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Universities show double standards in student publishing

[SYDNEY, NSW, 12 August 2019] The Responsible Student Publishers Association has recently launched the ‘Right to Publish’ campaign to defend the legal right students have to publish and benefit economically from their university work. Over the last few years, the association has observed several universities disregarding the legal right students have to publish their study notes and past assignments by confusing the recently coined issue of “contract cheating” with the well-established practice of student publishing. This confusion has led to some universities suggesting that student publishing should be prohibited.

Under normal circumstances, when you create a piece of work you subsequently control the rights to its publication and distribution. This mechanism is what allows individuals to control how artistic and literary works are performed and monetised in public. Producing a piece of work whilst attending a university is not such a straightforward affair.

Whilst universities unconditionally state that students own the work they create (and the rights that go with that ownership), they then go on to give themselves a licence to the work for their own purposes. Where this becomes unfair, is when the university grants themselves the right to make this work available to the public for their own benefit, but then in turn prohibit students from performing the same action.

Some universities have reached out to students many years after they have legally published their work, to demand that it is taken down. Students who object to their work being forcibly removed from publication, are faced with the challenge of defending their right to publish in a disciplinary hearing without legal advice or assistance.

Coincidentally, many universities publish student work themselves. Many of Australia’s top institutions exploit student owned copyright without giving students the same rights to publish. These actions are crippling the fundamental rights students are granted by owning the work they create, that is to be able to make the work public for the first time and to licence its use to others.

More information can be found on the newly created Right to Publish website (www.rtp.org.au) where students can educate themselves on their right to publish.

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The Responsible Student Publishers Association seeks to support the rights of students to publish work they create at university. Every year, thousands of Australian students choose to exploit copyright in the work they create during their studies and the association acts as a representative body for these students.