

Teacher Assistant Graders Outsourced To Bangalore

Posted By [Rob Sanchez](#) On 11 April 2010 @ 12:12

When I first saw an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* I thought it was some kind of April Fool's joke. Upon further investigation it became clear that the article is not a prank—our colleges are outsourcing the grading of writing assignments to India.

The following quotes from the article seem like a prank but they are for real: [Some Papers Are Uploaded to Bangalore to Be Graded](#), by Audrey Williams June, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 4, 2010.

Lori Whisenant knows that one way to improve the writing skills of undergraduates is to make them write more. Her seven teaching assistants, some of whom did not have much experience, couldn't deliver. Their workload was staggering: About 1,000 juniors and seniors enroll in the course each year. "Our graders were great," she says, "but they were not experts in providing feedback."

That shortcoming led Ms. Whisenant, director of business law and ethics studies at Houston, to a novel solution last fall. She outsourced assignment grading to a company whose employees are mostly in Asia.

So, [Lori Whisenant](#), who teaches business **law and ethics** at the University of Houston, is offshoring the job of grading the assignments from her students to India. Outsourcing [teaching assistant \(TA\) jobs](#) to Asia might seem like a lack of the ethics she is supposedly teaching—until her corporate background is reviewed. She worked at international corporations and Wall Street investment firms such as Deloitte & Touche, Ernst & Young, and PricewaterhouseCoopers, which might help to explain where she honed her globalist ideologies.

Seven TAs seems like an adequate number of graders for one professor. Since she teaches management, is it not reasonable to expect her to manage the work load of her TAs? These types of jobs are very valuable for students who need a steady paycheck and work experience. Outsourcing these jobs will only serve to hurt students and to further the deterioration of our university system. It makes far more sense to hire a few more TAs than to send the money offshore.

Virtual-TA, a service of a company called EduMetry Inc., took over. The goal of the service is to relieve professors and teaching assistants of a traditional and sometimes tiresome task—and even, the company says, to do it better than TA's can.

Professor Whisenant has been relieved of the tedious task of teaching by hiring virtual teacher assistants (TA) from an Indian based company called [Virtual-TA](#). Their website is amusing because so many of the pictures they post depict Anglo/Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic students — the prototypical Americans. The truth about Virtual-TA is exposed with a quick browse of their management team page where you will see names like Chandru Rajam, Tara Sherman, Ravindra Singh Bangari, Jeanne Grunert, and [Ravi Shankar](#). (Not the [sitar player](#).) Quite conspicuously the only address they list is for an office in Virginia — and there is no clue that [all the work is done offshore](#). Their Virginia company is listed as EduMetry, which is part of the [Forbes](#) conglomerate and is listed on the [Bombay Stock Exchange](#).

The graders working for EduMetry, based in a Virginia suburb of Washington, are concentrated in India, Singapore, and Malaysia, along with some in the United States and elsewhere. They do their work online and communicate with professors via e-mail.

OK, now for the reality check: Outsourcing the grading of student papers is a preposterous idea. Even if the work was outsourced to a different location within the U.S. it would be a disaster — but these tasks are being done in foreign countries by people who have unknown qualifications and who have no understanding of our culture and linguistic idioms. They probably don't even speak English!

Everyone reading this is educated to one degree or another so it's probably not necessary to spend much time explaining why offshoring TA jobs is an absurd idea. The most obvious problem with the entire concept is that the graders won't even know what was taught in the classroom or what context the students were writing in. The Virtual-TA website claims that they use "[Learning Outcomes Management](#)", whatever that means.

The company argues that professors freed from grading papers can spend more time teaching and doing research.

Weren't college professors hired to be educators? Apparently nowadays they are just too busy doing "research" to bother with the tedium of the classroom.

Whether Virtual-TA is that better way remains to be seen. Company officials would not say how many colleges use the service, but Mr. Rajam acknowledges that the concept of anonymous and offshore grading is often difficult for colleges to swallow.

While they might hesitate to tell reporters which U.S. schools are outsourcing their TA jobs overseas, a Virtual-TA "[success story](#)" web page makes no bones about some of their clients; like for instance: West Hills College Online and U21Global: The Online Graduate Business School. They seem to be in the same league as the University of Houston!

Virtual-TA's tag line is "Your expert teaching assistants." These graders, also called assessors, have at least master's degrees, the company says, and must pass a writing test, since conveying their thoughts on assignments is an integral part of the job. The company declined to provide The Chronicle with names or degrees of assessors. Mr. Rajam says that the company's focus is on "the process, not the individual," and that professors and institutions have ample opportunity to test the assessors' performance during a trial period, "because the proof is in the pudding."

Mr. Bangari, who is based in Bangalore, India, oversees a group of assessors who work from their homes. He says his job is to see that the graders, many of them women with children who are eager to do part-time work, provide results that meet each client's standards and help students improve.

In a previous quote Mr. Rajam said that the concept of anonymous graders might bother skeptics. Could that be because some people might question the qualifications of part-time women and children in third world countries, who operate out of shanty towns and sweat shops, to decide what grades American college students earn for their academic papers?

I was curious to see what Whisenant's students think about the outsourcing of TAs so I went to [ratemyprofessors.com](#) to read the gossip on her. Of course these online ratings might not be representative of all of her students but some of their opinions seem to make sense considering the poor quality of the TAs. Not surprisingly none of the students have a clue who is actually grading their papers, but they know shoddy and substandard when they see it!

Here is a sampling of some of the recent comments from students.

All student "help" is thru a TA & graders that arent much help. Grading of papers is subjective and contradictory; one time they say not developed enough & then say its too wordy after adding 30 words.

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Virtual-TA argued that offshoring the grading allows professors to spend more time teaching. If that was true it would seem that complaints like this would be less prevalent.

Devastatingly bad prof. In class she reads her own slides and that's it. Asking for help = cheating, totally laughable. Since she doesn't teach you, and no one else can help you, it ends up being an utter and obscene waste of \$1k. Writing intensive means professional critique? Course not. An undergrad TA (non-English major) grades you. Awful awful

Graders are extremely subjective. Difficulty in getting help

Not all of the ratings are negative however — the last one is by a student who likes the classes because they are so easy.

I still haven't figured out why so many people complain about this class...one of my easier courses this semester.

It's fair to assume that this one was written by a male student:

Wow this is an awesome class. The teacher was really hot too. I am glad i took this class, it was interesting and it was easy.

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