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Respekt: Plagiarism booming among Czech university students

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Prague, June 17 (CTK) - Czech universities are waging war against plagiarism that has been booming among students in the past few years in connection with the easy access to the Internet, the political weekly Respekt reports in its latest issue out on Monday.

More and more Czech university students attempt to cheat. They either crib their papers and theses from the Internet and other sources or even buy them from "ghost-writers" who thereby earn an extra income.

The weekly refers to a 40-year-old clerk without university education who writes theses as well as shorter essays for university students of various faculties per order. And he is no exception.

Advertisements offering these services are quite common on the web. The usual price is 180 crowns per page of a thesis and 100 crowns/page of a shorter essay for university seminars.

Not only individual "ghost-writes," many of whom are students themselves, but also whole companies provide such services in the Czech Republic, Respekt writes.

Hospodarske noviny daily recently reported about such a firm from Zlin, south Moravia, with several employees and an official price list.

A special website also offers students' theses and papers for low prices, though it officially states they are available only as a source of information.

Some time ago, a faculty of Prague's University of Economics revealed apparent plagiarism in 60 percent of seminar essays in one subject. Students mostly copied whole passages from various sources on the Internet, Respekt writes.

It says the situation at other faculties, especially in humanities and economics, is similar. The universities have therefore decided to intensify their fight against cheaters.

While in the past schools often turned a blind eye on the cases of suspected plagiarism, in the past two years their approach has changed, Respekt says.

It adds that Brno's Masaryk University is among the first to declare war against plagiarism.

Ivana Cerna, deputy rector of Masaryk University, told Respekt that it was connected with a younger generation of lecturers who are over 30 and well versed in modern information technologies.

"Older colleagues often cannot even imagine how easy it is to find information on the Internet," Cerna said.

Most of younger lecturers had practice at foreign universities that apply strict codes of conduct banning plagiarism. If students violate it, they are fired unconditionally, Respekt says.

It writes that Masaryk University has developed a special computer system storing students' theses and other shorter papers from almost 20 schools that will help uncover plagiarism.

However, the largest and oldest Czech university, Charles University in Prague, has refused to enter the system, pointing out that it is at variance with authorship rights, Respekt adds.

Lecturers, who suspect a student of plagiarism, can also check some excerpts of his/her paper on the Google Internet browser to find out the original source.

However, it is more difficult to uncover that someone else has written a student's paper, especially if such work meets the quality criteria, Respekt says.

"This practice actually devaluates education. If we do not fight against it, people without relevant knowledge will receive diplomas," Cerna said.

Petr Suchy, head of the international relations department at Masaryk University, is quoted as saying he is merciless toward students' plagiarism. In the previous school term, he sent three students to a disciplinary commission on suspicion of plagiarism.

His students must write their papers in English so it is easier to distinguish "halting" paragraphs they have written on their own from "stylistically brilliant" parts cribbed from the Internet sources, he explained in Respekt.

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