

In U.S., some students buy – not try – to excel at school

by Karin Zeitvogel – Fri Sep 11, 12:01 pm ET WASHINGTON (AFP) –

President Barack Obama may have hammered home a message of noses-to-the-grindstone as the secret to success at school in his speech to US students this week, but some American youngsters prefer buying their homework to doing it.

A Google search for "buy term paper" turned up 183 million sites, some of which, such as acceptedpapers.com, offer to write students' papers for them when they are "unable to be creative for an essay" or would "rather enjoy a night out than write a book report at the library."

Another service, perfecttermpapers.com, offers hard-pressed students "non-plagiarized research papers and term papers within your deadline... written by qualified American writers" for prices starting at around eight dollars.

Perfect Term Papers says it understands the needs and worries of students -- things like "how difficult is it to begin writing term paper/research paper when an evening out is equally important" or "when you might drop-dead the next minute due to exhaustion."

The dozen "paper mill" websites visited by AFP provide samples that would-be clients can consult online to verify the high quality of work that will be produced, in the student's name, by the essay-writing services.

Or, in some cases, the not-so-high quality of work.

Perfect Term Papers posted a sample paper on artificial intelligence, which began: "Intelligence, in any form, is the computational part of the ability to accomplish particular task or achieve goals in the life.

"The main problem is that despite of advancements, we still cannot distinguish in general what kinds and levels of computational procedures we want to call intelligent," the paper continued.

And a paper comparing Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" to J. D. Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye" posted on dreamessays.com began with the line: "The forthcoming of American literature proposes two distinct Realistic novels portraying characters which are tested with a plethora of adventures."

"This paper is just too awful to read. I would be mortified if one of my students handed it in," said Carol Zoref, who teaches a course at Sarah Lawrence College in New York called "Narrative Design," which often deals with Huckleberry Finn.

The paper was "overflowing with grammar mistakes, vocabulary mistakes, and nonsensical repetition," Zoref told AFP. Her advice to a student who submitted it would be "to get their money back."

Students who buy their papers are not only wasting their money but are naive to think they might pull the wool over their teachers' eyes, educators say.

"What gives it away for me is that the writing is so very different from the daily work the student has been turning in," high school English and writing teacher Marilyn told AFP.

These days, too, the source that has given students easy access to papers written by others, the Internet, has also made it easier for teachers to check to see if the essay was written by the student who submitted it.

"I take a selection of the text of a suspicious paper and paste it into the Google search box or turnitin.com," said Marilyn, who withheld her last name.

"If it is a copied paper from the Internet, the exact paper service is one of the hits on my search," she said.

Zoref agreed that it would be easy for a teacher to tell if a term paper were a student's own work or the product of a paper mill.

"Every student has a musical quality to their writing. Passing off someone else's writing as your own -- it's like Ella Fitzgerald trying to sing like Aretha Franklin.

"They have different musical qualities and their own unique voices and when they start to sing like someone else, you know it's just not their tune," she said, adding: "Like the president said, there's no excuse for not trying."