

# ACADEMIC GHOST WRITING AND CONTRACT CHEATING PROVISION OBSERVED ON A FREELANCING WEBSITE

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This paper and accompanying presentation will explore the use of Freelancer.com for academic writing provision. The focus is on an analysis of quantitative data collected from the site, focusing specifically on contract cheating related to writing tasks. The resulting presentation will consider both the projects being requested and the providers who are offering to complete work from the students.

The paper builds upon previous studies in the field. The earliest study about contract cheating examined the use of Rentacoder.com by students. Freelancer.com is the natural successor of Rentacoder, having come about through a series of re-brands and mergers. Unlike the first study, which found the majority of requests on Rentacoder were for computer programming assignments, this new study sees a substantial body of requests for writing services across a variety of disciplines. It does not consider contract cheating requests outside of the writing domain.

The paper considers Freelancer projects tagged with the terms “academic writing”, “essay writing” or both. These tags were introduced in the week starting 7 August 2017, removing the idea that Freelancer did not knowingly allow writing services for student work. A data set collected over the period 7 August 2017 to 9 September 2019 saw 4,353 projects posted on Freelancer.com that included one or both tags.

Notably, not all of these projects represented contract cheating, as some requesters seemed to have used multiple tags in an attempt to increase the visibility of their posts. A logistic regression machine learning model trained on 738 projects correctly classified 85.6

Some initial observations from the data set are of interest.

The top five countries from which contract cheating requests were made were: (1) India, (2) United States, (3) United Kingdom, (4) Australia, (5) Pakistan. These countries covered 54.77

For 1,231 requests, the country of the provider hired to complete the project was visible (in many cases customers choose to hide this information). The top five countries providing contract cheating services were: (1) Kenya, (2) Pakistan, (3) India, (4) United Kingdom, (5) United States. These countries covered 76.0% of all bid winning providers.

On average, each project received 27.61 bids from providers offering to complete the work.

The data set saw 696 projects which showed the final price paid using the USD currency. This average price point was \$71.53 USD per project. Assuming this is consistent across all 4,353 projects, this means that \$132,354 USD of contract cheating business goes through Freelancer.com each year for the stated categories alone. That number may well be an underestimate, since the amount paid also seems to differ by currency, with workers paid in Euros receiving a premium.

The presentation will provide more detail about the data set, the types of ghost writing contract cheating projects requested on Freelancer.com and the trends observed. But this is just one more site outside of essay mills which students can use to get their done for them and which instructors should be aware of.