

Academic Ghostwriting and International Students

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Ghostwriting is a common practice in a variety of professional and artistic endeavors but is only acceptable when the audience expects it. In academia, ghostwriting student essays is considered dishonest among faculty, but not all students agree since some of them do employ ghostwriters. In this article, we examine how international students perceive ghostwriting by interviewing ghostwriters and students who have used those services. We ultimately argue that a liberal arts education requires that students behave ethically, which excludes ghostwriters.

In their study of the ethics of ghostwriting in academic work and in the larger writing community, Linda A. Riley and Stuart C. Brown ask, “If it is ethical for the president of the United States, or the CEO of a corporation, to employ ghostwriters in the name of efficiency and effectiveness, then what of a student taking a speechwriting class and using a ‘ghostwriter’?” (713). Riley and Brown examine several positions regarding the ethics of ghostwriting and test three major positions found in ghostwriting literature: the ethicist’s position, the organizational position, and the speechwriter’s position (711). However, Riley and Brown do not focus on student writers, nor do they specifically address international student writers. Our paper explores this topic with this particular group of students to better examine the attitudes and values surrounding ghostwriting on college campuses.

In our second year of study at the University of San Francisco, we have noticed that some students hire ghostwriters to write papers or to do other tough homework. To investigate students’ and experts’ views about ghostwriting, we interviewed students and professors at our home university.¹ Because ghostwriting is accepted in many kinds of writing, we place students’ and experts’ perceptions of academic ghostwriting in the context of recent ghostwriting scandals in the business world and popular culture. We argue that all students, including international students, should realize the value of learning by themselves.

Ghostwriting in Context

Students who hire ghostwriters are part of a long history. Riley and Brown, in their essay “Crafting a Public Image: An Empirical Study of the Ethics of Ghostwriting,” state that the desire to craft an effective public image leads to the use of ghostwriting. They write that the practice of ghostwriting can be traced to ancient times, when “logographers” (wordsmiths) could be hired to craft rhetoric (Riley and Brown 711). Ghostwriting can be found in medieval times, when “poorly educated royalty were dependent on scribes and professional advisors to ‘compose as well as write down’” their messages (711). They assert that today, ghostwriting is used by business and public leaders like politicians, chief executive officers (CEOs), and presidents who do not have enough time and energy but want to show rhetorical skill.

Most people still accept that ghostwriters write speeches for public speakers. Ghostwriting is viewed by some as a necessary element of public life: defenders of ghostwriting see “no ethical dilemma in the practice because the audience knows the ‘speechgiver’ is not necessarily the

‘speechwriter’” (Riley and Brown 711). Riley and Brown mention the views of presidential speechwriters, such as speechwriter Peggy Noonan, for whom “the question of ethics is entirely absent” (713). Thus the key ethical idea for Riley and Brown is “what the audience knows.”

If the audience is unaware of ghostwriting, people often feel cheated. One of the authors of this study, Shulun, is a computer science minor, and so we were very interested in a recent news story about ghostwriting in technology. Verizon, which is a United States (US) broadband and telecommunications brand, found that a US-based software developer, “Bob,” outsourced work to China and spent his time surfing Reddit, which is a social networking website, and watching cat videos. Emil Protalinski, a technology journalist writing for The Next Web, reports that Bob paid “someone else less than one-fifth of his six-figure salary to do this job.” Bob was considered “the best developer in the building: his code was clean, well written, and submitted in a timely fashion.” If Verizon had not investigated foreign activity via its Virtual Private Network connection, Bob might still be considered a great employee. Some think Bob is smart to hire others do his work; however, many people, including Bob’s employer, feel that this was unfair and unethical because it violated the trust between managers and employees. Although we often accept the idea of ghostwriting or speechwriting in politics, Bob’s case shows that hiring ghostwriters in the workplace is still seen as lazy or even unethical.

Ghostwriting has also made recent headlines in the arts. The case of Mamoru Samuragochi, a famous composer in Japan, caused outrage because he deceived the public about the authorship of his works. Audiences may accept ghostwriting if they are aware of it in advance (Riley and Brown 712). Samuragochi’s deception was revealed by his ghostwriter, who suddenly showed up in the Japanese media and claimed that he had been working for Samuragochi for many years. Samuragochi held a press conference to admit his fraud. He did not compose his most famous works (Fackler).

Ghostwriting and Academic Work

Surprisingly, in some academic fields, ghostwriting is becoming more popular in recent years, both for speeches and research articles. Dr. Natasha Das, a freelance medical writer and Dr. Saurendra Das, an executive director at Excel Life Sciences, wrote a research paper on professional medical writers. According to their research, authors of articles published in medical journals are often busy researchers who cannot afford time devoted to writing. Though they are experts in their own therapeutic area, more often than not, researchers find it difficult to actually write and publish their research. Professional medical writers, with their expertise in writing comprehensible content, are often a great support to researchers. Their contribution to the manuscript is usually focused on getting a manuscript ready for publication. While medical writers can be legitimate contributors to the medical manuscript, full ghostwriting is still seen as unethical (Das and Das 22).

In another recent study, Jeffrey Lacasse of Arizona State University and Jonathan Leo of Lincoln Memorial University examined fifty academic medical centers and found that only ten explicitly published a policy of prohibiting ghostwriting. Additionally, “of the 10, seven included some definition of ghostwriting in their policy” while the rest have “policies [that] are ambiguous or ill-defined [about ghostwriting]” (Dickinson 12). Contrary to Das and Das, who see some forms of ghostwriting as acceptable, the unambiguous policies found by Lacasse and Leo define “participating in medical ghostwriting as academic misconduct akin to plagiarism or falsifying data” (Dickinson 12). That is to say, medical ghostwriting reduces the credibility of paper before the public, similar to plagiarism or fake data. This problem may even be a threat to public health, Lacasse and Leo argue.

Although business leaders may ethically hire ghostwriters, this is not tolerated in business schools. Emily Kubo investigates ghostwriting as academic misconduct in application essays. In

“The Ghost in the Details: The Problem of Ghostwritten MBA Applications in Japan,” Kubo describes ghostwritten applications by Japanese candidates applying to highly ranked Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs at US universities. Kubo writes that, for overseas applicants, “Differences in cultural and educational background often make essay questions harder to understand and answer effectively, and therefore, arguably could increase the temptation to hire application consultants to write life stories.” Yet there is an important difference between hiring a consultant to help with an application and hiring a ghostwriter to write it for you. To applicants facing “enormous pressure from their companies to get into a top-tiered MBA program,” this line is not always clear.

Kubo reports that in “March 2002, the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business expelled a student due to graduate in the spring. The unidentified student was purportedly removed because of ‘material misrepresentation’ in his application.” Unsurprisingly, these fraudulent applications are not welcomed at top US MBA programs, and some, like Haas, try to verify candidates who have written a great essay with a personal interview (Kubo). How big of a problem is ghostwriting in MBA applications? Adam Markus, an admissions counselor at the Princeton Review, emphasizes that this is a “worldwide problem” (Kubo). Although this issue certainly does not pertain only to international applications, there is no doubt that overseas students face greater challenges when applying for western MBA programs.

These challenges involve not just language differences but also cultural differences. In high school in China, students, such as us, were encouraged to combine the ideas of others, such as famous writers or political leaders, rather than learn how to focus on proper citations in the US style. At our university’s orientation, the International Student and Scholar Services told us about the rules for paraphrasing and quotations; we were very worried because there was such big punishment for this unfamiliar rule.

Students’ Perspectives on Ghostwriting

Riley and Brown conclude that an “encouraging” finding in their study is that “students hold themselves to high levels of ethical behavior when it comes to using ghostwriters themselves.” In their study, students could clearly distinguish between an ethical situation, such as “[h]aving a classmate read over a speech you’ve prepared and offer suggestions for making it better” and an unethical situation, such as “[h]aving a friend write a speech for you that you will deliver in speech class” (718). However, as students, we have seen firsthand that it is not always true that students hold themselves to high ethical standards. Students themselves are often customers of ghostwriters and also most of the ghostwriters who provide the services are actually students. Like Riley and Brown, we decided to ask the students themselves about their attitudes towards ghostwriting. However, Riley and Brown do not discuss student ghostwriters, so going further, we also decided to interview student ghostwriters. Additionally, as international students, we were interested in this population, which is also not discussed in their study.

We learned that some college students, especially English language learners, choose to hire ghostwriters to write papers. As Kubo observed, the challenges of writing in a different language and cultural context can “increase temptation” to hire a ghostwriter. In an ethics class in the fall semester of 2013, two international students Amy and Ben (all student names in this essay are pseudonyms) each hired a ghostwriter online to write their papers on Aristotle. They paid extra charges for ghostwriters to increase the security of paper. This means the ghostwriters would spend more time to write an original paper and decrease the risk of plagiarism. We interviewed these students and asked why they chose this means. Amy and Ben both said it took too much time to read the full books before writing the essay, and they chose to hire a ghostwriter in order to complete the

assignment. After that, they would not only save time but also get a good grade. We also interviewed another international student, Cathy, about this issue. She replied:

Why not? People help each other! Ghostwriters will have extra money and students will have a satisfactory grade. Sometimes, students do not write what they can get by writing paper. Do they really learn something in various courses?

Students Amy and Ben also shared this opinion—they all agree ghostwriting is a cooperative form of work and both parties gain mutual benefits.

This is similar to the perspective of the speechwriters discussed by Riley and Brown, who see that “a speech is often the result of a collective effort” (714). In “Nothing in Common? Great—A Good Ghostwriting Match Needs Some Tension,” a Chicago-based writer and media relations consultant Greg Beaubien also approves this view: “the client/ghostwriter dynamic thrives not just on combining the talents of two people, but on the collision of different points of view.” We interviewed David, an international business student who has a good grade point average, who talked about this issue:

I partially agree with ghostwriting, it might a solution to submit homework and make you feel not stressful. For many difficult courses like philosophy and literature, you just have to read a lot before writing. It sounds horrible, could you make sure you will read all of the readings and understand well to write a great essay?

Students Amy, Ben, and Cathy all agree with this view and add that many students might wait for opportunities to use ghostwriting. That is to say, they will choose to hire ghostwriters to accomplish their assignments under some special circumstances, such as if taking this risk would not have serious punishments or if they are unlikely to get caught. It is likely a criminal feels jealousy or anger with others, but they might wait for opportunities to try their scheme under special circumstances. Under these conditions, they may choose to commit their crime—like the student who hires ghostwriters. Furthermore, students who do not write their own papers could have many reasonable excuses to hire a ghostwriter to write instead, like the materials are too hard to understand, or they do not have adequate time to deal with a paper with too much pressure.

We found that there was a range of opinions about ghostwriting in academic work. One student, Edward, said he is strongly opposed to ghostwriting:

I’m saying that it is ridiculous for them to hire ghostwriters because they are just paying money for their laziness. Also, it is a waste of time for professors to read the articles or compositions that are actually done by ghostwriters. Nobody wants to be deceived by someone else.

However, another student, Frank, agreed with the students mentioned earlier. He said:

It is okay to hire the ghostwriters for not too many times during their student careers because sometimes we don’t have enough time to do all the things simultaneously. It is possible that we might have problems on our assignments and there’s no one to help. So my point is that hiring ghostwriters for once or twice is acceptable. But one thing that those who do ghostwriting should know that, the more times you do, the more risks you have to take.

Normally, once it has been discovered that students had hired ghostwriters, those who did more would be punished more severely than those who did it less frequently. If a professor catches students, they will not only lose trust from professors but also get a lower grade than others who did their own work. Even worse, the professor might give a grade “F” or forward cases to the Academic Honesty Committee to affect the student’s record.

To better understand ghostwriting, we asked an extra question to a student, Troy, who had hired ghostwriters before: “Why do you hire the ghostwriters?” He answered:

I hired them to do the works for me because I couldn't understand the requirements of the assignments very well. As an international student, it is hard for me to read some ethical papers. The handout that professor gave to me was not seemed to be very clear. I didn't know what I should write and what I should do with the assignments. What's more, it is hard for me to get the meanings even when I read ethics papers in Chinese. And the most important reason for me to hire ghostwriters is that I don't want to get a low grade on my courses.

After interviewing the students, we have learned some of the reasons why students want to hire ghostwriters, and we made a conclusion. Some of them just want to complete the assignments, but they are too lazy to do the work by themselves. Some are willing to do the work, but the challenges they faced were too difficult that they gave up. Some want to get a higher grade since they could not get that high grade by themselves.

But the interesting phenomenon is that once those students start to hire ghostwriters and received a high grade, they become satisfied by the ghostwriters' works, and they start to hire ghostwriters continuously, like the famous Japanese composer Samuragochi. Thus, the hope of the student Frank, that students might only hire ghostwriters occasionally, may be false. As Dan Ariely, a professor of psychology and economics at Duke University, said in a Technology Entertainment Design talk, "Rationalizing our actions could enable us to cheat while we think of ourselves being honest people. We would cheat more if the degree of rationalization rises." That is how rationalization drives those students to cheat more.

Ghostwriters' Position

In the view of ghostwriters, they are not involved in an ethical problem, and they may even regard themselves as an "artist" (Riley and Brown 713). As we mentioned, the speechwriter thinks writing a speech is often the result of "collective effort" rather than anything unethical (714). For example, Craig E. Smith, a speechwriter for President Bush's presidential campaign and Lee Iacocca, "describes the process of writing for Bush as a collaborative effort [because] Bush would provide detailed instructions, like a point outline" for integrating a whole speech (714). However, speech ghostwriting is different than ghostwriting in universities. College students might not put forth any effort in their assignment and utilize financial trade to buy a complete paper.

We met one of the ghostwriters who our interviewee hired before. He is also an international student. We asked him how much money he could gain for each paper. He answered:

It depends on the length and the hardness of the paper. Generally speaking, I can earn \$80 for writing 800 words essay, which is approximately 3 to 4 pages, double-spaced. If the paper requires me to read materials, it would cost more because it cost me much more time on reading them.

Then we asked how he thinks about his "job." He hesitated for a while and said:

Well, it's a tough question but a good question. Sometimes I'm feeling tired of doing ghostwriting because I have to spend most of my time on doing it. For other words, I have less spare time to have some entertainments. Also, some of the clients that I met were very tough to deal with. Sometimes I have to rewrite for several times if they were not satisfied with the works that I have done for them. But the good thing that I've gain from this job is not just money but also the writing skill.

For this ghostwriter, like the presidential speechwriters discussed by Riley and Brown, the challenges are not ethical but rather practical. Ghostwriters can both earn money for students' laziness and improve their own writing skills through their jobs.

Being a ghostwriter is not that easy. Demian Farnworth, a blogger who writes for the blog “Squawk,” has experience ghostwriting. His view of the pros of ghostwriting matched the opinion of the student who works as ghostwriter:

Ghostwriting is usually the first job a freelance writer gets fresh out of the corporate cubicle—especially a writer that’s fretting about bringing in income. Busy people are always looking for writers. Think easy money. You can get a free education as a ghostwriter if you research and write about a new field. I got an accelerated MBA in new media marketing during my time as a ghostwriter. You don’t have to worry about taking the public criticism of your content. You just write.

Farnworth feels that ghostwriting helped him improve his writing skills. Also, he did not need to worry about what he wrote because he was not the author of it. However, he also mentioned the disadvantages of being a ghostwriter, also similar to the disadvantages mentioned by the student ghostwriter:

A wet-behind-the-ears-freelancer may not have the experience or courage to negotiate a good fee. And the temptation of volume will depress the per-article fee, meaning you work harder and faster for less. Only the highest quality content will work. Otherwise, you’re climbing a mountain of sand. Do a good job and your client will refer you to other clients. That is how it is supposed to work. However, this is not in your control. You may land a friendly, generous client who liberally shares your contact information with everyone you meet (which was my case). Or you may meet someone who is absorbed in business affairs and forgets to recommend you even if you do a slamming good job.

In this part, Farnworth explains that not all the words that ghostwriters wrote are defined as effective; it depends on how well it works. Another point is that ghostwriters might face some tough customers and this would make it hard to finish the job.

Beaubien also writes about his experiences working with tough customers as a ghostwriter:

In the beginning, our working relationship seemed doomed. The client complained that I asked too many questions. I said he wasn’t clear when he spoke. How was I going to ghostwrite for this guy if I didn’t understand him? It seemed that we couldn’t have been more different as people: He was the conservative businessman and ex-jock who went in for motivational books and seminars. I was the smart-aleck feature writer who read the Beats and played guitar. (23)

From this case, we can easily learn that ghostwriters not only need to write papers for others in other fields, they also need to have good relationships with their clients because they need to imitate their clients’ writing styles.

In 2010, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* published “The Shadow Scholar,” an article by a retired ghostwriter who started this job in 2004 and earned as much as \$66,000 each year. The ghostwriter, Dave Tomar (writing under the pseudonym of Ed Dante), tells his own experience of getting paid to help students cheat on their papers. He said, “in the past year, I’ve written roughly 5,000 pages of scholarly literature, most on very tight deadlines. But you won’t find my name on a single paper. . . . As far as I know, not one of my customers has ever been caught” (Dante). He “helped” students in various courses and “completed 12 graduate theses of 50 pages or more” (Dante) and even could work twenty assignments in one day. In spite of this great output, it is very difficult to detect ghostwriters, and many people may not even know these “shadow scholars” exist. Tomar reports that his business was booming, especially during midterms and finals (Dante). Tomar thinks these students need help to pass courses or obtain a graduate degree; some students cannot even complete their writing, and they misspell simple words. He also noticed cheating has

become more common in colleges: “you have no idea how deeply this kind of cheating penetrates the academic system, much less how to stop it” (Dante).

There are three kinds of target consumers who seek his services: “the English-as-second-language student; the hopelessly deficient student; and the lazy rich kid” (Dante). These students have intense pressure with homework or are unwilling (or unable) to spend a lot of time on it. Tomar also considers the most successful or ambitious students who highly value grades or performance, but might not be most ethical. Meanwhile, he also criticizes the dispiriting education system which is “just another place where grades were grubbed, competition overshadowed personal growth, and the threat of failure was used to encourage learning” (Dante). However, students who have not prepared for the challenges of college but want to graduate or have a higher grade in order to look successful might find ghostwriting is the quick way to help them. Tomar recently published a book about his experiences, reviewed by Dan Berrett in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. In “An Academic Ghostwriter, the ‘Shadow Scholar,’ Comes Clean,” Berrett writes that ghostwriting is for “Students, out of pragmatism or laziness, he says, who seek to get the best grades for the least effort;” Tomar, he writes, thinks in this exchange trade of ghostwriting, “everyone is a co-conspirator” to cooperate with one essay. Hirers exchange money to ghostwriters to get essays in return in this exchange trade.

Interviewing with Experts and Experts’ Views

Ghostwriting is an ethical issue and also affects others. That is to say, students who hire ghostwriters lie to themselves with fake works and also lie to others by building a fake image, like Bob the Verizon programmer, to look outstanding externally. Dan Ariely, the psychology and economics professor mentioned earlier, thinks people could cheat but still think they are right or honest based on their rationalization. He asserts that people would like to analyze and balance the causes and benefits of lying or not lying. If they lie or cheat, they would also find a good reason to feel comfortable. Thesis students who choose to hire ghostwriters to cheat have made-up reasons and still think they are right to pursue a higher grade. However, they have chosen the wrong way by purchasing a good grade. They do not care what others think about a fake work. Like the programmer Bob, they will lose the trust of professors (or managers) and peers if people find they did not produce the work.

Peter Johnson, the Director of International Admissions at Haas School of Business, says of ghostwriting in MBA program applications:

I personally feel that if someone is capable of lying on their application, [they] are going to lie as a middle manager, [they are] going to lie when they are a CEO, and [they are] going to behave in a way that would reflect poorly on the program and poorly on the company. (qtd. in Kubo 50)

These people try to craft a fake image, which cannot be reliable in future jobs. From students’ view, it is not fair for peers to have unjust competitions. In the case of studying ethics, I am also an international student who found it stressful to write my paper on Aristotle. Compared with the students who hired ghostwriters, I spent almost a whole day writing my Aristotle paper; I reviewed a large number of books and studied the meaning and connections within readings. It seems unfair for me to get a lower grade after more effort and time-consuming work if the professor did not detect their strategy and gave them a higher score. Some of them missed too many classes and do not do homework but hire others to do them; they do not learn anything with a fake grade.

Therefore, from our point of view, it is necessary to help these students realize studying is important, and they should have a true recognition of learning in college. In other words, they should see the value of studying because learning is a great way to improve themselves rather than

having an excellent grade. These students purchase a good grade in the wrong way; the true way to obtain a grade is with hard work.

Marvin Brown is an ethics professor at University of San Francisco in the United States. The two students who hired ghostwriters got a “C” in his class. Professor Brown states why he would evaluate students’ learning based on their own writing:

It is a college! You have to know the rules. Coming to college is like driving a car. There are several rules. You should drive on the right side on the street. If you drive on the left side, you will be fined. If you break the rules in the class, you will get an “F.”

Professor Brown also emphasizes: “just one thing you cannot do in my class is getting a good grade by a ghostwriter.” He would utilize “turnitin.com,” which is a website used by most students and faculty that provides originality checking and plagiarism prevention service, and might be suspicious and use Google searches when student writing does not match the assignment requirements. Generally, Professor Brown assumes all students do write their own papers and suggests students who are not good at writing could have a chance to rewrite, and they could also get help from the writing center.

Professor Jonathan Hunt, who teaches rhetoric at our university, shares his own experiences evaluating students’ writing, including students’ writing in their second language. He thinks one or two students in his class may hire ghostwriters:

Sometimes [these students] may do it because they are lazy or dishonest. I understand that a student who is struggling may panic and do something desperate. However, for colleges (and most schools) there is no difference between a desperate student who cheats and a lazy or dishonest student who cheats. A cheater is a cheater and the penalty is the same.

For these professors, there is no reasonable excuse for hiring ghostwriters. Students have to admit they are lazy and dishonest because they are reluctant to spend more time studying and have too many excuses. Professor Hunt states that getting a low grade by your individual work is better than getting a high grade with dishonesty. He hopes students will learn something:

If you don’t do the work yourself, how will you learn? For me, hiring someone else to write a paper is like hiring someone else to go to the gym. . . it brings no benefits. If I want to become fit, then I must do the work myself—no one can do it for me. I think it’s the same with writing papers. You won’t improve unless you do the work yourself. Sometimes it’s hard and sometimes you won’t do well, but in the end you’ll be stronger.

Professor Hunt also talks about his personal experiences studying in France. It was extremely difficult for him to study written and oral French. Although he worked hard to learn it, he did not get very good grades. However, he now says “because I worked hard, I got better and better.” This is a great example to encourage students to learn something by themselves because they should be enhanced and obtain achievement by learning. Accumulated studying will make students stronger and stronger; as Professor Hunt mentions, students are required to endure their own process of learning and getting meaningful achievements by themselves. At least, students should try their best to achieve their goals and improve to higher and higher levels.

Professor Heather Hoag is in our university’s history department and is also the co-chair of the Academic Integrity Committee (which deals with issues of plagiarism and other forms of cheating or academic dishonesty). She described the experiences of students doing ghostwriting in her classes and how she dealt with the student: “I had a student that had done ghostwriting in my class before. After I found out his fraud, I immediately gave him an ‘F’ grade and reported him to the Academic Integrity Committee.”

When asked how she was able to detect the ghostwriting, Professor Hoag replied, “If a student doesn’t perform very well in my class but the assignments that he hands in could be graded as ‘A,’ then this student might be doing ghostwriting. So one of the ways to detect ghostwriting is to pay attention to students’ in-class behaviors.” This suggests professors should not only evaluate students by their papers, the class work activities could help professor grade students’ achievements fairly and comprehensively.

We asked Professor Hoag about her attitude toward the ethics of ghostwriting. Like Bormann, a scholar who writes about ghostwriting (Riley and Brown), Professor Hoag sees ghostwriting as unethical and deceptive—even worse than plagiarism:

For me, ghostwriting is harder to put up with compared to plagiarism. The reason why I’m saying this is that students committing plagiarism might misunderstand the material or they just forget to use quotation marks. However, those students who hire ghostwriters are just too lazy to do their assignments that they know what they should do.

Because Professor Hoag is the co-chair of the Academic Integrity Committee, we asked her if she any suggestions about how we can decrease this phenomenon. Hoag says that professors must play an active role: “For professors, they should keep improving their courses in order to let students clearly know about what they are learning and what they should do.” For students who are worried about challenging assignments and grades, “they should explore and use the resources that provided by colleges such as the Reading and Writing Center, teacher assistant, and so on.”

Furthermore, professors should have multiple ways to assess students like in-class work to assess students’ achievements. If courses depend entirely on papers or essays, it will not be fair if students use ghostwriters. Turnitin.com and other software could help to detect some improper behavior, but it is better to forbid ghostwritten websites and (following the findings of Dan Ariely’s work on cheating) to give an ethical reminder for students.

Reshape the Value of Learning

Ultimately, it is better for students to realize that learning is more important than a grade. The ghostwriter Dave Tomar, in his retirement, hopes student will focus on the value of learning. From our point of view, students could improve themselves by learning because they could have the opportunity to discover their potential and interests in a liberal arts education. Ken Saxon, who is an entrepreneur and leader with more than two decades of working experience, brings new insight that the liberal arts education could broaden one’s knowledge with awareness of self-worth. He delivered a speech on the value of the liberal arts education in 2010 to a freshman class at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His speech, “What Do You Do with a B.A. in History?” points to this controversial issue of the liberal arts education. He encourages students to study liberal arts and to follow their hearts regardless of what major they take, and they will gain significant achievements eventually based on high self-value and their own passion.

Saxon shares his experience of learning different kinds of knowledge in the liberal arts education. He took many courses to learn several aspects of knowledge and tried to find what attracted him most. For example, Saxon found learning humility from history class appealing but lost interest in the history “when the Twin Towers fell on 9/11” (525–26). In terms of philosophy, he says: “... abstract theories were intellectually interesting to me, but not so satisfying. Turns out, I’m a doer, an entrepreneur” (525). This shows how valuable it is to know varied fields of knowledge to discover which one is most suitable. Students might also reconsider their self-worth at the same time. Students could have various perspectives to look around the world and find connections to each thing surrounding them. If students could find their own interests in one field, they may not need to change their majors or jobs in the future. Thus, students could raise their awareness of

learning something and strengthen themselves by self-exploration.

In conclusion, we do not agree with the practice of hiring ghostwriters to complete papers. This is an ethical issue that affects the writers themselves and also impacts others. People might lose trust from others and lose opportunities to enhance themselves through needed practice. For students, they have to know the rules of college and consider what losses they will pay for it by using ghostwriters. If students commit fraud and pay for ghostwriters, they may be punished severely or even kicked out of school. Instead, we suggest that students use their liberal arts education to learn something new. Learning is a great way to strengthen ourselves and better achieve our potential.

Note

¹Because this research project involves potentially serious violations of our University's Honor Code (<http://www.usfca.edu/academic-integrity/honor-code>), we were careful to seek the advice of the Institutional Review Board, the Academic Integrity Committee, and the Office of Student Life. All of these offices reviewed our research and confirmed that our work is consistent with the Honor Code, upholding the values of honesty and integrity, educational excellence, and respect for others.

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