

Tertiary exam cheats in Singapore pay others to do their assignments

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SINGAPORE - More tertiary students are turning to popular paid services costing as little as \$45 to get their essay assignments and exam projects done for them by other people.

Checks by The Straits Times found that these services are easily available on online platforms like Facebook and Carousell, and also offered by fellow students in universities and polytechnics for a fee.

For instance, a student who did not wish to be named for fear of punishment said he had paid a fellow student \$50 to complete a compulsory computer coding assignment for him.

He said: "I didn't have a choice. Halfway through the module, I realised I didn't understand most of what was going on. If I didn't get someone to do it for me, I would have failed."

He also paid the same student \$80 to complete his online coding exam for him. "It was a relief the exam was online due to Covid-19. I felt a bit guilty at first, but the need to pass this module quickly overwhelmed any guilt I had."

The Education Ministry, in response to queries, said it takes a serious view of dishonesty among students. It added that all forms of academic fraud, including ghost writing and contract cheating, where students get academic work completed on their behalf by a third party, are strictly prohibited.

Offenders will be subject to disciplinary action, which may include expulsion, MOE said.

"Education institutions rely on a mix of assessment methods in order to ensure that a student's grade is truly reflective of their own efforts," it added.

This can include more traditional assessment in the form of examinations, where the assessment conditions are designed to prevent cheating.

Some universities, like Nanyang Technological University and National University of Singapore, [employ software to detect plagiarism in assignments](#). Students have to run completed essays through the checker called Turnitin before submission.

When asked, students said they were not worried about their essays being detected for plagiarism as the work they paid for had been "written from scratch".

The students also said they knew they were cheating, but many said they had no choice.

One student who graduated from a local university this year paid \$185 to Ace Essay Service on Carousell to complete an international business assignment.

Checks found that Ace Essay Service, which also has a platform on Facebook, has more than 5,700 positive reviews on Carousell. When contacted, it declined to be interviewed.

The 24-year-old student said: "I hired them two weeks before my submission date. It would have been more expensive to get a completed essay in a couple of days.

"I felt ashamed, but I only did it once and it was for a redundant module that has nothing to do with my career now."

He said: "The majority of my friends have used these services before. I even know of people who've paid to get their work done throughout an entire semester. This wasn't so common previously."

Students said prices could go up to \$600 an essay, depending on its difficulty and how quickly an essay needs to be completed.

A local university graduate, who also declined to be named, paid a freelance writer from Nigeria to complete two history assignments for \$45 and \$60 respectively. The price difference was due to the complexity of the questions.

When asked why he did it despite knowing he was cheating, he said: "The price was not prohibitive and there was a low risk of getting caught. Unfortunately, the quality of the essays turned out to be sub-par."

ST also spoke to students who offered their essay-writing services to their friends in universities and polytechnics.

A student, who received her diploma three years ago, said she helped her friend complete five essays over a three-year period.

She earned \$150 for each essay which was about 1,200 words long.

"I didn't feel bad about it because it wasn't me who was cheating, and my friend whom I helped had absolutely no guilt about what she was doing," she told ST.

Another student who helped a friend complete two essays for \$300 each agreed, saying: "I didn't see it like I was helping someone cheat, but it was more of helping him get through the module."

The 25-year-old graduate added: "I don't see an issue with this if it is a one-off thing. But if a student is doing it on a regular basis, then I think it shouldn't be condoned."