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The new way university cheats are being caught

By [Henrietta Cook](#)

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Everyone has a unique typing style – but cheaters type differently.

With this in mind, a Melbourne start-up has created anti-plagiarism software which is being trialled at four major Australian universities.



Herk Kailis, the co-founder of Cadmus. JASON SOUTH

It's called Cadmus and it tracks students as they complete assignments.

Some people's fingers linger on keys for longer, while others hover above the keyboard for shorter periods of time. Poor touch-typists might make the same error over and over again.

The editing and authentication software – which operates like a Google document and can be accessed anywhere – uses keystroke analytics to build up a profile of a student's typing style.

This allows it to detect when someone else is dishonestly involved in their work.

It's hoped that this stamps out contract cheating, which can involve students giving their password to someone they have paid to complete an assignment.

But the software has triggered privacy concerns among some students, who are worried about how their data might be used.

It was developed by University of Melbourne alumni Herk Kailis and Robbie Russo, who worked on the project while at the university's Melbourne Accelerator Program for start-ups.

Trials of the software began at the University of Melbourne earlier this year and are now set to begin at the University of Sydney, University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology.

It also hopes to educate students, who receive a notification and are directed to the university's plagiarism rules if large sections of text are copied and pasted into the document.

"This is a helpful tool to ensure that they comply with the best academic practice," Mr Kailis said.

It also collects information on how long students spend completing their assignments, and when they start and stop studying.

Last week, Fairfax Media revealed that [universities were collecting unprecedented amounts of information](#) about students, tracking their movement through campus with Wi-Fi routers and matching their online activity with demographic data to predict who might drop out.

University of Melbourne Student Union president Tyson Holloway-Clarke said the software cast a cloud of suspicion over all students. It also cramped their style.

"Some students like to work by handwriting their essays and then typing them up, or they might want to work offline. If you have the feeling that every keystroke is being monitored it could add an unjustified amount of stress," he said.

He said that while he supported moves to crack down on contract cheating, he was not convinced that the software was necessary.

"Could it collect evidence that is used against students in a punitive way? How might it colour the worthiness of a student's work if time logs show that they did not spend as much time on it as other students?"

University of Melbourne Provost Margaret Sheil said that the trials had been successful.

But she said students had raised concerns about data showing how long they had spent on assignments.

"They didn't think the information should be relevant to the teachers, you could be someone who did everything last minute," she said. "We have listened to those concerns."

"We are exploring this because the integrity of our assessments is absolutely critical to everything we do," she said. "Having robust assessment is in our students' interests as much as ours."

A University of Sydney spokeswoman said the university was considering trialling the software for a psychology subject. She said all information collected by Cadmus was encrypted, protected and restricted. "Tutors, lecturers and subject coordinators will not have access to information on when students were working on assignments or for how long," she said. "Data collected in Cadmus is never given back to lecturers in a way that could prejudice the marking of assignments."



Henrietta Cook



Education Editor at The Age