

My "Premium Education" Package

I teach writing at a small university in Rhode Island, not as a full-time professor, but as a member of a pool of adjuncts, summoned as the need arises.

Demand for writing courses and scheduling determine how many classes I'm assigned -- it might be one, two, or none at all. I am one of thousands of such instructors across the country, many of whom teach at several institutions simultaneously.

As a part-timer, I am lightly compensated for my efforts. I can't ask for a raise (adjunct instructors are paid a flat fee), nor do I receive bonuses for performance, the holidays, or any other reason. Given this unforgiving fiscal reality, I need to generate some extra income, and am taking my cue from business and political leaders who are forever touting the virtues of the entrepreneurial society.

You know how this goes: Don't count on big institutions to look after you -- work hard and work smart to succeed in a fluid global economy. I am applying these bromides to my enterprise as an educator, and am actively seeking out new teaching "profit centers" and "revenue streams."

As it stands, the students pay their tuition (an astonishing amount, to my mind) and get three 50-minute classes a week. I also grade assignments, occasionally comment on essay drafts, and make myself available for office hours. I am now terming this Basic Service, and in addition to it will be offering some fee-based add-ons, as well as an exciting all-inclusive Premium Education Package.

The airline and cable industries serve as my model. You want leg room, prompt attention from flight attendants, and a meal? You pony up for business class, instead of coach. You want to watch *The Sopranos*? You plunk down for an expanded cable package that includes HBO.

Similarly, I will continue to provide Basic Service education, but will now also offer the following fee-based **Premium Options**:

Rapid Paper Correction (RPC). Students purchasing RPC will have their assignments graded and returned within hours. No waiting the standard three to five days.

Expanded Assignment Comments (EAC). Students opting for EAC will receive intelligible comments on their paper, rather than rushed and cryptic scribbblings.

Late-Paper Protection (LPP). An exciting option that allows for the submission of one late assignment without penalty. Price doubles if LPP is not ordered at least seven days before use.

Personalized Office Hours (POH). Allows for individually scheduled consultation times at the student's convenience. With POH Select, the student can even summon the instructor to an off-campus location. Note that there is an additional charge for every mile traveled off campus, and rates are doubled outside of regular school hours. POH Select may not be available on holidays and weekends in all areas.

Tailored Mentor Service (TMS). A valuable feature that offers advice, guidance and networking benefits. TMS is available at several different stages, including Gold Circle Wise Uncle and Platinum Ring Father Figure levels.

Students can choose from these **Premium Options** on an a-la-carte basis, or can purchase an entire **Premium Education Package**. The latter includes all of the Premium Options, as well as a bound leatherette volume of class-lecture notes and a DVD featuring class discussions, bonus outtakes, and a special "Behind the Syllabus with the Instructor" commentary track.

Naturally, I expect some carping from traditionalists who suggest that providing a **Premium Education** shortchanges those who cannot pay extra for such services. Yet this objection is tree- rather than forest-based: Without recourse to these expanded revenue generators, I may be forced to give up teaching, as may many of my part-time colleagues.

In other words, those who choose **Premium Options**, and particularly the **Premium Education Package**, are not gaining at the expense of their fellow students. Rather, they are helping guarantee continued basic education service for all -- truly a "win-win."

This article originally appeared in the Providence Journal January 15, 2005.