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## Paper Mills

Public and campus concern with the term-paper industry has shifted rapidly from indignation to inattention, leaving the paper mills churning at higher speed. A recent study\* concludes that "students at every major university in the country have access to at least one commercial firm that offers a variety of writing and research services ranging from term papers on any subject for undergraduates to M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations." Prices are reported to range from a bargain basement \$2 per page for an undergraduate term paper (very likely one of many photocopies) to \$10,000 for a custom-tailored "original" doctoral dissertation. According to the study cited, demand far outstrips supply; sales are limited chiefly by the firms' inability to retain a sufficient number of "qualified" ghostwriters. Other evidence suggests that some term-paper entrepreneurs overcome this limitation by making use of unwitting labor: papers are stolen from departmental offices and sold, with already-graded "A" papers commanding the highest rate.

Several university administrators and public officials concerned with higher education engaged in a short-lived, largely unsuccessful effort to close down the mills. The obstacles they encountered included the defense of private enterprise, First Amendment freedoms, and the individual's right to privacy. Paper mill executives argued that they sold the papers as "research material" and could scarcely be held responsible for the unethical usage many students made of them. Quite a few faculty, disgusted with the paper mills, became even more dismayed by what they saw as the "police tactics" their administrations advocated to catch students involved.

Indeed it does seem that the proper place for an educational institution to combat the unethical and anti-intellectual patronage of paper mills is at its source: student cynicism regarding the true aims and values of the educational process. A good deal more is at stake than the authenticity of the credentials the university provides its graduates, or the maintenance of academic standards. A university must view as one of its main missions to instill in its students a respect for intellectual integrity and a sense of the value of learning for its own sake and of advancing their careers by legitimate means. After all, there is only a short distance from submitting a purchased Ph.D. to doctoring one's research findings and to other unprofessional and unethical practices.

The task is a very difficult one. Society is undergoing a period of soul-searching in which the media carry daily reports of unethical conduct by corporation executives, government officials, and professionals. Contact between the faculty and the students in many colleges is limited in scope and intensity, which curbs the opportunities for moral standard setting, emulation, and education. Nor is it quite clear how best to proceed.

Preaching in classrooms, exhorting the student government (if one exists), and having chaplains make appeals are measures that are hardly going to help. A grand dialogue of the faculty and the students on the issues involved may help but may be neither attainable nor sufficient. A highly punitive approach might well be rejected by many faculties, and might not educate the students, even if it led them to purchase fewer papers.

Possibly, as a first step, the American Council on Education, the AAAS, and the many other associations available to academia should set aside more of their symposia, workshops, and convention time to face the question: What is to be done about students who, in effect, purchase their degrees, cheat themselves of education, and drain their degrees of substance? Can colleges disregard this reportedly rampant practice, and not in a sense be paper mills themselves?—AMITAI ETZIONI, *Center for Policy Research, Inc.*, 475 Riverside Drive, New York 10027

\*R. J. Simon, E. Smith, J. Leckenby, M. Long, S. Young, "The term paper business," unpublished report, University of Illinois, p. 1.