



Preventing Academic Dishonesty in Writing – A Guide for Faculty

Why Do Students Plagiarize?

A quick Google search of “term papers for sale” produces some 15 millions results, with sites offering instant download of thousands of papers starting at about \$9 per page for a pre-written paper on a stock topic. Other sites offer customized papers starting at about \$18 per page, depending on the kind of assignment. Students create an account, describe the assignment, enter a credit card number, and in a few days a paper appears in the student's inbox, ready to be submitted as their own work. Most students who plagiarize know it is wrong, and yet they do it anyway.

Educational researchers who have looked at the issue of plagiarism have identified several reasons why students plagiarize, many of which have only intensified as the enormous population of techno-savvy Millennials – the children of the Baby Boomers – reach college age. Along with Millennials' “mad skills” using various media and technology comes a certain naiveté about the credibility, quality, and reliability of online sources. Moreover, research suggests that many Millennials don't perceive of plagiarism as morally or ethically wrong. This guide suggests ways for faculty to avoid creating situations in which students feel like they can, should, or must plagiarize.

Some of the most common reasons students give for justifying plagiarism:

- Pressure – social, parental, and institutional - for good grades
- Instructional situations that are perceived as unfair or excessively demanding
- Poor planning and/or time-management skills
- Student desire to fit in with a certain group or impress peers
- Faculty who are perceived as uncaring or indifferent to their own teaching and/or to students' learning
- Lax attitudes on the part of faculty toward academic honesty
- A different sense of academic integrity and ethical values among students than those held by other generations
- General confusion over and disregard for intellectual property rules (i.e., music downloading, file-sharing)
- Variances in cultural norms (particularly for international and first-generation students)
- Confusion between what constitutes plagiarism, paraphrasing, and common knowledge
- Past instances of plagiarism in a class or at an institution going unreported, leading students to think the practice is not taken seriously
- The thrill of deception – of “pulling one over” on the professor

Definitions

Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.

Misuse of sources occurs when a student attempts to identify and credit his or her source but incorrectly uses a citation format (i.e., incorrectly uses quotation marks or cites an author but has no works cited page).

Common knowledge is, generally, something an average reader will know or could find out using general reference sources. The OWL (Online Writing Lab) at Purdue University identifies common knowledge as information that can be found undocumented in five discrete, credible sources.

Institutional Responsibility

Educating students about academic integrity takes both individual and collective effort. A clear, consistent institutional policy toward plagiarism is essential to promoting a culture of academic integrity. Lawrence Tech's policy is outlined in the Academic Honor Code, available to you online and in your faculty handbook.

Classroom Strategies for Faculty

Minimize opportunities for plagiarism. Faculty should endeavor to design learning environments and assignments that encourage students to investigate, analyze, and synthesize information. Rewarding critical thinking and process-oriented work will diminish opportunity for and interest in plagiarism.

At Lawrence Tech, the Blackboard interface includes the plagiarism detection program **SafeAssign**. This program detects unoriginal work in a student's paper by comparing the work to that on the internet, the ProQuest research database, and an institutional database of papers submitted by Lawrence Tech students. Requiring students to submit assignments electronically using SafeAssign deters plagiarism and helps to educate students about proper citation of sources.

Spend time at the beginning of the term discussing standards of academic scholarship and conduct.

Cheating may mean different things to different students, and many students, especially freshmen, may be unclear about what constitutes cheating. Discuss the Lawrence Tech Academic Honor Code, which defines academic integrity, academic dishonesty offenses (including plagiarism), and the policies and processes that govern adjudication of honor code violations.

Opportunities for students to learn about the Lawrence Tech honor code:

- New freshmen students will hear about the Lawrence Tech honor code at "Discovery Days"
- The honor code is available on the Lawrence Tech website under "Student Affairs Quick Links"
- The student handbook and planner (given free to freshmen at Discovery Days or through Student Affairs) includes the Lawrence Tech honor code
- Instructors in University Seminar (COM 1001) will discuss the honor code in class
- You can discuss academic honesty and the LTU honor code in your class

Include a policy for using sources in your syllabus. Define a policy that clearly explains the consequences of both plagiarism and the misuse or inaccurate citation of sources.

Teach students what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Don't assume that students learned what plagiarism is in high school. Clarify the distinctions between plagiarism, paraphrasing, and direct citation. Discuss with students the difficulty of writing good academic papers. Emphasize that learning to write is a process that involves practice. Explain and demonstrate the differences between plagiarism and paraphrasing, and provide models of proper academic citation. Do exercises in class wherein students have to identify correct and incorrect use of information.

Make sure students know and understand your criteria for evaluating their performance. If you use a grading rubric, make it available to students. Explain what you are looking for in an assignment and what constitutes good scholarship. Hand out a model paper and point to factors that make it successful.

Cultivate a classroom climate that encourages honesty. This includes assuring students that they can succeed in the course without resorting to cheating. Give more rather than fewer exams, promote your office hours as an opportunity to clarify ideas with you, and remind students of the resources available to them outside of class for getting help with academic citation (such as the AAC writing center). Promote the benefits of integrity in your classroom by celebrating learning for learning's sake and reassuring students that everybody *isn't* doing it (plagiarizing, that is).

Assist with providing equal access to required course materials. The library often holds textbooks on course reserves for students who can't afford to buy them, but it can be difficult for the librarians to keep track of all the textbooks used each semester, so sending a quick email to let them know is helpful. If you have extra copies of a required text for your course, the library can use them! The AAC also has many of the most common textbooks used for core curriculum classes available to loan to students. In some cases, the Office of the Dean of Students can also assist students with short-term loans to purchase textbooks.

Make your assignments specific. The broader a paper topic, the easier it is for students to turn to the internet for content. Design assignments that require the student to analyze and synthesize information learned in class. Assignments should be challenging but not overwhelming; topics that are too difficult invite cheating. Know what's online before assigning a paper topic – a quick online search will reveal whether a plethora of papers are readily available to students.

Consider establishing a course theme. A course theme (like "literacy" or "popular culture") allows students to develop expertise on that theme and to support each other as they read, write, and engage in their research.

Make the research process, and technology used for it, visible. Ask your students to consider how various technologies—the internet, BlackBerry, texting, Twitter, Facebook, e-mail—affect the way information is gathered and synthesized, and what effect these technologies may have on plagiarism.

Require papers with current references. Many papers for sale are full of dated references, so requiring current references may be enough to deter the wholesale purchase of a paper.

Change the assignment each time you teach a course. This will prevent students from appropriating other students' work from previous semesters, or even recycling their own work from the first time they took the course.

Include in-class writing assignments. In-class assignments help students develop their writing skills and give you an opportunity to assess their abilities. It is much more difficult to assess a student's abilities and compare examples of writing when you only assign one paper per term.

Monitor students' progress throughout the process of producing a paper. This may include having them email their thesis statement to you for comments, meeting with you for brainstorming or during the outline phase, or submitting a first draft for comments. Such approaches allow you to watch the students' ideas develop while the students benefit from the process of writing. Engaging in this process also helps students feel a greater sense of ownership for their work. You might also require that students submit drafts of the paper along with the final version.

Learn to recognize signs of stress in students. These may include erratic behavior, nonattendance, detachment or listlessness in class, references to suicide, anxiousness, or badgering you for extra help or attention. For various reasons, stressed-out students are more likely to plagiarize. There are resources on campus available free to students dealing with stress, such as academic assistance at the AAC, clinical counseling services through Student Affairs, and help with identifying a learning disorder through the disabilities services office.

Teach students how to evaluate sources. Provide opportunities for students to discuss the quality of the content and context of their sources with you and one another, through class discussions, your BlackBoard discussion board, or reflective writing assignments. Discuss with students how their sources will enable them to support their argument or document their research.

Have students give presentations of their work. It is difficult to give a presentation about content from a paper that has been plagiarized. Students need to know and understand their argument and supporting evidence in order to present it in a coherent way. A plagiarized presentation will likely send up red flags for both student and instructor.

Create more informal assignments. Having informal discussion-based assignments, such as an in-class debate, student-led teaching, or daily response journaling, allows students to better formulate their own opinion about a topic. Projects like developing websites, developing posters for a "conference," or creating a class scrapbook allow students to engage their creative side while taking pride in something they've created – which encourages honesty and more ownership of the entire process.

Strategies for dealing with suspected plagiarism

If you suspect plagiarism, confront the student directly, as soon as possible, and without other students present.

Objectively explain your understanding of the problem, avoiding accusations or use of the words *cheating* or *plagiarism*. Listen carefully to what the student has to say.

If you are reticent to confront the student, talk to an experienced colleague or your department chair. Ask to have them present if you feel it would be helpful.

Ascertain that you know and understand Lawrence Tech's guidelines for plagiarism and its disciplinary process.

Be prepared for pleas, excuses, and tales of hardship and extenuating circumstances. Many students will tell you they didn't understand what constituted plagiarism, which is why it is so important to explain this at the beginning of class.

If the student denies any wrongdoing, question him or her about specific aspects of the paper. If you've used SafeAssign, you will be able to demonstrate areas in the paper matching items found in the database. Many instructors also use Google or similar search engines to search for matches.

Show sympathy if the student is distraught or upset. Make a referral to the clinical counseling services, if necessary.

Explain what will happen next to the student. For many departments, this means referring the student to the Chair of the department for follow-up.

Take official action per Lawrence Tech's Academic Honor Code.

References/Resources/For Further Information

"Avoiding Plagiarism." [A Faculty Guide to Cyber Plagiarism](http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/avoiding/index.cfm). University of Alberta Libraries. 11 June 2009. <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/avoiding/index.cfm>. Provides tips for students to avoid plagiarism and links to various online guides and articles on avoiding plagiarism.

"Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practice." [Council of Writing Program Administrators](http://www.wpacouncil.org/node/9). 17 June 2009. <http://www.wpacouncil.org/node/9>.

"Educational Tips on Plagiarism Prevention." [Plagiarism.org](http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_educational_tips_on_plagiarism_prevention.html). Accessed 6/11/09. http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_educational_tips_on_plagiarism_prevention.html. This site is the educational arm of iParadigms, LLC, which develops and markets textual intellectual property protection technology, including the popular plagiarism prevention tool TurnItIn™.

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Bartlett, Thomas. "Cheating Goes Global as Essay Mills Multiply." The Chronicle of Higher Education 20 March 2009, Volume 55, Issue 28, page A1. An investigative piece about the global preponderance, profitability, and sophistication of online essay mills.

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Callahan, David. "A Better Way to Prevent Cheating." The Christian Science Monitor 8 May 2006: 13. A brief commentary on the value of reframing college cheating as an issue of justice and equity rather than honor and morality.

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Purdue OWL. "Avoiding Plagiarism." The Online Writing Lab at Purdue. 17 June 2009. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>.

Stevenson, Seth. "Adventures in Cheating: A Guide to Buying Term Papers Online." Slate. 17 June 2009. <http://www.slate.com/?id=2059540>. This is a tongue-in-cheek look at the many options available to students who want to procure a term paper from the internet.

Downloadable resources available on the AAC writing center website:

- *Paraphrasing*
- *Evaluating Internet Sources*
- *Common Knowledge*
- *Argumentation*