Executive Summary

As a result of growing concern over students’ engaging in externally-facilitated cheating, I was asked to review SFU’s policies and practices related to academic integrity; investigate the methods and technologies for contract cheating; identify possible gaps in SFU’s approach to the problem; and recommend strategies to combat this phenomenon.

To carry out this mandate, I reviewed recent research on contract cheating and SFU’s readily-available policies and procedures from on-line sources. I also conducted a site visit over two days during which I was able to interview a number of SFU personnel with responsibility for or experience with academic integrity issues. I was further supplied with numerous additional documents, including those related to incidents of cheating, and conducted several more interviews by telephone. I also conducted a short survey of Academic Integrity Advisors.

Research on contract cheating emphasizes that it is neither easily detected or prevented. The technology that is available to everyone makes contract cheating a potentially escalating threat to an institution. While there is no clear evidence that SFU has experienced an unusual problem in this area, it is prudent and reasonable to take steps in a number of areas that have been identified in the literature as likely to assist in reducing incidents of externally-facilitated cheating.

In this report, I make thirty-one recommendations aimed at strengthening SFU’s strategies in the following areas a) engaging students and promoting a culture that values academic integrity; b) educating students about “gray areas” and clarifying expectations of faculty about issues of editing, collaboration and use of online materials; c) continuing and expanding reporting and assessment of contract cheating; d) educating faculty members and others about signs of contract cheating and providing them with strategies that make contract cheating more difficult; e) regulating advertising on campus and alerting students to dishonest vendors; f) revising policies for clarity of procedures and penalties; g) revising educational processes and clarifying information packages for students; and h) considering joint strategies with other post-secondary institutions.

The recommendations include suggested amendments to policies and procedures dealing with academic integrity issues, improvement to the current system for reporting academic dishonesty cases to better track the contract cheating phenomenon, broadening the role for the Academic Integrity Advisors, and using multiple avenues to better convey information about contract cheating, ethical and unethical tutoring and available help for students who may be struggling with their academic programs to students, faculty and teaching support staff.
SFU’s dedicated staff has already invested significant time, thought and energy to academic integrity issues. But, as is often the case in a large, complex institution, the excellent information available does not always reach the right people. Recommendations in this report for extending the use and supporting the role of Academic Integrity Advisors; assistance for faculty; training for TA’s and TM’s; and several recommendations aimed at better informing students, particularly of available sources for help, reflect and seek to ease that problem. SFU also has a number of local factors that impact its vulnerability to contract cheating. Other recommendations concerning the prohibition of on-campus advertising by unapproved tutoring services or those offering shadow classes to SFU students, a poster campaign to advertise available on-campus help for students and recommendations for collaboration with colleges that prepare students for enrolling at SFU are aimed at those local factors.

In this report, each of the considered strategies for combatting contract cheating is treated separately and recommendations specific to that strategy are made within that section. A full list of the recommendations organized by category is found in Appendix 1.
Summary of Recommendations, organized by category

Note: In some cases, recommendations are listed under more than one category where they affect or target multiple categories. Numbering from the body of the report has been retained.

Recommendations for changes to policies or associated procedures

Recommendation 1: Revise the draft Code of Academic Integrity to remove the definition of Academic Integrity (other than the information that the term is used interchangeably with academic honesty) and incorporate into the preamble the statement from the ICAI as well as other elements currently in the definition. Include the ICAI description in the SFU 101 course and the plagiarism tutorial and use this description consistently as well as in all communications about academic integrity used with students and faculty.

Recommendation 3: Revise the draft Code of Student Academic Integrity to provide an exception to the prohibition on use of an editor for approved writing-help services (unless prohibited by the instructor) and to add to faculty members’ responsibility in section 5.1.2 a requirement to discuss use of internet resources in their courses.

Recommendation 23: Amend the opening words of section 5.2.1 of the draft Code to read, “Any action that contravenes the standards of academic integrity is prohibited, including any act of dishonesty, falsification, misrepresentation or deception in one’s academic work. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following practices:”

Recommendation 24: Amend section 3 of the Procedures to read, “If an Instructor believes that a student in his or her course has engaged in academic dishonesty, the Instructor should consult with the unit’s Academic Integrity Advisor. The Instructor must outline the nature of the concern …etc.”

Recommendation 25: Consider amending section 6 of the Procedures to allow a student representation if the penalty is to be imposed by the Chair or the Registrar.

Recommendation 26: Amend section 7 of the Procedures to read, “If an Instructor finds, on the balance of probabilities, that a student…”

Recommendation 27: Amend section 10 and 17 of the Procedures to require the Chair or the Registrar to determine, on the balance of probabilities, whether the student has engaged in academic dishonesty, as well as giving the student the opportunity to discuss the matter and then deciding on the penalty to be imposed.

Recommendation 28: In the Procedures, move current section 21 to become section 20, following current section 19; move current section 22 to follow newly-numbered section 20. Leave current section 20 (now re-numbered section 22) to remain under the heading Official Transcript Withheld. For ease of reference, include a new section listing the penalties that can be imposed or recommended by the UBSD.

Recommendations for education or information for teaching staff

Recommendation 2: Provide instructors, through the Academic Integrity Advisors in each unit, with a standardized note on academic integrity for voluntary inclusion in their syllabi. Use the ICAI description of Academic Integrity and provide a link to the Student Affairs webpage on academic integrity for
students that has a list of available resources for students seeking help. Acknowledge in the note that the academic environment can be stressful and requires courage to navigate. Suggest through information provided to the instructors that they talk to their classes about the temptations and pressures to cheat and direct them to resources that can assist students to be successful; provide instructors, who wish to use them, with access some short notes to facilitate their discussion.

**Recommendation 6:** Provide information to faculty members about questions that should be asked in every case where a faculty member interviews a student suspected of academic dishonesty. Where the cheating was externally-facilitated, include questions about the source of the material; also include a question about what prompted the student’s decision to cheat.

**Recommendation 7:** Convene one or two focus groups from the AIAs to review the current online system with a view to considering what might make it more “user friendly” and to including in the system information about the source of materials used to cheat (where the cheating was externally facilitated) and any problems the student may have had that promoted the decision to cheat. Consider producing a written “user’s guide” for the online reporting system.

**Recommendation 11:** Schedule regular opportunities for AIAs to meet informally, in formats such as brown-bag lunches, to discuss their experiences and insights. Preferably, a record should be kept of ideas/suggestions/current problems that are discussed and these notes shared with the Associate Registrar.

**Recommendation 12:** Compile an information package for faculty members, sessionals, teaching assistants and tutor markers of strategies to combat contract cheating. Include reference to the Student Services Academic Integrity website and links to its pages for faculty. This package could be revised and expanded annually based on notes taken at AIA meetings. Ideally, the Learning and Teaching Centre should use this material to consider offering workshops for faculty on issues of detecting and preventing cheating generally and contract cheating in particular.

**Recommendation 13:** Form a committee of AIAs to work with a coop student to produce a short training manual for new AIAs. Consider a mentoring system when a new AIA is appointed, assigning the new AIA to someone with experience in the role.

**Recommendation 14:** Drawing from the annual Associate Registrar’s report recommended in Recommendation 10, the Associate Registrar should circulate to the AIAs a selected number of fact patterns drawn from the year’s past incidents of cheating, together with the penalties imposed in each case, as illustrative of current practices.

**Recommendation 15:** Produce written materials for TAs and TMs on what constitutes unethical tutoring practices and on the intellectual property rights of faculty members to notes, power points, assignment questions and exams produced by the faculty member for a class. Provide information about where to report tutoring services that may approach them or their students for materials and what to do if they become aware of material being used without authorization.

**Recommendation 16:** Produce written materials for TAs and TMs on available resources for students experiencing difficulty.

**Recommendation 30:** In consultation with the AIAs, the Associate Registrar should compile a guide to factors that might increase the seriousness of an act of academic dishonesty and indicate a more severe penalty. This guide should be available to faculty members through their unit’s AIA and could be paraphrased on the Student Affairs Academic Integrity webpage in the student section and substituted for the current Did You Know? material.
**Recommendations for education or information for students**

**Recommendation 4:** Create a second tutorial for students on more general issues of academic integrity. This tutorial should deal with “gray” areas of academic integrity so that students are aware of what constitutes appropriate help in writing and how they should determine whether internet materials can be used in their assignments and, if so, how they should be properly acknowledged. It should also provide a link to the Academic Integrity site of Student Services where a list of sources of assistance for students is available. Other issues, discussed in more detail below, could also be included in this tutorial, particularly information about violating intellectual property rights of faculty and understanding the differences between ethical and unethical tutoring services.

**Recommendation 5:** The proposed academic integrity tutorial, as well as the plagiarism tutorial, should be compulsory for all students entering SFU.

**Recommendation 22:** Add to the Student Services Academic Integrity webpage, under the section listing ways to find tutoring help, a statement of the direction recommended in recommendation 21. In the Academic Integrity tutorial, in recommendation 4, include a segment on unethical tutoring practices; warn students that it is academic dishonesty to supply for commercial purposes intellectual property created by instructors for their classes to third parties.

**Recommendation 29:** The flow chart “First or Minor Offences” should be amended to include the information that a record of the finding of academic dishonesty and the penalty will be retained by the university. The second chart should include some indication of the role of the registrar and include information about the UBSD.

**Recommendation 30:** In consultation with the AIAs, the Associate Registrar should compile a guide to factors that might increase the seriousness of an act of academic dishonesty and indicate a more severe penalty. This guide should be available to faculty members through their unit’s AIA and could be paraphrased on the Student Affairs Academic Integrity webpage in the student section and substituted for the current Did You Know? material.

**Recommendations for administrative changes**

**Recommendation 8:** Create a list of criteria for categorizing some forms of cheating as “contract cheating”. Classify cases that meet those criteria as a separate category in the Registrar’s data base.

**Recommendation 9:** Provide a field in the data base that tracks any previous post-secondary experience of students who commit academic dishonesty offences.

**Recommendation 10:** On an annual basis, the Associate Registrar should report the collated data from the data base, anonymized, to the Registrar and the Provost for a discussion of whether the trends support investigating or implementing any particular course of action.

**Recommendation 14:** Drawing from the annual Associate Registrar’s report recommended in Recommendation 10, the Associate Registrar should circulate to the AIAs a selected number of fact patterns drawn from the year’s past incidents of cheating, together with the penalties imposed in each case, as illustrative of current practices.
**Recommendation 17:** Initiate discussions with The TSSU Executive about the possibility of creating some training opportunities for TAs and TMs in classroom management and student coaching.

**Recommendation 18:** Initiate discussions between the Registrar’s office and Facilities Management to develop processes for removing unauthorized tutoring ads from bulletin boards as often as is necessary to extinguish the practice.

**Recommendation 19:** In the longer term, review campus policies on posting notices and on the use of bulletin boards with a view to creating an effective process to enforce policies that require approval and monitoring of postings.

**Recommendation 20:** Initiate discussions between the Registrar’s office and Campus Security to develop a protocol for identifying and removing persons soliciting students without authorization; send warning letters to organizations already identified as offenders informing them that they are not permitted to solicit on campus.

**Recommendation 21:** Create a Student Services administrative direction that on-campus advertising and on-campus solicitation by commercial tutoring services is not permitted unless those services have received express approval from the Co-ordinator of Academic Integrity. Send notices of this direction from the Registrar’s office to local companies currently advertising on campus.

**Recommendation 30:** In consultation with the AIAs, the Associate Registrar should compile a guide to factors that might increase the seriousness of an act of academic dishonesty and indicate a more severe penalty. This guide should be available to faculty members through their unit’s AIA and could be paraphrased on the Student Affairs Academic Integrity webpage in the student section and substituted for the current Did You Know? material.

**Recommendation 31:** Consider hosting a meeting of personnel from a variety of local post-secondary institutions to discuss local issues and co-ordinated approaches to communicating and reinforcing information about academic integrity and academic dishonesty.