

# The New Economy of Cheating

*The following is an (in part) an article on chronicle.com and is for subscribers only*

**F**ifteen credits were all he needed. That's what the school district in California

where Adam Sambrano works as a career-guidance specialist required for a bump in pay. But when he saw the syllabus for a graduate course he'd enrolled in last year at Arizona State University, he knew he was in trouble.

Among the assignments was a 19-page paper, longer than anything he'd ever written. The idea of that much research worried Mr. Sambrano, who also spends time serving in the Army National Guard.

Before the class started, he went on Craigslist and enlisted the service of a professional cheater. For \$1,000 — less than the monthly housing allowance he was receiving through the GI Bill, he says — Mr. Sambrano hired a stranger to take his entire course.

He transferred \$500 upfront, "From Adam for ASU," according to a receipt obtained by *The Chronicle*. Then he just waited for the cheater to do his work.

On any given day, thousands of students go online seeking academic relief. They are first-years and transfers overwhelmed by the curriculum, international students with poor English skills, lazy undergrads with easy access to a credit card. They are nurses, teachers, and government workers too busy to pursue the [advanced degrees](#) they've decided they need.

*The Chronicle* spoke with people who run cheating companies and those who do the cheating. The demand has been around for decades. But the industry is in rapid transition.

Just as higher education is changing, embracing a revolution in online learning, the cheating business is transforming as well, finding new and more insidious ways to undermine academic integrity.

A decade ago, cheating consisted largely of students' buying papers off the internet. That's still where much of the money is. But in recent years, a new underground economy has emerged, offering any academic service a student could want. Now it's not just a paper or one-off assignment. It's the quiz next week, the assignment after that, the answers served up on the final. Increasingly, it's the whole class. And if students are paying someone to take one course, what's stopping them from buying their entire degree?

The whole-class market is maturing fast. More than a dozen websites now specialize in taking entire online courses, including [BoostMyGrade.com](http://BoostMyGrade.com), [OnlineClassHelp.com](http://OnlineClassHelp.com), and [TakeYourClass.com](http://TakeYourClass.com). One of them, [NoNeedtoStudy.com](http://NoNeedtoStudy.com), advertises that it has completed courses for more than 11,000 students at such colleges as Duke, Michigan State, even Harvard.

As cheating companies expand their reach, colleges have little incentive to slow their growth. There's no money in catching the cheaters. But there's a lot of money in upping enrollment.

**T**wo professors at Western Carolina University were so concerned about the encroachment of cheating that they set up a fake online class to learn more about the industry's tactics, and see what they could detect.

About a dozen students agreed to enroll in the introductory psychology course, including John Baley, then a graduate student in clinical psychology. They were provided with fake names, email addresses, and ID numbers, plus a pot of money for cheating services. Half were asked to cheat, and they did so in a variety of ways, collaborating inappropriately with classmates, buying papers, and paying others to take tests.

Mr. Baley went looking for a company to take the whole class for him. He typed a few words into his browser — "cheat for me in my online class" — and turned up dozens of results. Many sites seemed untrustworthy: Their content was misspelled or grammatically incorrect, or their customer-service reps had trouble with basic English. Some requested confidential banking information or asked him to enter it into a website with no security protection.



John Baley, now a law student, hired a company to complete all of his work in a fake online class that professors at Western Carolina U. had set up as a research experiment. The professors — who were on the lookout for cheaters — didn't catch him.

But one company impressed him. Its representatives responded promptly, explained how their colleagues would complete the course, and guaranteed a B or better — or his money back. He agreed to pay the company \$900, half upfront, and handed over his course username and password.

Over the next 10 weeks, the company, which Mr. Baley declined to name, to protect any further research, passed him from the customer-service staff to the management team to the person who took his course. At each stage, he says, he dealt with people who were efficient, responsive, and reliable. In fact, the cheaters performed better than he thought they would. They completed every assignment without prompting, at one point providing a written script for a video presentation with less than 36 hours' notice.

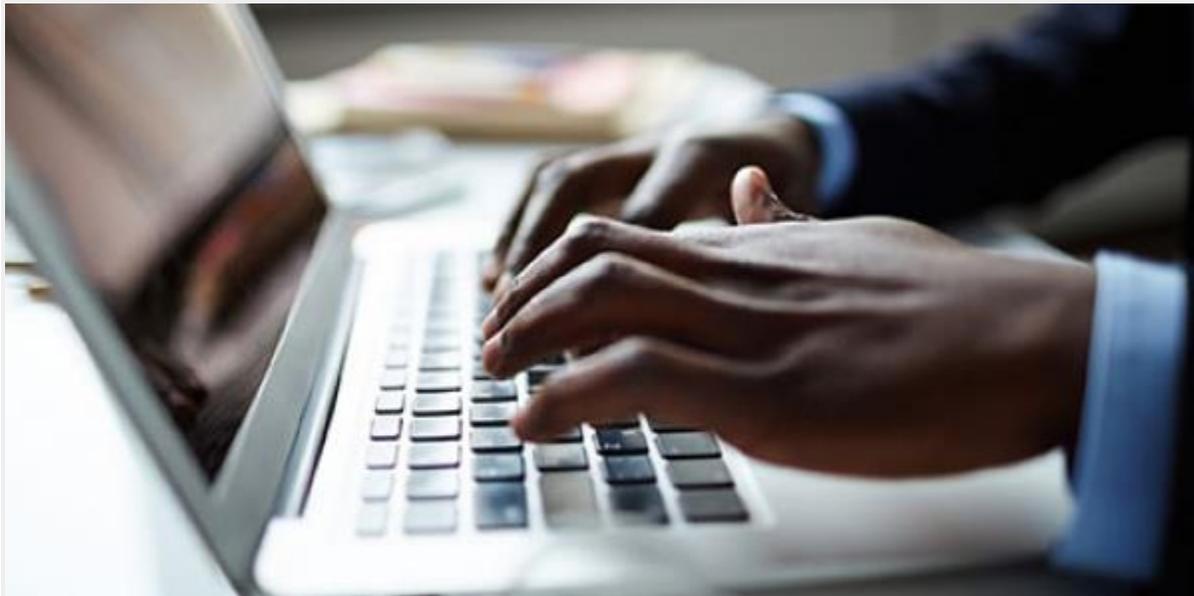
The instructors, Alvin Malesky, an associate professor of psychology, and Robert Crow, an assistant professor of educational research, used Turnitin and Google to

check students' work for plagiarism and monitored them to see if groups were taking exams at the same time.

The professors caught several students plagiarizing material. But they didn't spot the paid test takers, purchased papers, or coordinated assignments. And they had no clue that a person in New York to whom Mr. Baley had mailed his books was behind the A's they were giving.

Even when professors knew that students were cheating, and were trying to catch them, they came up short.

### **Contract Cheating's African Labor**



[Kenyan academic writers](#), who number more than 20,000, perform work for students in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere. “In every apartment building in Nairobi,” says one, “you could find two, three writers.”

Mr. Baley's only frustration was with the barrage of marketing he got. His Facebook and Instagram feeds were saturated with ads for cheating companies, he says. That didn't let up for months.

Two years after the company took his class, its representatives are still trying to enlist him to refer other students as clients.

**L**ike any underground industry, academic cheating has its share of sloppy opportunists and savvy operators. Most work in the shadows. Click on a website that offers academic work for hire, and you'll probably find little information about the people or company behind it. The owners often use aliases and mislead prospective customers with fake addresses and exaggerated claims.

No Need to Study LLC lists its corporate address as 19 East 52nd Street, in New York, but complaints filed with the Better Business Bureau say that address does not exist. A representative for the company said in an email that it is a virtual business offering services exclusively online and does not have an office open to the public. A dissertation-writing service that claims to be based in Chicago seems to operate out of Pakistan. "In order to create a best academic assignment that rank #1 among other assignments," its website says, "then you will seek for a dedicated and experienced writer's help."

Even more-established companies can be difficult to track down. The headquarters of one, Student Network Resources, appears to be in the middle of a New Jersey cornfield. A half-mile away, in a generic strip mall, it maintains a post-office box in a packing-and-shipping store. The owner of the store says he forwards the mail to Florida. It goes to the company's founder and president, Mark DeGaeta.

Mr. DeGaeta got the idea for Student Network Resources in the late 1990s, when he was still in high school, he says in an email to *The Chronicle*. Over the years, he has registered more than a dozen domains, including PaperDue.com and HelpMyEssay.com, which funnel work to his company, whose name is relatively unknown.

When students place a request through one of the sites, they enter their name, email address, and as much information about the assignment as possible, including due date and level (undergraduate, master's, or doctoral). That information goes into Student Network's system, where a price is set based on the difficulty of the assignment. The job is posted to a private board for writers, stripped of any personal details about the student. From there, a willing writer picks up the order and corresponds with the client through a private channel in which students often disclose personal information about themselves and their courses. Then the writer delivers the completed assignment.

Due 6/5	4 ps	Rightline	\$45 53
Due 6/4	3 ps	Kuhn	\$40
Due 6/6	5 ps	Lit.	\$60
Due 6/30	20 ps	ERP	\$250
Due 4/3	1 ps	World	\$12
Due 6/4	2.5 ps	Diversity	\$30
Due 6/5	3-4 ps	APEC	\$48
Due 6/20	40 ps	TRIPS	\$600
Due 6/12	15 ps	Ast. Growth	\$180
Due 6/29	8 ps	H.I.M.	\$117
Due 6/11	4.5 ps	Reaction I	\$54
Due 6/20	4.5 ps	Reaction II	\$54
Due 6/24	12 ps	bends + conn	\$144
Due 6/17	4.6 ps	Discussion I	\$72
Due 6/9	3.5 ps	Discussion A+B	\$42
Due 6/11	3 ps	Module 4	\$36
Due 6/14	3.5 ps	Module 5	\$48
Due 6/14	4 ps	Module 6	\$48

Chronicle photo by Brad Wolverton

A professional cheater's little black book of assignments shows the work he performed for students over the course of several weeks.

Mr. DeGaeta is mum about the revenue he has brought in, but the business appears to be lucrative. Two longtime writers say they've earned as much as \$10,000 a month.

At peak times, the company says on its website, most of its 150 writers earn more than \$1,800 a week. Writers typically pocket half the price of an order; the company gets the rest. If those numbers are accurate, annual revenue for Student Network Resources would be in the millions. The company has only two employees.

The founder has made a good living, according to public records. He owns an apartment in a tony neighborhood of New York, near the United Nations building, and seems to reside near Miami Beach. But his business has fallen off in recent years, he says, as the industry has expanded overseas.

The company emphatically denies that it is a cheating service. It says it tells customers that they may not use its material for academic credit — and requires them to acknowledge as much before purchasing papers, during the research process, and before receiving the work. "We vehemently protect our copyright," Mr. DeGaeta said in a written statement. "If the customer decides to use our material as a reference they must cite Student Network Resources Inc."

Several current and former writers told *The Chronicle* that they had believed that. Amelia Albanese, a former community-college tutor who worked for the company in 2010, says she thought she was writing sample papers for tutors and teachers. When she realized she was doing students' work, she quit.

"I worked at a college," she says, "and if the students I worked with had cheated, I would have been furious."

The company's business depends on covering its tracks. A memo it sent to writers last year gives step-by-step instructions for wiping the metadata from documents they produce.

"Every document that you submit must have 100% blank 'Summary' properties," the memo says. "You can make the 'Author' field (and other fields) blank by default for all new documents by going to 'Preferences' --> 'User Information' and replacing the content of the 'First:' and 'Last:' fields with a blank space."

According to Mr. DeGaeta, the memo was aimed at preventing writers from poaching clients. But if there's no trace of a cheater on a document, a college has no way of knowing — or if an instructor suspects something, no proof — that the student didn't do the work.

**C**heating has become second nature to many students. In [studies](#), more than two-thirds of college students say they've cheated on an assignment. As many as half say they'd be willing to purchase one. To them, higher education is just another transaction, less about learning than about obtaining a credential. The market, which includes hundreds of websites and apps, offers a slippery slope of options. Students looking for class notes and sample tests can find years' worth on Koofers.com, which archives exams from dozens of colleges. And a growing number of companies, including Course Hero and Chegg, offer online tutoring that attempts to stay above the fray (one expert calls such services a "gateway drug").

Many students turn to websites like Yahoo Answers or Reddit to find solutions to homework problems. And every month, hundreds of students put assignments up for bid on Freelancer.com and Upwork, where they might get a paper written for the cost of a few lattes.

**“Calculation based classes are \$750. All others are \$600. Anyone quoting different is not a pro and doesn't know what they are doing.”**

It's not uncommon for students to disclose personal details in their orders, which anyone online can see. This spring a student from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte included an attachment to his Upwork order that identified his institution and the introductory philosophy class he was looking for help in. A few days later, a

Ph.D. candidate in Britain went on the same site to solicit help with his dissertation. A document he attached to his order included his name and his adviser's.

Some of the most explicit exchanges happen on Craigslist, which has become a hub of cheating activity. Over two days in April, *The Chronicle* analyzed Craigslist posts in seven cities in which a cheater or cheating service offered to complete whole courses for students. The search turned up more than 200 ads. In many cases, the same ads ran in multiple cities, suggesting a coordinated marketing effort.

Craigslist posters appealed to students by acknowledging how little time they had for busywork. "Online classes are a pain in the ass," said one Chicago-area ad. Others outright asked students to hand over their online credentials. "You can trust us with your login and password information," said a Phoenix post. "We will do every section of your online class including discussion boards, tests, assignments, and quizzes."

*The Chronicle* exchanged messages with several Craigslist posters to inquire about the cost of their service and how it worked. One person who has posted regularly in the Los Angeles area said he had been in business for 10 years and had a staff of "over 20 experts." His prices, he said, depended on the number of hours it would take to complete a class, not how well a student wanted to do.

"We always get A's and B's," he said in a text message. "Calculation based classes are \$750. All others are \$600. Anyone quoting different is not a pro and doesn't know what they are doing. Cheap quotes = F grades.

"Oh," he added, "and you can split up the payments."

Another poster said his prices depended on the institution. "A course from Penn State World Campus requires more effort than a course from Post University," he said in an email. "Previously, I completed a remedial English course for a client at Kaplan

University. This person requested a 'B' for \$90/week for eight weeks. Another client at a Cal State University required an 'A' in a four-week upper division Asian Studies course for \$300/week."

**T**he most common way students cheat is through a simple web search — typing, for example, "essay," "essay help," or "write my essay." As many as half of the visits to some sites used for cheating come through search engines, *The Chronicle* found.

The companies that have made the biggest strides in the business have mastered the search game. Search-engine optimization efforts have helped [Ultius](#), founded in 2011, grow fast.

The Delaware-based company, with a call center in Las Vegas, has hired more than 40 employees, including engineers and customer-service representatives, according to job ads. It has contracted with more than 1,400 writers.

That growth has coincided with a surge in traffic. Over a recent three-month stretch, the site drew about 520,000 visits, according to a *Chronicle* analysis of data compiled by SimilarWeb. Thirty to 40 percent of Ultius's traffic comes from students' web searches, according to estimates on Alexa, which measures internet usage. Ultius is the No. 1 or No. 2 search result that pops up when someone Googles "buy a term paper," "buy a research paper," or about a dozen other phrases that indicate an intent to purchase a completed assignment, according to a *Chronicle* analysis of search data compiled by Spyfu, a search-engine optimization tool.

Boban Dedovic, 27, the company's chairman, helped start it after three semesters as a student at the University of Maryland at College Park, during which he worked as a tutor. To him, Ultius is a technology company that connects customers to writers, he says via email.

He denies that Ultius is part of the cheating industry, referring to it as a "doc prep service." In a written statement, the company says it works hard to ensure that its customers don't misuse its services, informing them of its fair-use policy (that its work is meant for reference only and must be properly cited) at least three times and requiring them to accept it. When the company suspects a problem, it conducts an investigation, drafts an internal report, and, if it finds a violation, disables the customer's account. However, the company says, it cannot individually monitor every one of its orders.

Ultius protects its business by keeping those orders private. When a student posts an assignment on Craigslist or other sites, looking for someone to pick it up, Google indexes that text, making it visible in searches. But the customer experience at Ultius occurs behind a wall, in the same way a bank keeps its clients' information private. Because Google can't create a record of those pages, professors wouldn't be able to find them.

The company's dealings with one Ph.D. candidate illustrate the increasingly complex work that students are outsourcing, while faculty members remain in the dark. Last year, Ultius contracted with a student who described herself as a "single active duty parent" to help write a concept paper for her doctoral program, records show. The job included revisions requested by the chair of her dissertation committee.

The Ph.D. student requested that Ultius complete a literature review and produce a theoretical framework for her dissertation. The order required the company to find

data on migration patterns and economic growth in Jamaica, and to apply advanced economic theory. The company did the work, but the customer was so displeased with it that she filed a complaint with the Better Business Bureau. That complaint details the case.

#### Complaint

Bait and Switch Tactics used in order to get hundred of dollars from me and then not have the ability to provide the product as advised.

I reviewed many writing companies for assistance with work needed for my university paper. I found Ultius in the BBB accredited business listings so decided to call \*\*\*\*\*@ultius.com to ordering to ensure the company could do the work requested. I reviewed online and noticed the ordering page had a variety of types of papers offered, yet not a concept paper so I called a NV telephone number and spoke to a lady who ensured me her company were accredited with BBB, had prepared many concept papers for my university and stood by their work.

The owner had advised me they would partner with me until the paper was accepted and would take responsibility for ensuring the paper would be passed by the chair process, to enable us to partner through the end of the dissertation process.

The owner walked me through what selections to make in order to place the order and have a writer start "working their magic". The first work returned to me was very substandard, to the point the work I presented was more accurate than the work returned. I advised of all the errors and received a very apologetic response promising to have the work completed to the standard needed by the university.

I had a very detailed feedback session with the new writer who was empathetic and appeared to want to do a great job. When I received the second writing effort returned the quality was much higher than that of the first writer, I submitted the writing piece and it was rejected as the formatting was incorrect for the type of paper and the university. The chair of the university gave very specific feedback on what changes were needed and how the writing should have been structured. I gave the feedback to Ultius who advised me they would review and rectify. When I followed up a week later I was instructed that I needed to pay again for the same work I had originally requested. I am a single active duty parent and cannot afford to lose \$700 so easily. When I called and asked for the company owner information - the gentleman refused to share that information with me. I will be consulting Judge Advocate General to gain assistance with this matter as I am very upset and disappointed as I was expecting to partner with this company thru conclusion of my schoolwork.

Thanks,  
\*\*\*\*\*

#### Desired Settlement

I would like the company to stick to the word and complete the work to the expectation of the university. Partnering with me as I receive feedback from the university on what needed to be changed to ensure completion of the concept paper occurs to the expectation of the university chair.

At that point I have no problem paying for the next phase of the dissertation journey.

#### Business Response

Dear Better Business Bureau,

We are sincerely sorry that Ms. \*\*\*\*\*'s order took much longer than expected and she was dissatisfied, but the product's focus changed throughout its five month course. While we understand Ms. \*\*\*\*\*'s frustration, we believe her complaint is unfounded because we fully refunded the client prior to her posting, in spite of giving her free content over the course of her editing order. Moreover, we exerted extra resources to come up with other resolutions, which she declined. We offer three services: custom writing, editing, and business writing. Custom writing involves new research and fresh content. Our editing service includes correcting grammatical errors, improving sentence structure, and checking for accuracy and consistency. Based on our records, Ms. \*\*\*\*\* placed an editing order on 4/25. Our order form does not list "concept paper" as an option, but we explicitly offer editing and custom writing. Rewriting and editing are distinctly different. Rewriting is actually custom writing. Ms. \*\*\*\*\* requested a writer look over and adjust her existing work, which our support representative interpreted as editing.

Based on Ms. \*\*\*\*\*'s initial instructions, we delivered the edited version on 4/30, per the client's deadline. Ms. \*\*\*\*\* believed our writer's efforts were unsatisfactory, so she requested a revision. In her revision request, Ms. \*\*\*\*\* wrote: "old incorrect qualitative details were left in the concept paper instead of writing new information based on a quantitative econometric study - so this will need re-writing from scratch."

Changing one's thesis from quantitative to qualitative methods is not a minor change. Such changes are not considered a part of editing. It is a major change to the structure of the research and subsequently custom writing. Ms. \*\*\*\*\* mailed our Office Manager and expressed her concern regarding her order's progress. Our Office manager attempted to explain the difference between editing and custom writing, but Ms. \*\*\*\*\* disagreed. After the email exchange, the Writing Manager contacted the client in order to clarify her revision requests.

Specifically, Ms. \*\*\*\*\* pointed out 3 issues to address in the revision: 1) APA formatting; 2) Revising the theoretical Framework based on an understanding of advanced economic theory using the endogenous growth model, based on current journal articles; and 3) Issues with using LinkedIn as part of the research. Point 1 presented a challenge because the client's understanding of APA format was based on proprietary differences from the standard that we had not been provided or informed of. Points 2 and 3 not only require new research and writing, but are critical elements of a doctoral candidate's research. These elements of the graduate research need to be decided upon by the client, not a writer or editor. Most importantly, such changes are certainly not editing.

We assigned another writer to tackle Ms. \*\*\*\*\*'s revision. On 5/6, the second writer uploaded a draft for the client to review in order to verify that he was proceeding properly. In commenting on the Theoretical Framework, Ms. \*\*\*\*\* noted "This is the area the chair is stating needs a LOT of review to ensure it is aligned to study - with more

indepth literature review to align to endogenous growth theory and migration of SKILLED workers from Jamaica causing a brain drain, with information on any prior research studies of data relating to migration from Jamaica."

This is original research, requiring the writer to seek data on migration patterns and economic growth in Jamaica, all within the context of the endogenous growth model. Finally, in commenting on the Annotated Bibliography, the client asked for sources that only align with migration patterns of skilled Jamaican workers, endogenous growth theory, and studies about the impact of migration on economic growth, and on the Jamaican economy in general. At this point, Ms. \*\*\*\*\*'s editing order was turning out to be custom writing.

In a message to Ms. \*\*\*\*\* , the writer explained "I spent my efforts working to expand your annotated bibliography to include sources that include information on neoclassical growth theory and endogenous growth models. Migration from Jamaica is addressed within a larger framework based on the studies of Boubtane and Dumont, one of many new sources I found and will upload both separately and into the document. As for the theoretical framework, I reviewed the instructions uploaded in the concept paper template and made substantial additions." Our writer spent considerable time adding custom writing to Ms. \*\*\*\*\*'s editing order. Her revision was uploaded 5/23. Ms. \*\*\*\*\* repeated the chair's comments that "The theoretical framework section is still missing the point." At this juncture, the second writer contacted the writing manager because he was unable to continue. Our writers are freelancers and do not have an hourly wage. Subsequently, he spent many unpaid hours re-writing Ms. \*\*\*\*\*'s editing order alongside researching and restructuring her research problem.

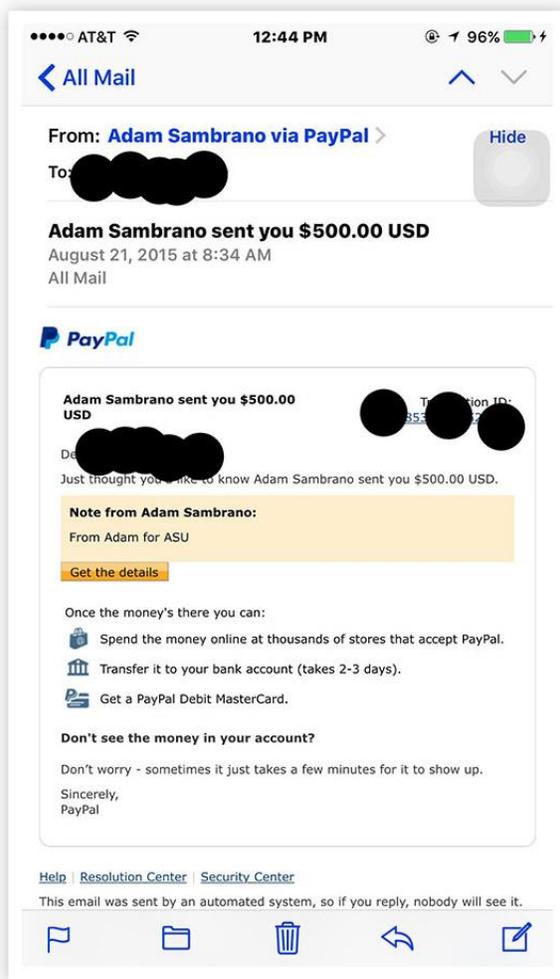
A third writer, with extensive PhD dissertation experience, was assigned to the order on 6/16. Ms. \*\*\*\*\* related to the new writer that she had never heard of the Endogenous Growth Theory and knew nothing about it. During the next few months the third writer tried to get clarification on many aspects of the project. She talked about needing the Theoretical Framework, then added in the Literature Review, then the Methodology sections, all of which needed a "major re-write" her words. We delivered the Theoretical Framework and Literature Review on 9/8. The sections prior to the Theoretical Framework had been edited, revised, and re-written as necessary to align with what follows. On 9/16, the client passed along the chair's response to the Theoretical Framework. The writer sent another revised version with the editorial changes made, noting that changes to theoretical concepts needed to be made by the client, because they were not decisions a writer could make. On this date, the Writing Manager emailed an annotated Methods Section and explanation as to what would be needed to continue working on the Methods Section.

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The Writing Manager wrote: "Attached is the methods section of your concept paper, annotated with numerous notes and comments addressing major issues in the

Ultius considers customer service a top priority, and despite 19 complaints in the past three years, mainly minor beefs over papers and assignments, it maintains an A+ rating from the BBB.

The Ph.D. student threatened to go public with her story, but more often it's the paid cheaters who make threats. After Mr. Sambrano, the high-school guidance specialist, transferred \$500 to have the whole course at Arizona State done for him, he stopped hearing from his Craigslist cheater and filed a PayPal claim against him. The cheater advised him to drop the claim or he'd hand over evidence of the arrangement to the university. Mr. Sambrano, afraid he'd be expelled, dropped the charge. He says he ended up doing the class himself.



Adam Sambrano, a career-guidance specialist for a school district in California, paid a professional cheater he found on Craigslist to take a graduate course at Arizona State University for him.

In another case, if not for a cheater turning a student in, a college may never have known that the student was paying someone else to log in to the course and complete the work. In May an undergraduate at Colorado State University-Global Campus, dissatisfied with the quality of the work done for him, filed a PayPal claim. Angered, the cheater gave the student's name to the instructor, along with text messages, screen shots of the student's portal, and payment records detailing how the student had arranged to have the entire course done for him, says Jon M. Bellum, the provost.

CSU-Global, an online institution with about 15,000 students, had its information-technology department look at the IP addresses used for the student's coursework and found more than one.

Mr. Bellum would not disclose the penalty the student faced, citing privacy law, but says such abuses can result in expulsion. Often, though, the university is not aware of the violation.

**C**olleges have tried technology to combat cheating. Several thousand

institutions around the world use the anti-plagiarism software Turnitin, which says it has a database of some 600 million papers. But a [recent study](#) found that custom work is "virtually undetectable."

Coursera, an online education platform employed by dozens of prominent colleges, uses webcams and "keyboard dynamics," which attempt to verify students' identities on the basis of their typing patterns. But that [doesn't do much good](#) if the cheater is always typing.

CSU-Global says it spends about \$60,000 a year administering random identity checks on its students. The tests require them to provide answers to personal questions like what banks service their loans or what streets they've lived on. If they don't answer accurately, they can't log in to their classes. About 2 percent of identity checks result in students' getting locked out of the CSU system.

Other institutions have blocked access to sites that help students cheat. Victor Valley College, in California, has prevented anyone on a campus computer from accessing the website of Student Network Resources. But students can turn to their own laptops or other devices.

The biggest key to fighting the problem is faculty engagement, says Tricia Bertram Gallant, a former president of the International Center for Academic Integrity. She often speaks with professors about the business, she says, and finds them surprised that someone else could be doing students' work.

"When I tell them about contract cheating, they're shocked," she says. "They basically say, 'What? That goes on?'"

## **In studies, as many as half of college students say they'd be willing to purchase an assignment.**

Others are in denial that it could happen in their classes. And even those who know about it and want to stop it say they're too busy, or feel that the fight is futile, with new cheating companies popping up all the time.

But some professors are catching on. Last fall, Megan Elwood Madden, an associate professor in the School of Geology and Geophysics at the University of Oklahoma, spotted a suspicious passage in a student's paper. She ran it through Turnitin, finding

several plagiarized sources but no match for the bulk of the text. So she Googled the student's research topic and found the assignment posted on Course Hero with the student's request for help.

A web search did not turn up the text the student had handed in, because it was hidden in Course Hero's system. But once Ms. Elwood Madden had logged in to the site, she could see communication between the student and a contractor suggesting that the student had had the work completed for him, the professor said in an email.

She discovered that the student had used Course Hero to arrange work in at least four other classes as well. The revelations led the university to expel the student.

Such stories are rare, academic-integrity officers say, because there are so few would-be enforcers in pursuit. After *The Chronicle* published [an article](#) about the Western Carolina experiment, two federal law-enforcement officials contacted the professors, eager to hear more about the business.

William Josephson, a former assistant attorney general in New York who has investigated fraud, says companies that assume false identities violate federal laws governing interstate commerce. [Laws in at least 17 states](#) prohibit students from using cheating services to complete their assignments. But prosecutors aren't enforcing them.

**F**aculty members on the front lines are no more active. That's also true in other countries where the cheating industry has developed. This spring, Marcus J. Ball, a higher-education reformer in Britain, came across an advertisement for academic cheating services on the wall of a London subway station.

The ad offended Mr. Ball, who began emailing college administrators and professors, trying to persuade them to sign a petition for the British government to debate the issue of contract cheating. His goal was to create a "unified block" of people willing to stand up to the cheating companies, with hopes of taking the fight to Canada, the United States, and elsewhere.

In May, Mr. Ball contacted more than 250 college officials, including academic-integrity leaders in several countries. Only five responded.

"Academics are constantly complaining about the essay-mill problem," he said in the email. But when presented with a "practical way forward to potentially solve the problem, they don't engage."

Last year, Ms. Bertram Gallant, who is director of the academic-integrity office at the University of California at San Diego, organized a dozen international experts to study the growth of contract cheating and how to stop it.



Tricia Bertram Gallant, a former president of the International Center for Academic Integrity, says professors are often surprised that someone else could be doing students' work. "When I tell them about contract cheating, they're shocked," she says.

The group laid out a series of big goals. Chief among them: Mobilize faculty members and students to demand laws making it more difficult for cheating companies to

operate. It is creating a tool kit to help professors detect and prevent cheating. And it is organizing an international awareness day to bring more attention to the problem.

But the group can only muster so much fight. "There's just not enough of us who care," says Ms. Bertram Gallant. "It's a very small cadre internationally who really dedicate our lives to working on this issue, and that's just not enough people."

College leaders haven't helped, she says. Many have failed to make the issue a priority. Few colleges have academic-integrity offices, she says, or devote dollars to the problem.

"There is a lot of money to support these companies, but not a lot of money to support our research," she says. "All the money is going to the illegal part of the industry, and none of it is going to combat the industry."

Colleges also might need to rethink their approach, says Ms. Bertram Gallant. As online education continues to grow, and cheating companies have more opportunities to infiltrate classes, institutions would do well to enlist people with the skills to ferret out violations, she says. While educators may be equipped to catch plagiarism, they don't have the tools to track a paid cheater who is assuming someone else's identity.

Instead, colleges continue to rely on proud traditions to fight the scourge of cheating. This fall, as students return to campus, some colleges will require them to sign an honor code. Others will spell out for them the potential consequences of academic dishonesty.

In October, academic-integrity officials at the University of Oklahoma plan to hold a session to warn new students about paper mills. The tool they're using to combat cheating? Tea bags. To remind the students of the importance of ethics, the university is encouraging them have a cup of "integri-tea."

*Dan Bauman and Ben Myers contributed reporting to this article.*