

Case 5 ♦ Philosophiverr

The college experience is undergoing a dramatic shift and so is the profession of collegiate level educators. Traditional bricks-and-mortar colleges are increasingly offering a blended experience, including classes that are completely or partially taught online. The new economics of education also mean that today six out of ten college teachers are part-time contract workers known as adjuncts. Adjuncts are typically poorly paid and do not receive healthcare benefits; they also have little or no job security.

When Kansenis found herself without teaching work one semester, she turned to the website fiverr.com as a way to help make ends meet. Fiverr is a micro-employment website where people like Kansenis offer to provide services, known as gigs, for five dollars. Popular gigs include reading birthday messages in a dramatic movie-trailer-voice, transcribing text, or drawing cartoons. Kansenis' gig is offering to answer questions about western philosophy. Customers submit a question, pay five dollars (four of which go to Kansenis) and receive an answer of between 100-400 words.

Kansenis writes, "Had I wanted to, I could have made a living writing papers for students. Many gigs on Fiverr do exactly this. I estimate that I get at least 100 emails per year on Fiverr asking me to either take an exam, write a paper, or take an online course for someone else. Just the asking is likely unethical, but I surmise that these people find what they want elsewhere; and this means that a large number of students are getting credit and college degrees for work they have not done themselves."¹

Kansenis began her Fiverr gig thinking that traditional philosophy students would use her service as an affordable way to find extra help in their courses. Some college students have sent in drafts of essays asking for feedback and others have used the gig as planned. However, the majority of Kansenis' consumers are "weekend philosophers" or non-traditional students who are unaffiliated with any college and are simply interested in philosophical questions.

When asked about the potential abuse of her gig, Kansenis writes, "[t]o be fair, I think that we have to look at this not from a sanctimonious eye per se, but from the situations which have given rise to this. The main concern that students mention is that Philosophy is not part of their major, has nothing to do with their job and is useless to them. Millennials seem to be more pragmatic and are looking for more of a vocational education overall. The idea of a 'liberal education' where writing and critical thinking are emphasized is not esteemed. To the contrary, it is seen as an obstacle to moving on with their lives."

Case from the 2013 Regional Ethics Bowl. Copyright, Association for Practical and Professional Ethics.

<http://appeonline.com/ethics-bowl/regional-ethics-bowl/>

¹ The quotations in this case came from a series of questions answered by Kansenis as part of a paid gig the subject of which was this case study.