

## Plagiarism

In widely accepted terms, **plagiarism** is the intentional use of other people's words or ideas without due acknowledgment. The U.S. Office of Research Integrity defines **plagiarism** as the "appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit" (§ 93.103), and it is a rapidly increasing problem facing today's educators. This entry explores the types of **plagiarism**, the impact of the Internet on the **plagiarism**, and recommendations for ameliorating the problem.

**Plagiarism** applies to both the intentional and unintentional use of intellectual property, an issue that many find confounding. **Plagiarism** comes in many forms, from replicating a few words, to copying entire texts, to buying "custom" papers. Examples of what needs to be credited or documented include words or ideas presented in a book, journal, Web page, or magazine, and diagrams or other visual materials. Examples of what does not need to be credited or documented are an individual's own thoughts or ideas; common knowledge, such as myths or folklore; and results of the individual's own research.

There are three general forms of **plagiarism**, *criminal plagiarism*, *careless scholarship*, and *ignorance of the rules*, and each is aligned with an increasing degree of intent. The criminal plagiarist knowingly steals or buys the intellectual property of another, while the sloppy scholar engages in an unintentional act of omission. The third category, ignorance of the rules, is linked to students (or professionals) who are not acquainted with the conventions of scholarly writing. Often students often cannot tell the difference between correctly paraphrased versus plagiarized text, and the **plagiarism** is unintentional. Studies have shown that students often lack the knowledge to cite sources properly.

The first use of the word **plagiarism** dates back to the seventeenth century. While **plagiarism** is certainly not a new problem, many cite the Internet as the reason behind the explosion of incidents of **plagiarism** in recent years. According to many, Internet **plagiarism** is a serious and growing problem, and offenses range from "cutting and pasting" passages to purchasing entire custom-created papers. Internet **plagiarism** offenses are becoming so widespread that new words are evolving to adequately describe the offenses. For example, the term *cyber-plagiarism* is used to refer to the practice of cutting and pasting information from the Internet into a writing assignment without a citation. *Cyber-pseudepigraphy*, on the other hand, refers specifically to the practice of buying papers online, which constitutes fraud.

Indeed, the advent of the Internet has been a double-edged sword for educators. While it has allowed students free and easy access to a wide variety of resources from which to plagiarize, it has also facilitated the invention of tools to detect such improprieties. A variety of commercially marketed software programs and Internet sites make it possible to check for incidences of **plagiarism**. The most commonly recognized fee-based software programs are Turnitin, Essay Verification Engine (EVE), and Copycatch. It is often suggested that faculty discuss **plagiarism** concerns with students and request that students submit all written work to one of the programs.

No specific data are available that provide a complete picture of the scope of **plagiarism**. Individual studies have cited the incidence of **plagiarism** to be anywhere from 26 percent to 80 percent. However, it is difficult to accurately grasp the full extent of **plagiarism**, as many statistical references rely on student self-report. In addition, faculty often are reluctant to report **plagiarism** because they are fearful of ruining a student's career or becoming embroiled in litigation, or because they are concerned that the incident may reflect poorly on their

teaching practices. In addition, faculty may not be confident in their own ability to detect plagiarized material.

Many schools and universities do little more than provide an academic honesty statement that includes a reference to **plagiarism** in student handbooks. However, it is highly recommended that faculty take a more proactive approach, spending time educating students as to what **plagiarism** is, what constitutes **plagiarism**, and the consequences if one is caught engaging in **plagiarism**. Studies have shown that detailed descriptions in each of these areas are imperative, as subtleties do little to change behavior. One strategy for amelioration is instruction providing students with examples of plagiarized work and asking them to determine what offense has been committed. Another strategy is breaking major assignments into smaller interim assignments and monitoring student progress by requiring that they submit each component for review. This not only allows faculty to detect irregularities but also forces students to manage their time more effectively, perhaps eliminating the need to plagiarize a hastily prepared assignment.

While no one knows for certain why students plagiarize, studies have linked **plagiarism** to the following reasons: lack of time, especially for nontraditional students; ignorance and/or lack of understanding of the rules; access and opportunity; fear of failure; personal values/attitudes; and lack of academic integration, which in essence is an issue of student engagement. Numerous studies have pointed to the value of student engagement and have tied student engagement to student success, retention, and persistence; however, few, if any, studies to date have examined the link between student engagement and **plagiarism**.

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## Further Readings

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