

# THE ESSAY RACKET

BUY AND SELL EDUCATION



Probably everyone who reads this knows at least a few choice cheating stories.

There's the one about the guy who wrote exam answers on a piece of gum, to be swallowed at the first sign of danger. Then there's the ever-popular story of the girl who wrote the answers on her thigh, recounted in several *Porky's*-style post-pubescent fantasy flicks.

Cheating—specifically the plagiarization of essays—has become big business.

In Toronto alone, there are three companies that specialize in writing essays for students who either don't have the time or the energy to write their own: Quality Research Essay at Victoria Park, Essay Services on Steeles Avenue, and Custom Essay on Collier Avenue downtown.

There's only one catch—they're expensive. Very expensive.

The least pricey of the three companies appears to be Quality Research Essay, which charges \$6 to \$10 a page for their work. Even for a moderate-size essay, say 10 pages, you're looking at \$60 to \$100 a crack.

Custom Essays will cost you even more—a flat \$10 a page for undergraduate work and \$20 for graduates.

Essay Services, situated near York, charges the same basic rate as Custom Essays, but only if you use one of the more than 12,000 essays they have on file. If you require a custom job, an original essay written just for you, the price doubles, meaning that same hypothetical 10 page work would now cost you between \$200 and \$400.

To reassure the more skeptical of their potential clientele, all three companies offer a money-back guarantee.

Why the high cost? According to Bernie Engelhe, co-owner of Essay Services, all of his writers are university graduates, some of them having obtained their Ph.D. or Master's degrees, and all are specialists in their own particular fields.

"Fine words! I wonder where you stole them!"

Jonathon Swift

Also, all the writers Engelhe hires must be capable of turning out an A paper on demand. If it is reported the essay was marked lower, the writer is dismissed, he says.

Simply put, that kind of talent doesn't come cheap.

Despite the cost element the three agencies apparently do very well, although none would reveal their monthly income. Their offices are comfortable, if not posh, and Engelhe claims his company alone has an average of eight to 10 students coming in for essays daily.

The majority of essay service patrons are university students, but college and secondary school level students have also been known to succumb to temptation. The agencies also claim an equal number of Canadian and foreign students use their service, which may reflect the greater problems faced by students from non-English speaking countries in writing essays.

Not surprisingly, the highest demand for professionally written essays is in the area of literature, followed by, in order, political science, philosophy, and sociology. These are the popular ones because of the sophisticated writing skills these subjects require.

Needless to say, these organizations are extremely unpopular with York faculty and administration. Last October, assistant vice-president of student relations John Becker banned all essay service employees from the York campus. All three companies have received letters from Becker saying they "are prohibited from using University property for any purpose," warning "should any of your agents be observed on York University property in the future, you will be charged with trespass and removed from the campus by police."

The letter also suggested the University would take court action to keep them from coming on campus, but Becker told *Excalibur* recently that he has not yet found any other legal means to deal with the companies. Because the essay service agencies are apparently not doing anything illegal Becker said, there is little else the York administration can do.

However, while the agencies are basically immune to any punitive action York can take against them, the University can penalize students using them.

According to Section C-12 of the York Undergraduate Calendar, any student caught plagiarizing, defined as "the presentation of work as one's own which originates from some other unacknowledged source," will be subject to severe penalties, ranging from an automatic failure for the course, to a one-year suspension from university for a second offense.

"Plagiarists at least have the merit of preservation."

Benjamin Disraeli

However, director of student programs Bob Dolan said that no formal charges have been laid against anyone using essay services so far this year.

"Some professors may have their suspicions," Dolan said, "but nothing's been brought to my attention as yet."

According to Becker, it's not only administration that is concerned about the essay service but students as well. Becker said he has had several calls from students annoyed by the unfair advantage these services give to those who can afford them.

"One female student called me who had actually spoken with the essay service on Steeles and was very indignant about it. That's when the whole thing started bothering me," Becker said.

Becker added he feels the essay services cheapen the whole academic process, describing them as "leeches" hanging on to the system.

Not surprisingly, the owners of the agencies are of a different opinion, at least publicly.

All three companies claim that their business is to provide research material to aid students in their assignments and not their objective to sell essays to be submitted *verbatim* by students as their own work.

However, when an *Excalibur* reporter called the three essay services in the guise of a desperate student, asking if they could write an essay for her to be handed in within two days, she was given a cheerful "yes, ma'am" reply.

Another *Excalibur* reporter was met with a similar response when he phoned Essay Services asking for a four page essay from their files on Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*.

He was also reassured that professors never receive the same paper twice, as the service records the name of the university and the instructor to prevent detection.

However, Engelhe says "nobody is forcing students to use our services." The onus for academic honesty does indeed lie with the students, he said.

