



October 13, 2021

Department of Education
Secretary Miguel Cardona
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20202

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
Director Rohit Chopra
1700 G St NW
Washington, DC 20552

Dear Secretary Cardona and Director Rohit Chopra:

I am writing to you about a matter that is currently threatening the integrity and quality of U.S. education.

As colleges and universities are rightly leveraging online tools to make learning more accessible, we are seeing cases of cheating skyrocketing to unprecedented levels. As a result, students are graduating without being fully equipped with an education that sets them up for success in the real world. That is why we are calling on you to work with university administrations to investigate systemic cheating and institute policies and put a stop to online platforms that enable cheating on college campuses.

The American Consumer Institute (ACI) is a nonprofit institute based in Washington, D.C., founded with the purpose to promote consumer welfare by improving the understanding and impact that public policies and regulations have on consumers. With university tuition being one of the greatest financial investments an American consumer will make in their lifetime, upholding the value of that investment is critically important. That is why we launched the [Academic Integrity Project](#) – to raise awareness of and call attention to this pressing issue.

According to [NPR](#), “many universities are reporting increases, sometimes dramatic ones, in academic misconduct.” Some universities saw two or three times the number of cheating cases compared to previous years.

This is not a coincidence. There has been a rise in online platforms that provide tools making it easier for students to cheat. The largest of these platforms, Chegg, is valued at \$10 billion and provides students with tools that allow students to receive near-instantaneous answers to exam and homework questions. A textbook company has even [sued Chegg](#), alleging that Chegg plagiarized their work by reproducing the questions in its text book’s chapters and then selling the answers for profit. In [a report done by Citron Research](#), Purdue University Professor of Mathematics Ralph Kaufmann referred to Chegg as a company with “two faces,” adding that

“while Chegg claims to help students do their homework, students on Twitter are very clear that they use the site to do their homework for them.”

Chegg is the largest and most well-funded of this type of program, but it is not the only one. A Google-led mobile app named Socratic provides students quick answers to their questions, and even has a [photo-based search](#) where a student can take a photo of their homework or test problem and get the answer and work needed to get there right away. Another platform, Edubirdie, does not even try to hide what it is, and blatantly [says on the website](#) “We’ll do your homework while you live your life,” offering ghostwriting, essay creation and plagiarism checking for student essays.

These platforms are shameless in their exploitation of vulnerable students, and it has to be stopped. Honest students are being tempted to cheat to keep up with their peers, and those who do cheat are able to get away with it without repercussions.

Because of the availability of shortcuts and lack of consequences, the quality of education is falling, as well as a sense of integrity and pride from academic achievement. As aptly stated in [a study published in the Journal of Marketing Education](#), “Today’s business student becomes tomorrow’s business professional. Therefore, business professors must be particularly concerned about honesty and ethics as their students will likely move on to corporate careers.”

The ripple effect of academic dishonesty will inevitably lead to negative long-term impacts on the U.S. economy, labor productivity, our international prowess, and even national security. We need to put a stop to it before it gets even worse.

It is my hope that you see the gravity of this situation. I ask that you investigate this problem and take a leading role in providing U.S. universities the guidance and best-in-class practices to stem cheating on our nation’s campuses.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Steve Pociask
President and CEO
American Consumer Institute
steve@TheAmericanConsumer.Org