices starting at \$7.99 per page, and secure and confidential orders. At the bottom, a banner says "Get your writing assignment done in 4 simple steps!" with four icons representing the process: receiving a task, writing, reviewing, and submitting.

An example of a website that sells essays to students, part of the contract cheating economy that sells academic essays on the Internet (Sarah Eaton)

## Lack of data in Canada

Eaton said that while contract cheating has been studied extensively elsewhere in the world, there has been little data compiled about just how much takes place in Canada.

"Studies show up to 30,000 students in the U.K. have engaged in some form of contract cheating. We really don't know the extent of it here, but we do know it's growing," she said.

As an example, she said look no further than her own campus.

"On the University of Calgary campus, I've heard a number of my colleagues from different disciplines say they will go into their classrooms, and there will be flyers there, from services, offering to do students' work for them — and people have gone in from these companies and placed these flyers so students can go and pick them up."

## **Companies aggressively marketing on campus**

The situation at the University of Calgary has gotten so brazen that Eaton says an administrative intervention was necessary.

"In fact, we've had cases where the university's legal team has intervened and asked companies to cease and desist," she said.

She added that some of the contracted cheaters have attained the status of urban legends, of a negative sort.

"I have heard of a case for an online high school, where they discovered a woman had come in and taken tests for over 50 students," she said.

"Students will have to come in with their student ID to take a test, for example, but this woman, who was of medium build and medium height with brown hair, would borrow the students' ID and either put on a ballcap to look like a boy or [else] let her hair down to look like a girl, and take tests for a number of students.

"And they eventually caught her out."

Calgary Eyeopener

The problem of contract cheating



## **The truth is that the consequences are slight**

The catch? Depending on the jurisdiction they operate in, the consequences for the hired pen tend to be pretty minor.

"Within a university system, it's called academic fraud," she said. "There can be consequences for the students, but in Alberta, as far as I know, it's not actually illegal."

The biggest culprits on campus?

"We suspect it's more prevalent in business and engineering, but again, we don't know the full extent of it," Eaton said.

As far as how to stop it, Eaton mused that what may need a makeover is the way in which students themselves are judged.

"There are strategies we can use," she said. "Some of it is around how we design — the way we assess students — so instead of high stakes tests, we can give them multi-phase, multi-step projects where they have to check in

with the instructor every step of the way."

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*With files from the [Calgary Eyeopener](#)*