

## Essay mill users rarely win against professors

Websites offering to do homework for money often filled with "gibberish"

Brian Walker

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There's really no such thing as "free time" for a college student. There's always a test to study for, a book to read or some homework assignment to complete. The typical Wayne State student might be able to fit one of those things in during their lunch break at a full-time job.

These tasks pale in comparison to many more difficult term papers. From the extensive research required to the pages upon pages of writing, semester term papers are often the stuff of nightmares. Maybe life would be somewhat easier if only there was a bypass.

As it turns out, there are companies that claim to offer just that. They're called essay mills — ghostwriting services that sell essays and other homework writings to university and college students. And when former WSU student Mark Morgan learned this, he couldn't have been happier.

"It was like a godsend, or at least I thought," Morgan said.

After seeing a news report about essay mills — which focused largely on the lack of academic integrity of the students who use them — Morgan said he searched Google and found BestEssays.com. For the cost of \$115, the site said that it could write Morgan's three page history paper in 48 hours.

"I didn't really want to pay that much for it, but I was desperate, and I knew that I wouldn't finish it otherwise," Morgan said.

At first glance, BestEssays.com seems like a legitimate business. The site has a clean layout with toll-free numbers offering customer support. The site's main page also quickly addresses students' concerns with statements like "original, non-plagiarized, essays," and badges assuring a "100 (percent) Confidentiality Guarantee."

Prices on the site vary greatly depending on how soon the customer needs the order and the level of writer for the order. For example, a one-page, double-spaced paper would cost \$24 if ordered 10 days in advance, but becomes \$56 if ordered with a three-hour deadline.

Furthermore, the shorter deadline would only cost this little if written by another college student. If the customer asks that someone with an MA or a PhD write his paper, the cost then becomes \$58 and \$63 respectively.

With the site's professional appearance, and its "100 (percent) Customer Satisfaction Guarantee," Morgan felt confident placing his order. But confidence was the last thing he felt when he received his paper three days later.

"It was horrible; it was like somebody from a different planet had written it," said Morgan.

It was clear that whoever wrote the paper didn't use English as their first language. Morgan said he attempted to fix the essay before his class, but said it still failed to make any real sense. His instructor felt the same.

"He asked me to stay after class about a week after I turned it in, and I knew it was going to be about the paper," said Morgan. "At first I tried to act like I'd written it, but then I just confessed. It was so bad; I didn't want him to think it was my work anyway."

Morgan's lack of effort led to his receiving an F in the class.

His case isn't unique. According to Dr. Dan Ariely, professor of psychology and behavioral economics at Duke University, the papers received from essay mills are rarely an example of college-level work. When Ariely himself ordered an essay from a mill as part of a study on why students cheat, he described what he got back as "gibberish." One paragraph from the essay, which was also on the topic of cheating, read as follows:

"Cheating by healers. Healing is different. There is harmless healing, when healers-cheaters and wizards offer omens, lapels, damage to withdraw, the husband-wife back and stuff. We read in the newspaper and just smile. But these days fewer people believe in wizards."

Ariely said many of the writers for the essays actually work in foreign countries – a fact that Morgan learned the hard way.

"It was a complete waste of money. I asked for a refund, and all they did was give me 30 percent off my next order," Morgan said.

Despite all the services available on the Internet today, Ariely said that students will still have to write essays the old-fashioned way.

"I think that the technological revolution has not yet solved students' problems. They still have no other option but to actually work on their papers."