

Plagiarism big Business

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Students who lack the time or skill but with plenty of bucks to burn are contributing to healthy profits in a booming sector of the economy - essay writing services.

At a cost of about \$15 per page, a Toronto based company, 'Custom Essay Services', will furnish students anywhere in the continent with original essays tailored to individual writing styles and course requirements. Prices vary slightly depending on the client's level of study.

According to company manager Derrick Sim, the essays take a day or two to write, depending on the length and sophistication required, and bring in A minus or B plus grades on average.

The service, started at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute by Ray Kennedy, is now in its 13th year and is staffed with people Sim describes as "intellectual bohemians who work freelance." Sim says a number of his employees are ex-professors, "some of them with eight degrees."

The service also employs a number of foreign students who work under the table and are paid \$5 per page.

Complete confidentiality is guaranteed, and the company boasts a 90 per cent return rate among its customers.

A California based company, modestly called 'Research Assistance Inc.', is advertising its stock of over 16,000 research papers in student newspapers across Canada.

The company, also offering custom research, touts an "ordering hotline" and accepts payment by Visa and MasterCard.

When he telephoned the company in Los Angeles, Mike Kukhta, president of McMaster Student Union in Hamilton Ontario, was told that students using the service receive a list of documented research information from which they are expected to write their term papers - rather than the completed papers which the firm advertises.

Company officials told Kukhta that the agency advises its customers never to put anything into a paper that is not their own.

While essay writing companies may only be breaking income-tax and false advertising laws, students caught using their services face stiffer penalties.

In Halifax, Dalhousie university's Calendar advises students that "the presentation by an author of work of another author, in such a way as to give one's reader reason to think that the other author's work is one's own" is considered plagiarism and can be rewarded with loss of credit and suspension from the university.

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Students assisting others in plagiarism or other "irregular procedures" can also be liable to penalty from the university.

Professor John Yogis, chair of a Senate Discipline Committee which deals with plagiarism, says the committee has dealt with about 25 allegations of academic penalties being imposed.

Dalhousie students seem more inclined to take advantage of the cheaper, off-the-racks services available at the library. Yogis says he hasn't come across students submitting custom produced essays during the time he has served on the committee.

There do not seem to be any companies in Halifax which specialize in custom papers for students, although there are a number of companies which have advertised in The Dalhousie Gazette student newspaper offering assistance in grammar and English composition.

These services, if their assistance is restricted to grammatical advice, are not contributing to anything illegal. They may, in fact, be filling a role which universities are doing a bad job in providing - training students in writing essays.

When contacted by the Dalhousie newspaper, a person at one of the services was reluctant to be interviewed but said they didn't know of any custom essay writing services in Halifax. They estimated their business at 5 to 10 people seeking grammatical advice per month.

"I don't know if the reason is that students haven't been using these services or they haven't been reported," Yogis says, "the danger in many custom written papers is that they are often plagiarized themselves," making it easier to detect.

Most cases of plagiarism are discovered by professors who either notice something familiar in the material submitted or consider it to be substantially different in style or quality than the student's regular work.

Yogis says his committee is seeing more allegations and thinks the practice is increasing, although he admits he has little idea of how widespread the practice is.

"The agency advises customers never to put anything into a paper which is not their own"

Sim says he'd never heard of anyone being charged of plagiarism with one of his company's essays and claims a manufactured paper is almost impossible to detect.

"It's all original, so unless you tell them, the profs have no other option but to believe you. There are a lot of lazy profs out there."

Yogis says purchasing essays reflects a "totally defeatist" attitude on the part of the students but he defends an evaluation system which requires submission of written work because there is little replacement for it.

Sim blames the university system for the success of his

business. "They stick 400 students in a psychology class... it's a large factory out there, grinding out students... there's a chink in the system."

Sim rationalizes the service in free enterprise terms, saying "some rich people have tutors, and if you can afford it, it's a business choice."

