

# CQ Researcher

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## Plagiarism and Cheating

*Are they becoming more acceptable in the Internet age?*

Cheating scandals among some of the nation's best students at Harvard University and New York City's Stuyvesant High School have highlighted a problem experts say is widespread. In surveys, a majority of college and high school students admit to cheating on a test or written assignment. Some experts blame the cheating culture on cutthroat competition for college admissions and jobs. The simplicity of copying from the Internet or cribbing from smartphones makes plagiarism and cheating easier, teachers say. However, in the case of works of art and entertainment, some see a refreshing new ethic of sharing and "remixing" creative material in digital media. Researchers find that cheating increases when educators "teach to the test" instead of emphasizing learning. But experts question whether shifting to learning for learning's sake is realistic when public school funding now depends on standardized-test results and families think their children's future depends on high grades.



*When Harvard student Kaavya Viswanathan was accused of plagiarism in her novel *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life*, she said the copying had been "unconscious." But after passages were found to have been copied from multiple authors, the publisher recalled the novel and canceled Viswanathan's contract.*

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# Plagiarism and Cheating

BY SARAH GLAZER

## THE ISSUES

Last spring, a teaching assistant at Harvard University noticed something strange while looking over take-home final exams for an undergraduate course on Congress.

Several students had cited the same obscure 1910 congressional members' revolt in answer to a question. On further examination, around a dozen students had used the same string of words on some questions, exhibited the same misunderstanding of material and, most damningly, repeated the same typo. The teaching assistant alerted Matthew B. Platt, the assistant professor of government who was teaching the course. In a letter reporting the incident to the university's academic integrity board, Platt implicated 13 students.<sup>1</sup>

By Aug. 30, when Harvard publicly revealed the cheating scandal, the university was investigating 125 students — almost half the class — for plagiarism and illicit collaboration.

The scandal has intensified an ongoing national discussion about cheating and plagiarism and elicited surprise at how many American students admit to engaging in these illicit practices. More than two-thirds of college students admit to cheating on a test or on written assignments — including plagiarizing from published materials or getting someone else to write their term paper — according to the International Center for Academic Integrity, a coalition of colleges and K-12 schools based at Clemson University in South Carolina.<sup>2</sup>



AP Photo/Troy Maben

*Nick d'Ambrosia, 17, holds up his iPod on April 13, 2007, at Mountain View High School in Meridian, Idaho, where officials banned iPods and other digital-media players in testing areas after some students were thought to be downloading formulas and crib sheets onto the players. Many high schools have banned such devices and cell phones from testing venues but critics say the rules often are only laxly enforced.*

"We have a cheating epidemic in America, and the people in charge of our schools are not doing anything about it. And nobody's making them do anything about it — including our state legislatures and policy makers, who appropriate tens of millions of dollars for our schools," says David Callahan, co-founder of Demos, a liberal New York City-based think tank, and author of the 2004 book *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead*.

Yet, why would smart Harvard students need to cheat? Similar questions were raised this past June when a

cheating scandal erupted at Stuyvesant High School, a public school for high achievers and one of the most difficult schools to get into in New York City. More than 70 students were caught sharing test information by cell phone.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, studies find that cheating is prevalent among high-achieving students: Up to 80 percent of top high school students have admitted to cheating on a test.<sup>4</sup> Denise Clark Pope, whose 2003 book *Doing School* described cheating among high-achieving students, says elite schools like Stuyvesant actually tend to have more cheating than average because the stakes are higher.

For both low- and high-achieving students, she says, cheating is a response to either a "disengaged state of learning," excessive pressure to get good grades and test scores — or both. After the scandal at Stuyvesant broke, for instance, many students there said they would cheat, especially by copying another student's homework, if they thought

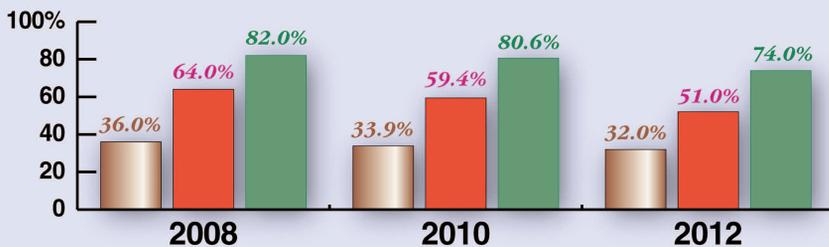
the teacher was giving them meaningless, rote tasks.<sup>5</sup>

"The high achievers are not really engaged — they're doing it for the grade, and there are very high expectations from parents and schools about getting into college that can lead to behavior you know is wrong," says Pope, a lecturer at the Stanford University School of Education. "At the other end of the spectrum," she says, where students are performing poorly in school, students say they cheat "because the teachers don't care about me" or "it's definitely boring so it doesn't matter if I do it with integrity or not."

## Fewer Students Admit to Cheating

*The percentage of students admitting to having plagiarized Internet content, cheated on a test or copied homework has declined since 2008. Some experts believe the drop stems from tougher anti-cheating policies, but others caution that more students may simply be avoiding admitting guilt.*

**Self-Reported Plagiarism and Cheating  
Among High School Students, 2008-2012**



Sources: “2008 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth,” Josephson Institute, 2008, [charactercounts.org/pdf/reportcard/2008/Q\\_all.pdf](http://charactercounts.org/pdf/reportcard/2008/Q_all.pdf); “2010 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth,” Josephson Institute, 2010, [charactercounts.org/pdf/reportcard/2010/ReportCard2010\\_data-tables.pdf](http://charactercounts.org/pdf/reportcard/2010/ReportCard2010_data-tables.pdf); “Report Card 2012: The Ethics of American Youth,” Josephson Institute, 2012, pp. 46-48

■ Plagiarized an Internet document for a class assignment  
■ Cheated on a test  
■ Copied homework

Some educators say the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, which requires all students to achieve proficiency in basic skills by 2014 by passing high-stakes standardized tests, has led educators increasingly to try to raise exam scores by “teaching to the test” and encouraged some teachers to illicitly change students’ answers to boost scores.<sup>6</sup>

Drawing on research that finds cheating decreases when teachers stress learning the material instead of “teaching to the test,” Pope has co-founded a program, Challenge Success, which has trained about 100 schools to shift to learning for learning’s sake.

Callahan blames a cult of individualism and self-interest that he says began during the Reagan administration for fostering a “cheating culture,” as evidenced by the 2007-2008 Wall Street subprime mortgage scandal. “A lot of young people justify their cheating by

pointing to the larger culture, he says: “There’s a lot of cheating in the larger world, so why should I be a saint?”

Other experts say problems with cheating predate the Reagan era. Psychologist Howard Gardner — a professor at the Harvard School of Education who says he was “shocked but not surprised” by the Harvard cheating scandal — traces the problem to a “thinning of the ethical muscle” in American society over the last four decades. In a 2005 study of students and young professionals launching their careers, “Young people told us [they] admired ethics, but [said], ‘We want to be successful. We feel our peers are cutting corners, and we’ll be damned if we let them get the trophies.’”<sup>7</sup>

According to an ethics survey of 23,000 high school students by the Los Angeles-based Josephson Institute, one-third of high school students say lying and cheating is necessary to get ahead in life.<sup>8</sup>

That suggests an economic rationale may also lie behind academic cheating, Callahan says. “The reality is, things are very competitive,” he observes. “It’s a tough economy, and it’s harder to get into the middle class than it used to be. Credentials do matter.”

Under the NCLB law, high scores mean more federal money for public schools and bonuses for teachers and principals, so school administrators and teachers feel intense pressure for students to perform well on tests. Some appear to be cutting corners to accomplish that. Teachers and administrators in Atlanta, Philadelphia and El Paso, Texas, are being investigated for allegedly changing students’ answers on standardized tests or doctoring test results in other ways.<sup>9</sup> (See “Current Situation,” p. 18.) The former El Paso school superintendent was sentenced in October to three and a half years in prison for manipulating test scores and defrauding the district of bonus cash, his reward for purportedly boosting the districts’ test scores.

The teacher scandals point to a cynical climate in schools over high-stakes tests, according to ethicist Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Josephson Institute. He often hears rationalizations from teachers that echo those of students: “They say, ‘This is a rigged system; we have to lie and cheat to get the resources our students need.’”

Paradoxically, while a majority of high school students admit to cheating on a test, the rate has declined somewhat in the past two years — from 59 percent in 2010 to 51 percent today, according to the Josephson Institute’s most recent survey.<sup>10</sup> The drop could indicate that students and teachers are taking cheating more seriously.

However, at the same time, the share of kids who admit to lying on the survey jumped 4 percentage points. “Are they getting more savvy and not admitting it, or is [cheating] really going down?” Josephson asks.

Among college students, the share of students admitting to having cheated has dropped even more dramatically over the past decade, according to surveys by Donald L. McCabe, a professor of management and global business at Rutgers University.<sup>11</sup> That could be because students today are less likely to consider plagiarism cheating, especially if the plagiarized information comes from the Internet, McCabe suggests, based on his interviews and post-survey comments from high school and college students. Only one in four undergraduates considers cut-and-paste plagiarism to be serious cheating.<sup>12</sup>

To plagiarize, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “to steal or pass off (the ideas or words) of another as one’s own; use without crediting the source.” But the definition comes in for debate depending on the circumstances, as Judge Richard A. Posner writes in *A Little Book of Plagiarism*, which struggles to define the term in 109 pages. “The reader has to *care* about being deceived about authorial identity in order for the deceit to cross the line to fraud and thus constitute plagiarism,” he writes, noting that people generally don’t care, for example, that judges typically put their name on opinions written by their law clerks.<sup>13</sup>

A common justification made by writers accused of plagiarism is that the copying was unintentional, and sometimes this defense is accepted. But some institutions, such as Harvard, say lack of intention is no excuse: “If you copy bits and pieces from a source (or several sources), changing a few words here and there without either adequately paraphrasing or quoting directly, the result is *mosaic plagiarism*. Even if you don’t intend to copy the source, you may end up committing this type of plagiarism as a result of careless note-taking and confusion over where your source’s ideas end and your own ideas begin,” the “Harvard Guide to Using Sources” admonishes.<sup>14</sup>

## Cheating Scandals Rock Top Universities

*At Harvard University more than 100 students were suspected of collaborating on a take-home exam last spring. Other top institutions — from high schools to graduate programs — have been associated with large-scale cheating scandals, many of them occurring during the past decade.*

### Notable High School and University Cheating Scandals

**Harvard University (2012)** — 125 students suspected of collaborating on a take-home exam for an introductory government course.

**Great Neck, Long Island, New York (2011)** — 20 people arrested for paying others to take the SAT on their behalf or for providing the service.

**Indiana University School of Dentistry (2007)** — 24 students suspended for hacking into computers to obtain exam answers.

**Duke University Fuqua School of Business (2007)** — 34 first-year MBA students expelled, suspended or given failing grades for collaborating on a take-home exam.

**University of Virginia (2001)** — 45 out of 158 students expelled after being suspected of turning in physics papers written by other students during the previous five semesters.

**Stuyvesant High School, New York City (2012)** — 71 students suspended for from 5 to 10 days, accused of exchanging answers via cell phone for a statewide Regents exam.

**U.S. Naval Academy (1994)** — 24 midshipmen expelled and 62 are disciplined for receiving answers to an engineering exam ahead of time.

**U.S. Military Academy (1951)** — 90 cadets expelled for receiving answers to an exam ahead of time.

**U.S. Military Academy (1976)** — More than 150 cadets resign or are expelled for cheating on an electrical engineering take-home exam. The academy reinstated 98 the following year.

Sources: Meredith Galante, “The 10 Biggest College Cheating Scandals,” Business Insider, August 2012, [www.businessinsider.com/the-10-biggest-cheating-scandals-to-rock-college-campuses-2012-8?op=1](http://www.businessinsider.com/the-10-biggest-cheating-scandals-to-rock-college-campuses-2012-8?op=1); individual news reports

Experts are divided over whether young people today are less morally sensitive to plagiarism in an age when they constantly remix, copy-and-paste and retweet others’ creations online. “Sharing is in the DNA of the Internet,” especially on social media like Twitter and Face-

book, says Urs Gasser, executive director of Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet & Society. “It’s no longer so clear — not only for youth but, honestly, also for adults — what is plagiarism.”

As copying gets easier on the Internet and the line between plagiarism

## Term Paper Mills Skirt Plagiarism Rules

*Shadowy websites fulfill big demand for ready-made homework assignments.*

*"Hello! I need you big help!"*

*"Add conjunctions to make the essay smoothy."*<sup>1</sup>

*"The paper he sent me is nothing, I can't show it to my teacher.*

*My deadline is tomorrow until 11 pm. I hope you will fix it. Or i am lost."*<sup>2</sup>

Dave Tomar received these desperate and shockingly illiterate email requests during the 10 years he wrote term papers for students for money. Now a freelance writer in Philadelphia, Tomar first offered an inside glimpse into the shady world of term paper mills in 2010 with an exposé under a pseudonym in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. It became one of the most widely read and commented-upon articles in the history of *The Chronicle*, founded in 1966.<sup>3</sup>

In his 2012 book, *The Shadow Scholar*, Tomar says he began writing term papers for other students when he was a Rutgers University undergraduate. A fellow student offered him money to complete an assignment. Tomar's reputation soon spread across campus.

When he graduated in the spring of 2002 with aspirations to become a writer, Tomar was saddled with student debt and discovered he could earn more by turning out term papers than doing anything else. He made more than \$50,000 in his best-earning year.

Tomar's highest-grossing paper — 160 pages on international financial reporting standards — bore a price tag of \$4,000, split between him and the term paper company, he says. More than an amusing peek into a shadow world, Tomar's book is an indictment of the current state of education — including his own at Rutgers. "For \$25,000 or \$30,000 a year, I was increasingly angry about what I was getting for the money," he says, casting Rutgers as an impersonal institution that seemed more interested in collecting his tuition and parking money than teaching him anything or preparing him for the job market.

The highest proportion of Tomar's clients came from for-profit colleges that, he contends, used aggressive telemarketing

to recruit students with virtually no academic credentials. But a surprising number were graduate students, and some came from Ivy League colleges.

"It's alarming that some of these deficient students are in a post-graduate program and seem to have gotten there without any of the critical skills they should have by the time they get out of high school," he says. For good students and bad, Tomar puts his clients' motivation down to "the shared pressure of going to school to get grades and degrees rather than learning."

No one knows how many websites or companies sell term papers to students, but guesses are they run at least in the hundreds.<sup>4</sup> A Google search for "custom term papers" yields millions of results, but many sites are spinoffs of the same company.

At PaperMasters.com, which promises "all our papers are custom written by professional writers," prices range from \$22.95 per page for a college paper to \$32.95 for the "rush" rate on a graduate-level paper. Other companies' websites offering cheaper rates are often replete with grammatical errors.

In most states, including Pennsylvania where Tomar worked, it is illegal to sell term papers that will be turned in as student work.<sup>5</sup> But, Tomar says, "I was never too worried about legal consequences," because most of the companies that employed him attached a disclaimer to the completed paper identifying it as a "study guide," to be used in completing the student's own work. The disclaimer helped companies "posture like lecture-note companies," which offer lecture notes or sample essays online for free, Tomar says.

A recent study by Turnitin — a plagiarism-detection software company based in Oakland, Calif. — found that opppapers.com, now known as StudyMode.com and offering 890,000 "model" papers, is the second most frequent source of verbatim text matches used by college students after Wikipedia.<sup>6</sup> (See graphic, p. 18.)

Prices range from \$29.95 monthly to \$89.95 for a six-month subscription to access StudyMode's "premium" essays, which

and legitimate re-use of others' work gets fuzzier, here are some of the questions being asked:

### ***Is plagiarism becoming more acceptable in the Internet age?***

In 2009, University of Notre Dame anthropologist Susan D. Blum published a study of her travels among a strange tribe with alien concepts of creativity. Plagiarism "does not horrify them," and citation rules "are simply not accepted," she reported.<sup>15</sup> The tribe? Today's college students.

Think of hip-hop and electronic dance music, which freely "sample" snippets of others' recordings, Blum says. "It's creative but not necessarily original," she says, but it "exemplifies the way a lot of young people think about writing. Students I've talked to are pretty skeptical about this issue of originality."

The very idea of sole authorship may be losing credibility among teens and 20-somethings, she says. And in the creative arena, at least, this generation may be right. "A lot of scholarship on language shows all we're

doing is remixing phrases we've heard all the time," she observes.

Although it's unclear whether or to what degree the digital revolution is to blame for much of today's plagiarism, some experts say high school and college students have trouble understanding basic rules of attribution and what it means to write in their own words. Rebecca Moore Howard, a professor of writing and rhetoric at New York's Syracuse University, says college students commonly incorporate whole paragraphs from a source

account for at least 70-80 percent of the essays on the site, according to a “support guru” who answered the company’s California phone number. People who submit at least one paper to the site can get free access, but only to 6,000 essays, according to StudyMode. “We also buy other people’s databases,” the support person said.

The StudyMode.com website cautions, “Turning in an essay or research paper that isn’t your own will get you in serious trouble at your college. Use our free essays for ideas and get a head start on your projects and coursework.”<sup>7</sup> But the finding by Turnitin, whose software detects identical texts in a student paper, suggests students are using the site for more than ideas. StudyMode.com did not respond to a request for comments on the Turnitin findings.

A well-written custom paper that doesn’t plagiarize from other sources can escape detection by Turnitin, which matches a student’s writing to its database of published sources and other term papers. Once turned in to a teacher who scans all papers with the software, it becomes part of the more than 250 million student papers in Turnitin’s data base.

To discourage this kind of cheating, Jeff Karon, visiting instructor in the English department at the University of South Florida, instructs his students to download a free paper from a term paper mill and critique it. “By analyzing these ‘free essays’ before the class, students learn firsthand that the papers available over the Internet often are far inferior to what they could produce on their own,” Karon writes. If, on the other hand, the



Emad Hasan

*In his 2012 book, The Shadow Scholar, Dave Tomar says he spent 10 years writing term papers for students, at one point making over \$50,000 in a year. He says he entered the shady world of term-paper writing to help pay for his undergraduate education at Rutgers University.*

paper seems “too good,” his students often remark that no professor would believe it came from a student.<sup>8</sup>

The thousands of scholarly assignments Tomar wrote covered a huge range of subjects, including papers toward a master’s degree in cognitive psychology and a Ph.D. in sociology, and, most ironically, essays on business ethics.<sup>9</sup>

“If anyone asks if I have regrets doing this job,” Tomar points to the dozens of subjects he researched. “How could you regret the learning I managed to get?” — learning, he says, that he didn’t get in college.

— Sarah Glazer

<sup>1</sup> Dave Tomar, “No Cheater Left Behind,” *Huff Post Education*, Nov. 1, 2012, [www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-tomar/cheating-in-school\\_b\\_2057008.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-tomar/cheating-in-school_b_2057008.html).

<sup>2</sup> Dave Tomar, *The Shadow Scholar: How I Made a Living Helping College Kids Cheat* (2012), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ed Dante, “The Shadow Scholar,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Nov. 12, 2010, <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Shadow-Scholar/125329/>.

<sup>4</sup> One list of term paper sites, compiled by Coastal Carolina University, jumped from 35 in 1999 to 250 in 2006. The list is at [www.coastal.edu/library/presentations/mills2.html](http://www.coastal.edu/library/presentations/mills2.html).

<sup>5</sup> Marie Groak, et al., “Term Paper Mills, Anti-Plagiarism Tools, and Academic Integrity,” *EDUCAUSE Review*, September/October 2001. For an example, see this Pennsylvania law against selling term papers: <http://law.onecle.com/pennsylvania/crimes-and-offenses/00.073.024.000.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Turnitin, “Higher Education by Top Site,” 2012, Turnitin.com. Note: Turnitin uses a text-matching algorithm but does not necessarily identify if the identical text has been attributed to another source.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.studymode.com](http://www.studymode.com).

<sup>8</sup> “A Positive Solution for Plagiarism,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 18, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Positive-Solution-for/134498/>.

<sup>9</sup> Dante, *op. cit.*

into their papers, changing only a few words, without using quotation marks — a process she calls “patchwriting.”

In an analysis of 174 student papers from 16 colleges, she found that students commonly neglected to attribute their stolen words. And even when they did give attributions, nearly half the citations were from the first page of their sources and included just a few sentences — a matter of “enormous concern,” she says, but more as a matter of “reading comprehension” than of morality.

“It seems clear there is a trend of students reading only far enough into a source to get a good quotation,” she says. “It’s hard for students to avoid plagiarizing when they’re working with isolated sentences and quoting or paraphrasing them.”<sup>16</sup>

According to the International Center for Academic Integrity, about two-thirds of college students report that they have cheated on a written assignment, by plagiarizing or buying a term paper, for example. But Teresa Fishman, executive director of the cen-

ter, points out that the two-thirds cheating rate has remained fairly steady over the past 20 years — before the World Wide Web existed. “This is a long-standing problem — not a problem just from the Internet age,” she contends.

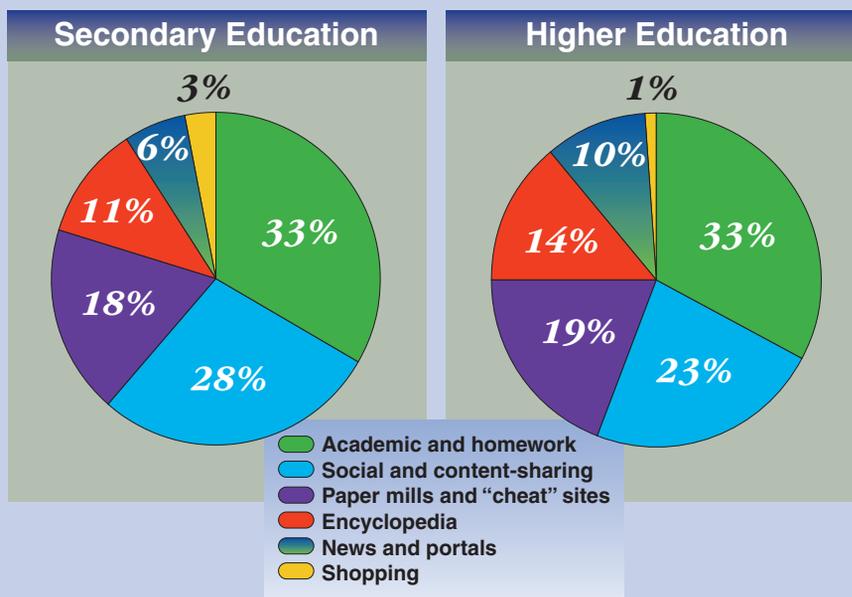
Perhaps plagiarism seems more common today because easy access to text-matching software and search engines makes it easier to catch, suggests the Berkman Center’s Gasser.

Emily Grosholz, a philosophy professor at Pennsylvania State University, says she can confirm her suspicions

## Many Students Crib From Term Paper Mills

When the leading plagiarism-detection service catches students copying sentences in their papers directly from a website, nearly a fifth of the verbatim text comes from so-called cheat sites that share or sell papers, according to a study by Turnitin, whose software detects plagiarism by matching students' text to online sources. One-third of the direct matches it found came from legitimate homework sites. The study did not look at how often any of the sources were properly cited in student papers.

**Types of Websites Copied in Papers by High School and College Students, 2012**



\* Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Source: Turnitin, 2012

in a matter of seconds. In a badly written paper replete with spelling errors, "All of a sudden you get a paragraph that's beautifully crafted," she says. "I just put it into Google, and I usually find it."

Easy methods of detecting plagiarism may explain why a majority of college presidents, according to a Pew survey, think plagiarism has increased over the past decade. Of those, 89 percent blame computers and the Internet.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, youths who create online computer games often have a nuanced sense of authorship, ac-

ording to a study of the MIT website Scratch, where kids and teens from around the world have posted more than 2 million computer games of their own creation.<sup>18</sup>

Scratch encourages children over age 8 to post games they have "remixed," or based on other creations found on the website. At first, when youngsters saw their games scrambled into new versions by other kids, some complained of plagiarism. In response, the site began attaching an automatic footnote crediting the original creator. However, complaints didn't decrease. But when a game re-mixer thanked original creators with

a personal message, the creators reacted a lot more positively.<sup>19</sup>

"That study says young people haven't converted to people who think it's OK to steal people's work; they have moral boundaries, too," says Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, director of National Programs and Site Development at the National Writing Program, a network of 200 university-based projects at the University of California-Berkeley that trains teachers in writing instruction.<sup>20</sup> "They didn't want to be invisible. They were willing to be remixed, but as a creator you want a tip of the hat, too."

Meanwhile, some college students are so afraid of plagiarizing or violating a copyright, says Patricia Aufderheide, a communications professor who co-directs American University's Center for Social Media, that they won't even read reviews of a film before they have to write one for her film class. She blames some of that fear on what she considers draconian university integrity codes that stress copying as the primary crime to avoid. Citing sources is the more important principle, she says.

"Copying is a basic part of learning," Aufderheide adds, especially when it comes to creative work. "All work in the world is recombinant."

When 17-year-old best-selling German novelist Helene Hegemann was accused of plagiarizing from a blogger and another novel, she justified it by saying she was just "mixing," as the rest of her generation does online. "There's no such thing as originality, anyway, just authenticity," she said when the scandal broke.<sup>21</sup>

But Gasser says Hegemann actually had violated the new digital norm of sharing by using someone else's words in a print book, the profits of which went only to her. "If you played the 'remix' game, you would share back your creation and let others build on top of it," Gasser says. "The norms are more complicated than just 'I remix and run with it.'"

***Is an over-emphasis on grades and test results making cheating more prevalent?***

When dozens of Stuyvesant High School students were caught exchanging test answers by cell phone last June, many people questioned why some of New York City's top students felt the need to cheat on the statewide Regents exams, which are not considered particularly challenging for Stuyvesant students.<sup>22</sup>

In subsequent interviews, the students overwhelmingly expressed anger at teachers and the school for giving them what they considered meaningless assignments that taught them nothing.<sup>23</sup>

An editorial entitled "Why We Cheat" in Stuyvesant's student newspaper put the case boldly. Students who took a test in the morning often provided answers to students taking

the same test later that day, the newspaper acknowledged, but called that "an act of communal resistance."

"Copying homework or sharing answers to a test, while undeniably wrong, become [sic] minor acts of rebellion against a course and school that has [sic] devalued learning and analytical thought," the editorial said.<sup>24</sup>

While cheating on such a large scale may have been rare at Stuyvesant, copying someone else's homework happened daily, students interviewed by *The New York Times* said. In fact, in a survey by the student newspaper last March, 80 percent said they had cheated.<sup>25</sup>



*Ethicist Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Los Angeles-based Josephson Institute, which conducts surveys on youth ethics and teaches character development, says cheating is the result of a breakdown in social mores — not excessive pressure from high-stakes testing. "Students do not cheat because there's undue pressure on grades," he says. "They cheat because they're allowed to cheat."*

Underlying such behavior, many students agreed, is the pressure placed on them to get the grades and test scores needed to get into the nation's top colleges. Stuyvesant's former principal used to joke to incoming freshmen: "Grades, friends and sleep — choose two."<sup>26</sup>

Josephson, of the Josephson Institute, says to understand the cynical climate at today's schools, one need only examine the scandals in Atlanta, Philadelphia and El Paso, where educators are being investigated for manipulating students' test scores. Their aim was often well-meaning, he says:

To boost overall school performance to avoid losing government funding.

For teachers, he says, "The consequences of truth are costly enough that [they've] induced large segments to believe it's OK to lie."

When Josephson asked one superintendent why schools had so little interest in taking up his institute's character-education programs to fight student cheating, he got this answer: "Cheating is not the problem; it's the tests: You have to expect kids to cheat if we test them this way."

Teachers are feeling intense pressure because under No Child Left Behind, low-scoring schools can be labeled as "failing" and lose federal funding or be closed.

Eric Anderman, a professor of educational psychology at Ohio State University, says less cheating occurs "when teachers emphasize that the learning is what's really important." In a study he conducted, cheating went down when students moved from

a score-oriented middle school math class into a high school class where the teacher emphasized learning math for its own sake.<sup>27</sup>

The study was based on Anderman's observations of teachers with different teaching styles. For example, if a student gets a disappointing 75 percent score on an algebra test, Anderman prefers that the teacher give the student more time to study and then retest him the following week. "At that point the teacher could just give the student the higher grade — if [he gets] a 93 the next week — or average the two scores," Anderman says. "But it

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sends the message: 'You're not done with this work until you demonstrate that you've learned it.' "

Drawing on research from Anderman and others, Pope founded Challenge Success, which emphasizes learning over scores and has conducted workshops with 100 elementary, middle and high schools in the United States.

St. Francis High School, a Catholic school in Mountain View, Calif., came to Pope's program after a rash of student cheating. After the program's intervention, infractions at the school declined from 88 cases of plagiarism and cheating in one academic year to 18 the following year.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to introducing an honor code and having students sign pledges that their homework was their own work, Stanford's Pope says, her program got the school to focus on the learning environment: Was there too much work required in too little time? Was a competitive culture creating a rat race? "If everything is about the grade, everything will be about the grade," Pope says. "It has to be systemic change, a culture change at the school to have these results."

Josephson pooh-poohs the idea that there's more academic pressure than ever before, saying the real problem is a breakdown in social mores. In fact, he points out, the number of colleges in the nation has risen, offering more students the chance to go to college than ever before.

"People who give in to temptation will always say the temptation was too great," observes Josephson. "What a person of character is supposed to do is resist temptation. Students do not cheat because there's undue pressure on grades; they cheat because they're allowed to cheat."

Experts on both sides of the debate perceive an uphill battle in today's environment. "We've had students say, 'I want that six-figure income, I want the nice house with a two- or three-

car garage, and this is what I have to do to get there,' " says Anderman.

"The bottom line is, kids see other people doing it and say, 'If they can do it, I can do it too.' They don't see it as a bad thing."

### ***Are colleges and schools doing enough to prevent plagiarism?***

Fed up with student cheating, Panagiotis Ipeirotis, an associate professor of information sciences at New York University, decided to take a harder stance in the fall of 2010. He automatically scanned all student papers using Turnitin, one of several plagiarism-detection software programs that check students' writing against a database of term papers and published sources.

By semester's end, 22 of his 108 students had admitted plagiarizing, and Ipeirotis had spent hours dealing with their cases. But his crusade created such a climate of mistrust that he received his lowest student evaluations ever, and those poor evaluations ultimately were the cause, he decided, of his lowest salary increase ever. "[I] paid a significant financial penalty for 'doing the right thing,' " Ipeirotis concluded on a blog entitled, "Why I will never pursue cheating again."<sup>29</sup>

Experts say fear of poor student evaluations, which can mean reduced pay, often discourages professors from pursuing cheating or plagiarism. "Many teachers don't want the hassle of pursuing a case of plagiarizing . . . through numerous administrative levels," Gardner says. Nor do they "want to be threatened by parents or students with lawsuits or even physical harm. So at many places, there is in effect a kind of 'don't ask, don't tell' policy."<sup>30</sup>

Harvard took a hard line, however, in a spectacular fraud case recently involving student Adam Wheeler, who faked his way into Harvard, Stanford and Bowdoin College by plagiarizing his admissions documents and lying about his credentials. Harvard pursued the case in the courts, and Wheel-

er eventually was jailed for defrauding the university of money and an admissions place.<sup>31</sup>

Julie Zauzmer, a Harvard senior and author of *Conning Harvard*, a 2012 book about the case, admires how Harvard handled Wheeler once it discovered that he had fabricated high school transcripts and plagiarized on everything from his college admission essay to his Fulbright scholarship application. "They didn't need to bring it to the police, but they did — and they took on a lot of embarrassment," she says.

Some experts say stricter policing would prevent cheating and plagiarism; others suggest that honor codes, under which students have unsupervised exams and pledge to turn in cheaters, help students internalize values better. Only a minority of colleges and some private high schools use honor codes.<sup>32</sup>

"Ideally, honor codes are developed and implemented by students, who decide what's important to put in them," says the International Center for Academic Integrity's Fishman. "If you have an honor code that sits on the shelf and no one knows what it says, that doesn't make a difference."

The traditional honor code is a vow that each student will not cheat, steal "or tolerate those who do." The last requirement is often enough to keep many schools from adopting an honor code, says Fishman, because "people won't turn in their friends."

Harvard is considering enacting an honor code, but *Crimson* editor Zauzmer doubts it will be adopted, especially since such codes usually entail students sitting in judgment. "You go before a disciplinary body of students, and the next day you're sitting next to them in Spanish class! It's hard for me to imagine that working," Zauzmer says.

Student surveys conducted by Rutgers' McCabe over the last 20 years generally show less cheating at colleges and high schools with honor

codes. <sup>33</sup> “Honor codes reduce cheating,” McCabe maintains. But, he adds, “kids are reporting less cheating than they’re actually doing” at those schools because they feel inhibited by the honor code culture.

Ethicist Josephson says honor codes affect only a small percentage of students; even military academies with longstanding honor codes, such as West Point, have been rocked by repeated cheating scandals. (See “Background.”)

“Trying to impose an honor code to solve the dishonor problem is like having foxes watch the henhouse,” Josephson says. It’s a pipe dream for schools to say all of a sudden, “We didn’t trust you before so now we’ll trust you completely,” he says. High schools should return to old-fashioned policing of exams, he urges: permitting only a blue book and a pen and banning cell phones — a rule enforced only laxly in many schools.

At Dartmouth, which has an honor code, teachers don’t use plagiarism-detection software or proctor exams because that would violate the honor code, says Aine Donovan, director of Dartmouth’s Ethics Institute. “I don’t walk around the room looking over people’s shoulders, because if you’re a person of honor it’s like hiring a private detective to spy on your spouse,” explains Donovan.

Higher education law expert Peter F. Lake — a professor at Stetson University School of Law in Gulfport, Fla., and author of the 2009 book *Beyond Discipline* — says debating the value of honor codes versus disciplinary systems is a “false choice” because the root cause of cheating is poor teaching and disaffected students. “Don’t turn an educational problem into a legal issue if you don’t have to,” he says. “Listen to the university’s discipline officers: They’re saying a lot of your cases are coming from teachers who are not competent.”

Harvard’s student newspaper, *The Crimson*, recently questioned whether

## Plagiarism Accusations Dog Writers

*Some of the nation’s most celebrated writers, as well as a high-profile student author at Harvard, have been accused of plagiarism. The publisher of a novel by Harvard student Kaavya Viswanathan, 19, canceled her contract in 2006 after it was discovered that passages from How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life bore strong similarities to other works, including Salman Rushdie’s novel Haroun and the Sea of Stories. For example:*

### From Rushdie:

**“If from speed you get your thrill/take precaution — make your will.”**

### From Viswanathan:

**“If from drink you get your thrill, take precaution — write your will.”**

*In an earlier case, prominent historian Doris Kearns Goodwin’s 1987 book The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys was found to have incorporated several passages that closely resembled Lynne McTaggart’s 1983 book Kathleen Kennedy: Her Life and Times, such as:*

### From McTaggart:

**“Hardly a day passed by without a photograph in the papers of little Teddy taking a snapshot with his Brownie held upside down, or the five Kennedy children lined up on a train or bus.”**

### From Goodwin:

**“Hardly a day passed without a newspaper photograph of little Teddy taking a snapshot with his camera held upside down, or the five Kennedy children lined up on a train or on a bus.”**

*Sources: Paris B. Bhayan and David Zhou, “Opal Mehta Contains Similarities to Two other Novels,” The Harvard Crimson, May 1, 2006, [www.thecrimson.com/article/2006/5/1/opal-mehta-contains-similarities-to-two/](http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2006/5/1/opal-mehta-contains-similarities-to-two/). “Excerpts from Kennedy Books by Lynne McTaggart and Doris Kearns Goodwin,” The Associated Press, March 25, 2002, [www.bigbeam.com/doc/1P1-51604798.html](http://www.bigbeam.com/doc/1P1-51604798.html)*

students caught cheating are granted due process. Rather than turning an infraction into a teaching moment with a class about plagiarism as some other schools do, Harvard creates a “penal system” in which students have few rights in hearings and generally receive the harshest possible punishment, *The Crimson* charged. <sup>34</sup>

Lake says universities should not try to run their disciplinary systems like miniature court systems, because it invites more litigation and appeals and

forces academics “to play lawyer as opposed to what they’re good at — education.”

The financial penalty for schools without Harvard’s rich endowment may also explain their reluctance to treat students harshly. “If you drop the hammer too hard, you’ll scare your customers,” Lake points out, especially “if you’re tuition driven and you’re not a Harvard.”

And one disciplinary action on a record can ruin a student’s future, a punishment many professors are reluctant to

dole out. “Now it’s almost Kafkaesque: If you’re lucky you’ll graduate without being disciplined, yet all around you there’s cheating,” Lake observes. “Any minute you could be the person who gets destroyed by this system.” ■

## BACKGROUND

### Famous Plagiarists

While plagiarism may be considered an unforgivable — and unique — transgression in the 21st century, history indicates that many great writers and personalities, from Shakespeare to Jonathan Swift, plagiarized liberally from other writers.

The first known use of the word plagiarism in its modern sense occurred in the first century, when the Roman poet Martial used the Latin word “plagiarius” — someone who steals another’s slaves — to complain that another poet had stolen his verses.<sup>35</sup> However, plagiarism, as it is understood today, was commonly accepted in Roman times. A poetic form known as the “cento,” in which fragments of other poems are strung together to create a new meaning, remained popular into Shakespeare’s time.

In England, the first accusations of what would come to be called “plagiarism” cropped up in the 17th century. In

fact, by modern standards, Shakespeare would be considered a plagiarist, according to Richard A. Posner, a judge on the U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago and senior lecturer in law at the University of Chicago. “Thousands of lines in his plays are verbatim copies or close paraphrases from various sources, along with titles and plot details, all without acknowledgment,” writes Posner, in *The Little Book of Plagiarism*.<sup>36</sup>

For instance, Shakespeare’s famous description of Cleopatra on her barge in “Antony and Cleopatra” closely mimics Plutarch’s description in his life of Mark Antony, but Shakespeare renders the same words into poetry. “If

this is plagiarism, we need more plagiarism,” concludes Posner.<sup>37</sup>

In Shakespeare’s time, creativity was understood to be what Posner calls “creative imitation.” The poet John Milton justified such “borrowing,” saying it was not plagiarism if the borrower made the original work better. Originality was not crucial.

As late as the 18th century, British novelist Lawrence Sterne, in his classic comic novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, parodied and copied word for word from such writers as Rabelais and Francis Bacon. He was later labeled a plagiarist by 19th century critics for copying passages extensively from the 17th-century

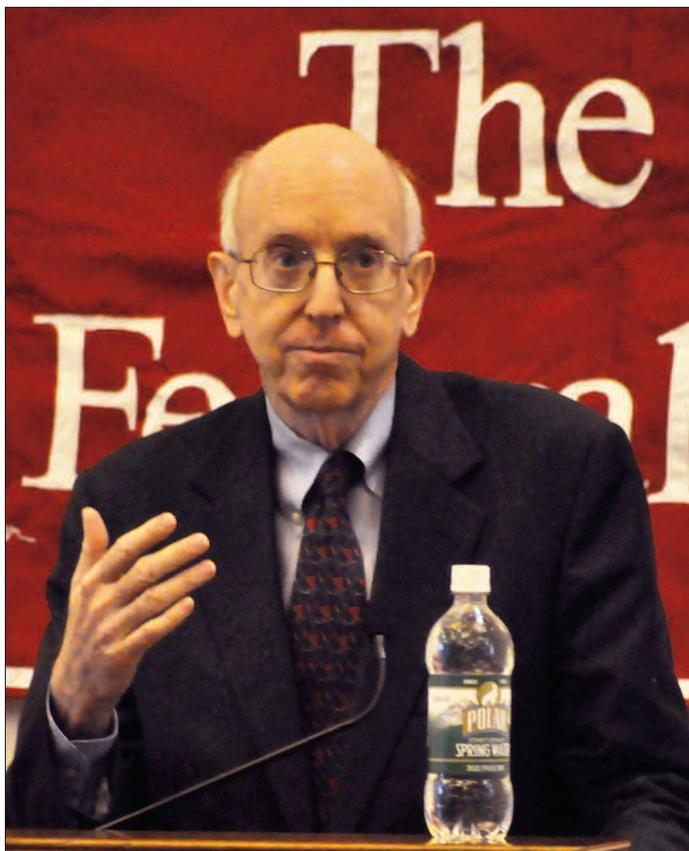
medical treatise *Anatomy of Melancholy*, by Robert Burton, without attribution, although to some critics he was simply making fun of Burton’s solemn tone.

### ‘Cult of Originality’

What Posner calls “the cult of originality” emerged from a shift in how artistic works were marketed, which changed radically with the advent of easier, less expensive printing in the 17th and 18th centuries. Before then, copying was a form of dissemination, and the right to copy rested with the owner of a physical book, who copied the text by hand.

During the Renaissance, the maker of an engraving, a process that produced multiple printed images from an artist’s drawing, was considered to have produced some-

*Continued on p. 14*



Gallery/Chensiyuan

*Richard A. Posner, a U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals judge and senior law lecturer at the University of Chicago, grapples with debates over the definition of plagiarism in his 109-page A Little Book of Plagiarism. Although plagiarism generally means stealing or passing off the ideas or words of another as one’s own without crediting the source, Posner says the reader must “care about being deceived about authorial identity in order for the deceit to cross the line to fraud and thus constitute plagiarism.”*

# Chronology

## Ancient Rome 20th Century

**Concept of plagiarism introduced.**

### 1st century A.D.

Roman poet Martial uses Latin “plagiarius” to describe a poet who stole his verses.

## 18th Century

**Ownership of written works shifts from holders of copies to authors; copyright emerges as a commercial concept.**

### 1759

Lawrence Sterne, whose innovative novel *Tristram Shandy* borrows from other authors, is accused of plagiarizing a 17th century medical treatise.

### 1769

In landmark *Millar v. Taylor* ruling, English judges declare a work belongs to the individual who wrote it.

### 1790

Congress passes first U.S. copyright law, giving author sole right to printed works for 14 years.

## 19th Century

**Cheating scandals erupt at U.S. colleges; some adopt honor codes.**

### 1834

Poet Thomas de Quincey exposes poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s alleged plagiarism.

### 1842

University of Virginia adopts first honor code, in which students vow not to lie, cheat or steal and agree to report one another’s misdeeds.

**Cheating scandals rock West Point; “creative plagiarism” continues in literature.**

### 1922

Poet T. S. Eliot publishes “The Waste Land,” drawing on Shakespeare, Chaucer and others. “Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal,” Eliot says.

### 1951

U.S. Military Academy at West Point expels 90 cadets for cheating.

### 1974

New York officials cancel statewide high school Regents exams after a scandal involving illegal answer keys.

### 1976

In another West Point cheating scandal, 150 cadets are implicated.

### 1978

Alex Haley, author of best-seller *Roots*, pays \$650,000 in settlement over plagiarism charges brought by novelist Harold Courlander.

### 1989

New York Education Commissioner cancels state chemistry exams after *New York Post* publishes answer key circulating among students.

**2000s Cheating scandals revealed at high-achieving high schools. No Child Left Behind law, which links federal aid to test scores, adds to pressure for students to meet proficiency standards.**

### February 2000

At Dartmouth, 78 students accused of cheating on computer science homework, but charges are dropped

after honor board cannot pinpoint blame.

### 2001

Congress passes No Child Left Behind law requiring all students by 2014 to reach grade level in reading and math by passing standardized tests. Critics say it encourages “teaching to the test.”

### 2002

Historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Stephen Ambrose accused of plagiarism.

### 2003

*The New York Times* reveals reporter Jayson Blair plagiarized and fabricated quotes in dozens of stories.

### 2006

Harvard student Kaavya Viswanathan, 19, accused of plagiarizing a novel.

### 2010

Harvard student Adam Wheeler, who plagiarized admission essays, found guilty of fraud.

### 2011

Teacher cheating scandals erupt in Atlanta, Philadelphia and Washington.

### 2012

Fifty-one percent of high school students admit cheating on a test in past year. . . . More than 65 Atlanta teachers to lose licenses over cheating (April). . . . 70 students at New York City’s Stuyvesant High School involved in test cheating. *New Yorker* writer Jonah Lehrer resigns after plagiarism discovered (July). . . . 125 Harvard students investigated for cheating on take-home exam (August). . . . Former El Paso School District Superintendent Lorenzo García sentenced to three and a half years in prison for manipulating student test scores (Oct. 5).

## Can Art Justify Plagiarism?

*“I felt my words had become part of some grander cause.”*

At first, *New Yorker* staff writer Malcolm Gladwell was indignant when he learned that a successful Broadway play about a serial killer was using lines lifted almost word-for-word from one of his articles.

Gladwell wrote to the playwright, Bryony Lavery, that to “lift material, without my approval, is theft.”<sup>1</sup>

Then he read the script. “I found it breathtaking,” he remembered. “Instead of feeling that my words had been taken from me, I felt that they had become part of some grander cause.”<sup>2</sup>

When news of Lavery’s alleged plagiarism broke a few months later, in September 2004, Gladwell was already feeling uncomfortable with his rebuke of the playwright. In his *New Yorker* account about his change of mind, he noted that Lavery had created something entirely new, a work of art as well as an entirely new story, about what would happen if a woman met the man who killed her daughter. He called this kind of creative act the “art defense” to plagiarism. Art, he said, is “not a breach of ethics.”<sup>3</sup>

However, he wrote, it was clearly plagiarism when renowned historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, writing about the Kennedys, borrowed material verbatim without attribution from another history of the fabled family. That example couldn’t claim the “art defense,” he said, because it had not transformed the stolen words into a work of art.

Gladwell’s art defense is similar to a legal defense in a copyright infringement case. If a writer takes a passage of someone else’s writing and uses it in a “transformative” manner — as in a parody, for example — that can be legally permissible under the legal doctrine of “fair use.”<sup>4</sup>

But what about when one artist steals a plot, character or passage from another artist’s work? Novelist Jonathan Lethem, in a widely discussed essay, “The Ecstasy of Influence,” argues that literature has been doing just that — “in a plundered, frag-

mentary state for a long time.” He cites Shakespeare’s borrowings from Plutarch for his description of Cleopatra in “Antony and Cleopatra” (later stolen by T. S. Eliot for his poem “The Waste Land”) and William Burroughs’ 1959 novel about a narcotics addict, *Naked Lunch*, which incorporated snippets from other writers.<sup>5</sup>

Society’s common cultural heritage is essentially a public “commons,” Lethem argues, and when people become overly preoccupied with who owns the words, the music or the art, “the loser is the collective public imagination.”<sup>6</sup>

Take this example: A story titled “Lolita,” about a middle-aged man who falls in love with an adolescent girl, was written by a German writer 40 years before Vladimir Nabokov’s famous novel *Lolita*. Did Nabokov know that he was adopting Heinz von Lichberg’s story? Or could Nabokov have read the story many years before and captured it unconsciously in his memory?

In any case, it doesn’t much matter to readers because Nabokov’s *Lolita* is so much better than Lichberg’s long-forgotten story, Lethem suggests.

Recently, Drexel University English professor Paula Marantz Cohen made a similar argument in defense of a former Harvard student, Kaavya Viswanathan, widely condemned for plagiarism. The 19-year-old’s seemingly precocious novel, about an Indian-American girl dreaming of going to Harvard, bore close resemblance in phrasing to a young-adult novel by Megan McCafferty. When news of the similarities broke, the publisher withdrew Viswanathan’s book and canceled her contract.<sup>7</sup>

Calling this “creative plagiarism,” Cohen takes a contrarian view. McCafferty’s was a “conventional” coming-of-age novel, she writes, but “Viswanathan’s novel pushes the boundaries of humorous realism into the realm of farce and social satire.” We should be “empathetic with writers struggling to find a creative path through the thicket of existing expression,” Cohen argues.<sup>8</sup>

*Continued from p. 12*

thing just as valuable as the original. But as mass printing became more available, prints lost their value.

French literary and social critic Roland Barthes (1915-1980) famously declared that the author is “a modern figure” who emerges from modernity’s “prestige of the individual.”<sup>38</sup>

The idea of originality — often seen as the bedrock of creativity today — grew out of Enlightenment ideas of individuality, which were further developed by Romantic poets such as

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The 19th-century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer helped to stoke a “cult of genius” with his ideas about the importance of brilliant composers and writers.

Nevertheless, Posner argues, “Creative imitation is not just a classical or Renaissance legacy: It is a modern market imperative.”<sup>39</sup> As proof he cites the many re-makes, prequels and sequels of popular movies.

The concept of copyright as a commercial privilege emerged in the

17th and 18th centuries in England and Germany. Ownership no longer was attached to the physical book but to the words and the author. From the 1740s to the 1770s, lawmakers, publishers and writers debated whether copyright attached to the author should be limited or last forever. In an influential legal decision in 1769, *Millar v. Taylor*, a British court held that a work belonged to the individual who wrote it because it was the embodiment of the individual and a work of “original authorship.”<sup>40</sup>

Famous words and cherished music might have been lost forever if they had not been appropriated by later artists who made them fixtures in popular culture, Lethem similarly argues. For example, he points out, in his album “Modern Times,” folk singer and songwriter Bob Dylan — who borrowed widely without attribution — keeps alive the obscure Civil War poetry of Henry Timrod.

Borrowing from influential predecessors is endemic to our culture, Lethem argues: Without Charlie Brown there would be no “South Park” and without “The Flintstones,” he maintains, “The Simpsons” wouldn’t exist.

Mischievously, Lethem discloses at the end of his famous essay that almost every line was cribbed from someone else. The provocative article, originally published in *Harper’s* in 2007, drew critics and put Lethem on the lecture circuit.<sup>9</sup>

One critic, surprisingly, was Stanford University law professor Lawrence Lessig, who says the ever-lengthening term of copyright hampers creators, an argument supported by Lethem. Yet, Lessig objected, if a creator wants to build on the work of others, “It is not too much to demand that a beautiful (or ugly) borrowed sentence be wrapped in simple quotation marks.”<sup>10</sup>

In a follow-up essay, Lethem conceded Lessig’s point in the realm of academic, scientific or journalistic writing, where citations are “necessary and sensible.” But, in songs, films, paint-



Getty Images/Alex Wong

*Novelist Jonathan Lethem argues that for centuries famous authors and musicians have borrowed from other artists to create new art. For example, in his album “Modern Times,” singer Bob Dylan — seen receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama on May 29, 2012 — borrowed from obscure Civil War poet Henry Timrod, thereby keeping Timrod’s work alive, Lethem says.*

ings and poetry, direct quotations are often “subsumed within the voice of the artist who claims them,” he insisted, adding, “There are no quotation marks around the elements in a Robert Rauschenberg collage.”<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps it was something quite different that bothered Lessig. “I was . . . especially troubled,” he wrote, “when I found buried in the text” of Lethem’s essay “the only sentence I have ever written that I truly like.”

— Sarah Glazer

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, “Something Borrowed,” *The New Yorker*, Nov. 22, 2004, [www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/11/22/041122fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/11/22/041122fa_fact).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Fair use requires both a transformative purpose and an appropriate (small enough) amount. There is no requirement for attribution. See Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi, *Reclaiming Fair Use* (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Lethem, “The Ecstasy of Influence,” pp. 93-120, in Jonathan Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence* (2011). See p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> Kaavya Viswanathan’s novel is *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life* (2006). Megan McCafferty’s novel is *Sloppy Firsts* (2001).

<sup>8</sup> See Paula Marantz Cohen, “Creative Plagiarism,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct. 22, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/article/Creative-Plagiarism/135158/>.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Lethem “The Ecstasy of Influence,” *Harper’s*, February 2007, <http://harpers.org/archive/2007/02/the-ecstasy-of-influence/>.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Jonathan Lethem, “The Afterlife of ‘Ecstasy,’” in Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence* (2011), p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Thomas Jefferson famously stood behind the principle that authors should have the right to benefit from their literary property temporarily — after which time the public had the right to benefit from their contribution. If anything, he saw copyright as a necessary evil on the path to sharing knowledge, as indicated in his frequently quoted statement: “He who receives an idea from me receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me.”<sup>41</sup>

## Cheating Scandals

Cheating scandals were common among students in the 19th century. In the 1860s at Yale University, which was then essentially a finishing school for the wealthy, “perhaps less than half of the compositions were actually written by the supposed author,” a student wrote in his diary.<sup>42</sup>

In 1842, the University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson 23 years earlier, adopted an honor code based

on student self-governance that is the oldest in the country. It stemmed from the shooting murder in 1840 of a popular law professor, John A. G. Davis, by a masked student. Responding to the incident, the university’s students agreed to “vouch” for one another by agreeing to report on other students’ misbehavior. Eventually, the faculty established an “honor pledge” for examinations, agreeing to trust students when they pledged that they had “neither received nor given assistance” on their

## PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING

schoolwork. Today offenses of the honor pledge — that students will not lie, cheat or steal — are presented to student jury panels.<sup>43</sup>

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point also adopted an honor code in the 19th century that read: “A cadet will not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do it.”

However, in 1951 a cheating scandal rocked West Point, ending with the expulsion of 90 cadets who had received answers to an exam ahead of time. The roots of the scandal were traced to a small group of football players.<sup>44</sup>

Nicolaus Mills, a professor of American studies at Sarah Lawrence College, notes the similarity between the 1951 case and Harvard’s recent scandal. In the Harvard case, up to half of the 125 students accused of copying from one another on a take-home exam were members of the varsity football, baseball and basketball teams. Mills suggests that for some of the players being investigated,

the cheating can be traced to their recruitment despite weak academic records. Two senior co-captains of Harvard’s basketball team withdrew from school in September in the wake of the scandal.<sup>45</sup>

In 1976, West Point was hit with yet another cheating scandal — the largest in its history. More than 150 cadets, about half the junior class, resigned or were expelled for cheating on a take-home exam in electrical engineering. Of those, 98 were reinstated the following year, after the Army

“bowed to public pressure,” in the words of a 1978 Associated Press story, and to the recommendation of a special commission headed by former astronaut and West Point graduate Frank Borman.<sup>46</sup>

In February 2000, a visiting professor at Dartmouth, Rex Dwyer, accused almost half of his computer science class of copying answers to a homework assignment from a portion of his class website that he accidentally left unlocked. Seventy-eight students were

centuries. In the case of canonic writers such as Swift, Coleridge and Mark Twain, however, discoveries of plagiarism seem to have done little to tar their reputations.<sup>48</sup> Often authors say they plagiarized unconsciously, having read something long ago and since forgotten that it came from another source — a process known to psychologists as cryptomnesia.

In a famous instance, a friend wrote to Mark Twain that he had admired his dedication in *The Innocents*

*Abroad* long before Twain published it in his book. In fact, the friend said he had read it in a book by Oliver Wendell Holmes. When Twain checked the book by Holmes, he discovered, “I had really stolen that dedication, almost word for word. I could not imagine how this curious thing had happened.”

He wrote to Holmes to apologize. Holmes graciously replied that he “believed we all unconsciously worked over ideas gathered in reading and hearing, imagining they were original with ourselves.”<sup>49</sup>

Nineteen-year-old Harvard student Kaavya

Viswanathan made a similar claim after *The Harvard Crimson* reported in 2006 that her novel *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life* contained almost word-for-word passages from a novel by Megan McCafferty.

Viswanathan — who had received an advance of \$500,000 from publisher Little, Brown and had sold the movie rights — initially claimed the copying had been “unconscious” and that she had “internalized” McCafferty’s novels while reading them. But after other passages from her novel were found to



Getty Images/Lee Celano

*Cadets of the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., prepare for their graduation and commissioning ceremony on May 26, 2012. Despite having adopted a rigorous honor code in the 19th century, the prestigious institution was rocked by cheating scandals in 1951 and 1976. In the second scandal more than 150 cadets resigned or were expelled for cheating on a take-home exam in electrical engineering.*

implicated in violating Dartmouth’s honor code. Mid-way through hearing the cases, the college’s faculty-student honor board decided that although there had been cheating, it was unclear who was guilty. Dartmouth dropped charges against all of the students. Dwyer said he had mistakenly put the answers to the homework online prematurely but blamed the students for cheating and collaborating illicitly.<sup>47</sup>

Charges of plagiarism have trailed writers, historians and journalists for

# How Plagiarism and Copyright Infringement Differ

The idea that authors should have the right to benefit from their literary property — at least temporarily — is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, which gives Congress the power to “promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the Exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.”<sup>1</sup>

Congress passed the first copyright law in 1790, giving authors the sole right to print their works for 14 years and the right to renew their copyright for another 14 years. Since then, the length of copyright has been continually extended and now lasts for the life of the author plus 70 years. Disney’s lobbying of Congress is often cited as the reason for the extensions, since every time Mickey Mouse is about to come into the public domain, the mouse’s copyright is extended.<sup>2</sup>

Legal experts point out that plagiarism and copyright are not the same: Plagiarism is not a legal crime but an ethical offense in which a writer or creator fails to give credit and makes people believe a work is his own. Copyright, by contrast, is a legal term for the exclusive right to reproduce, publish, distribute or sell an original work.<sup>3</sup> It is intended to protect the creator’s economic interest in the market. “Plagiarism can become the basis of a lawsuit if it infringes copyright or breaks the contract between author and publisher,” according to Richard A. Posner, a judge and the author of *The Little Book of Plagiarism*.<sup>4</sup>

Using too much of a copyrighted work without the permission of the copyright owner is considered illegal “infringement” of the owner’s copyright unless it falls under the “fair use” doctrine. Fair use allows copyrighted materials to be used without permission of the copyright holder under certain conditions. For instance, copying works for a “transformative” use — such as parody, criticism or comment — is considered “fair use.” However, millions of dollars in legal fees have been spent trying to define fair use in court, and the definition relies upon varied judicial decisions.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to plagiarism, using copyrighted material under the fair use doctrine does not require attribution to the original work. However, notes Patricia Aufderheide, a communications professor who directs American University’s Center for Social Media, if you’re arguing in court that your use of someone else’s work is legally allowed fair use, “It would be a smart thing to attribute [to the original creator], not because the law says so, but because judges are human and they, too, think attribution is a nice idea.”

“You can be a plagiarist and not infringe on copyright [if you take] a small enough portion without credit that it doesn’t qualify as infringement,” says Siva Vaidhyanathan, a professor of media studies at the University of Virginia.<sup>6</sup> The size of the un-credited “portion” under “fair use” is not fixed, however. Determinations are made as copyright-infringement cases come before judges.

One can be found guilty of copyright infringement without plagiarizing. “If you take too much of a piece, [even if you] give adequate credit, you can still be accused of infringement because you competed against the original in the marketplace. They’re not the same thing, though they’re often conflated in the public mind,” explains Vaidhyanathan.

— Sarah Glazer

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Malcolm Gladwell, “Something Borrowed,” *The New Yorker*, Nov. 22, 2004, [www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/11/22/041122fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/11/22/041122fa_fact).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence* (2011), p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/copyright](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/copyright). Also see [www.copyright.gov/help/faq/definitions.html](http://www.copyright.gov/help/faq/definitions.html).

<sup>4</sup> Richard A. Posner, *The Little Book of Plagiarism* (2007), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> “What is Fair Use?” Stanford University Libraries, 2010, [http://fairuse.stanford.edu/Copyright\\_and\\_Fair\\_Use\\_Overview/chapter9/9-a.html](http://fairuse.stanford.edu/Copyright_and_Fair_Use_Overview/chapter9/9-a.html).

<sup>6</sup> “Interview with Siva Vaidhyanathan #6,” University of Virginia, 2004, [http://archive.org/details/thecopyfight\\_siva\\_vaidhyanathan\\_06](http://archive.org/details/thecopyfight_siva_vaidhyanathan_06).

have been copied from other authors, including Salman Rushdie, the publisher recalled the book and canceled its contract with her.<sup>50</sup> (See box, p. 11.)

Prominent historians also have been accused of plagiarism. One of the most famous involved Doris Kearns Goodwin, whose 1987 book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* incorporated more than 50 passages from Lynne McTaggart’s 1983 book *Kathleen Kennedy: Her Life and Times*. Goodwin insisted she was not guilty of plagiarism, claiming the copying was unintentional and the result of sloppy note-

taking. She hired a political consultant to arrange support for her in the media and received testimonials from prominent historians. In response to an exposé published in *The Weekly Standard* in 2002, Goodwin acknowledged that she paid a “substantial” sum in exchange for McTaggart’s silence about the incident under an out-of-court settlement negotiated by her lawyers and publisher. Under the secret settlement, Goodwin agreed to add at least 40 new footnotes citing McTaggart in a new edition, according to *The Weekly Standard*.<sup>51</sup>

Soon, the “cover-up was forgotten,” writes historian Jon Wiener in his book *Historians in Trouble*, and Goodwin was appearing as a commentator on TV. “She paid a price for plagiarism,” Wiener points out “and it succeeded.”<sup>52</sup>

The same year, the Civil War historian Stephen Ambrose was accused of multiple instances of plagiarism by *The Weekly Standard*. After first minimizing the charges, Ambrose eventually apologized for “improperly attributing” other authors’ writings.<sup>53</sup>

## Students Copy From Wikipedia and “Cheat” Sites

*Wikipedia material is copied word-for-word into papers written by both high school and college students more than any other website content, according to a study by Turnitin, which sells plagiarism-detection software. The study did not determine whether students properly cited such websites. One so-called cheat site that charges students to access its term papers — oppapers.com, now known as StudyMode — is the second most copied site for college students after Wikipedia.*

### Top Websites Copied in Papers by High School and College Students, 2012

High School		College	
Wikipedia	8%	Wikipedia	11%
answers.yahoo.com	7%	oppapers.com*	4%
enotes.com	3%	Slideshare	4%
Answers.com	3%	coursehero.com	4%
oppapers.com*	3%	Scribd	3%
Scribd	3%	answers.yahoo.com	3%
Slideshare	2%	Answers.com	3%
essaymania.com*	2%	medlibrary.org	3%
shmoop.com	2%	bignerds.com*	2%
medlibrary.org	2%	papercamp.com*	2%

\* Denotes “cheat” site or paper mill

Source: Turnitin, 2012

The media also has had its share of plagiarism scandals. On May 11, 2003, *The New York Times* published a front-page story revealing that reporter Jayson Blair had fabricated interviews, concocted scenes and stolen quotes from other newspapers, often to pretend he had been on locations he never visited. In the fallout from the scandal, two top editors resigned.<sup>54</sup>

And last year, *New Yorker* staff writer Jonah Lehrer was caught self-plagiarizing (recycling an article he had written earlier for the *Wall Street Journal*) and fabricating quotes from singer Bob Dylan. Lehrer resigned in July, and his publisher, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, began recalling his bestselling book, *Imagine: How Creativity Works*. The

following month, *Wired* terminated Lehrer’s online column after more than a dozen posts were found to have problems, including instances of outright plagiarism.<sup>55</sup> ■

## CURRENT SITUATION

### Cheating Trends

Despite concerns about a growing “epidemic” of student cheating, a recent survey shows that cheating at

the high school level has declined over the past four years, although it continues to involve a majority of students.

According to the Josephson Institute’s 2012 survey of 23,000 high school students, 51 percent admitted to cheating on a test during the past year, compared to 64 percent in 2008. And 74 percent admitted to copying another person’s homework, down from 82 percent.<sup>56</sup> About one in three students admitted to copying an Internet document for a classroom assignment — a share that has not changed much since 2008. It’s unclear, however, whether the latest survey numbers represent a real decline, since a quarter of students said they had lied on at least some answers on the survey — slightly more than in 2010.

The survey also shows a decline in students’ cynicism about the need for cheating. Thirty-six percent of those surveyed agree with the statement that a person must lie or cheat sometimes to succeed, compared to 40 percent in 2008, but Josephson still finds that share troubling. “That level of cynicism supports the fact that we have a generation that has come to believe that lying and cheating is part of the American way,” Josephson contends.

At the college level, surveys conducted between 2002 and 2010 of more than 70,000 undergraduates found that 65 percent admitted cheating, compared to 87 percent in 1993-94.<sup>57</sup> While that suggests cheating is declining among undergraduates, survey author McCabe says based on interviews and additional surveys he thinks the difference reflects a changing definition of what constitutes cheating. Only about one in four college students considers cut-and-paste plagiarism from the Internet to be serious cheating. And about one in five (22 percent) classify cut-and-paste plagiarism from written sources in the same way.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, changing student attitudes are especially evident with regard

*Continued on p. 20*

# At Issue:

## Is a new definition of plagiarism needed?



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WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, JANUARY 2013

“**p**lagiarism” is a perfectly fine term with a perfectly clear definition: use of someone’s words or ideas without giving credit. But words change, and dictionaries provide only partial evidence of terms’ meanings.

In actual use, the term plagiarism today covers almost every form of academic misconduct — from imperfect mastery of academic citation conventions to buying term papers. Plagiarism is used for misdeeds committed by college students and professional writers. However, this single term is less helpful than confounding because their misdeeds vary in seriousness, forms, motivations, type of affront and consequences. And they represent differing crimes: against another’s intellectual property or moral rights; against truth; against professional norms. Some challenge higher education’s monopoly on conferring credit.

Student omission of page numbers for quotations may simply reflect incomplete skill in mastering academic writing. Buying or downloading term papers flouts the purpose of written assignments and is fraud.

Professional writers importing sentences or paragraphs from the work of others — as in the recent case of Fareed Zakaria using Jill Lepore’s work in his own publication without proper attribution — is a clear case of plagiarism properly termed. The young and decorated writer Jonah Lehrer both plagiarized and fabricated quotations. Both are impermissible, given the norms of professional writing. But to call both plagiarism muddies the situation. A journalist recently cited a case in which one researcher used another’s data without permission, calling it plagiarism, but I explained that it was stealing data.

Another misdeed that often is called plagiarism is the ridiculously termed “self-plagiarism.” But recycling one’s own work for republication represents no crime against the rights of another. Surely we have a right to our own words? However, in the economic model of professional writing — whether journalistic or academic — in which “credit” accrues only to the first appearance of work, recycling one’s own words is not considered novel enough to deserve the rewards of credit, pay, promotion or glory. Only the first appearance is acknowledged. So in a society in which competition for early appearance is granted primacy, this misdeed is also punished.

Because plagiarism is used to describe so many forms of misconduct, it confuses rather than explains. A set of new, more precise terms — under the general headings of academic misconduct and publication ethics — would clarify our thinking on the topic.



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**C**learly, the processes of information-gathering have changed. We now have access to nearly unlimited information via electronic files, many of which don’t provide authors’ names. But does that mean we need a new definition of “plagiarism”?

Although it’s difficult to reach a consensus on the precise wording and boundaries of plagiarism, most teachers, students and writers agree on the basics: Plagiarism is taking work that is not one’s own; taking credit for the words of another or using another person’s ideas without giving proper credit. Regardless of how it is phrased, the commonalities in the definition of plagiarism include work, legitimate ownership, misappropriation and credit.

While some people define it as “literary theft,” plagiarism is a more complex idea than stealing, because it can involve the misappropriation of words and ideas rather than tangible property, but the concepts are closely related: taking and benefiting or profiting by improperly laying claim to something that is not one’s own. The idea applies whether the material comes from a website, video or book.

While it is not necessary to redefine plagiarism, it would be useful to delineate its boundaries and conditions more clearly — to refine, rather than re-conceptualize the definition. Although most plagiarism is not criminal, one could envision the elements of plagiarism like those of a crime, so one can identify instances of plagiarism by determining whether they fit the definition. Plagiarism occurs when one:

- uses words, ideas or work products . . .
- attributable to an identifiable person or source . . .
- without attributing the work to the source . . .
- in a situation in which there is a legitimate expectation of original authorship . . .
- in order to obtain benefit, credit or gain.

This definition clarifies the elements of plagiarism but doesn’t change our understanding of what plagiarism is. It also makes common sense exceptions for accepted practices such as speech-writing and the kind of imitation people do when they are learning — such as copying famous paintings to practice artistic techniques. It clarifies that it is possible to plagiarize not only traditional printed texts but also things like graphic designs, videos and other 21st-century modes of communication. In short, it maintains the definition of plagiarism that is already widely understood and protects original authorship and innovation, rather than using technology as an excuse to take credit where it is not truly due.

Continued from p. 18

to student collaboration — increasingly encouraged by schools to build teamwork skills seen as necessary for the 21st-century workforce. For the Harvard open-book, open-Internet take-home exam, some students said it was unclear that they couldn't collaborate when they did so in every other phase of the course, including discussing the exam questions in groups with a teaching assistant shortly before the exam was due.

Surveys of Duke University students have found an increase in cheating that involved collaboration, even as other kinds of dishonest behavior — such as copying without attributing the source — are declining. Some “students told us that working together on homework assignments was acceptable because it's ultimately the student's responsibility to learn the material. How they learn is irrelevant,” reported researchers Noah Pickus and Suzanne Shanahan of the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University.<sup>59</sup>

At Harvard, cheating and plagiarism received new attention this fall following last spring's cheating scandal. Harvard senior Zauzmer said every course she took that semester had a plagiarism statement on the syllabus and professors were talking about the issue more than usual.

Although Zauzmer approves of the new attention to plagiarism, she worries that the scandal could discourage people from legitimate collaboration, such as “sitting in the dining hall with someone who is taking your Congress class and discussing the readings together.”

## **Intransigence and Scandal**

Schools across the United States have mounted widely publicized

character education in November.

“Very few” of the schools that participate in the institute's character education curriculum “are doing anything serious about the integrity issue,” Josephson says. Partly, he says, the issue is about protecting property values. In affluent suburbs such as Scarsdale, N.Y., homeowners are willing to pay property taxes equivalent to private school tuition so their children can attend public schools boasting a high rate of graduates who attend Ivy League colleges.

If cheating is discovered, “the whole community is against your reporting it,” Josephson says.

Perhaps more disturbingly, experts say, some teachers engage in test cheating themselves — in part because of the No Child Left Behind law's linkage of federal school funding with performance on high-stakes tests.

On Oct. 5, former El Paso School District Superintendent Lorenzo García was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison for devising a scheme to inflate student test scores, including forcing weaker students to drop out so they would not drag down scores.<sup>60</sup>

García's sentencing came after a two-year state investigation implicated 178 teachers and principals in At-

lanta in a widespread pattern of changing wrong test answers to inflate scores.<sup>61</sup> The investigation revealed widespread cheating in at least half of the Atlanta school district's 100 schools and described teachers holding a “changing party” to erase wrong answers.<sup>62</sup> In April more than 65 Atlanta teach-



Joshua Cbefec, left, Adam Justin, background center, and George Trane, right, are escorted from the Nassau County District Attorney's office, in Mineola, N.Y., on Nov. 22, 2011. The three were among 20 current and former students from five area high schools arrested in connection with a scheme to pay up to \$3,000 for others to take the SAT or ACT college entrance exam for them. The district attorney said she could not reveal the outcome of the cases because the students are considered “youthful offenders” and records are sealed. Students taking the college entrance exams now must provide a photo of themselves when they register.

Photos are then printed on students' admission tickets and forwarded to students' home schools along with the test results.

AP Photo/Neusday/Howard Schnapp

ers were told they would lose their licenses.<sup>63</sup>

Similar scandals or investigations of suspicious test answer patterns emerged in 2011 in Baltimore, Md.; Norfolk, Va.; Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. “I’ve never seen so many cheating scandals as there have been in the last few years,” said Diane Ravitch, a former U.S. assistant secretary of Education under President George H. W. Bush who has since become a fierce critic of NCLB. “As we get closer to this deadline of 2014 [when all students must reach grade level in reading and math under the law], it’s not surprising that there are schools and districts where these things happen again and again.”<sup>64</sup>

“That’s the tone and climate in which student cheating occurs,” Josephson says of the teacher scandals. “How can you be surprised if students cheat?”

## Student vs. Machine

To curb plagiarism, many schools scan student papers using plagiarism-detection software that matches students’ writing against a database of published sources and previously submitted student papers. About 1,500 colleges and 4,000 secondary schools use the software developed by the company Turnitin, and about 100 college admissions offices use it to check the originality of essays on applications, according to a company spokesman. (Turnitin is the most popular program with more than 60 million submissions in 2011, but there are dozens of other such programs, including Blackboard’s SafeAssign, another market leader.)<sup>65</sup>

Some schools require students to use a plagiarism software program, such as Turnitin’s WriteCheck, to check their papers before they turn them in. “After a year of using Turnitin, schools see a 30 percent drop in plagiarism; after three to four years, a 50 to 70 percent drop,” according to Chris Harrick, vice president of marketing for Turnitin.

Yet some teachers say Turnitin is far from perfect. For example, says Kenyon College economics professor David E. Harrington, a text that plagiarized from *The New York Times* wasn’t detected by Turnitin because the company doesn’t have a subscription agreement with *The Times*. And letting students check their papers on Turnitin before submitting them “is more likely to teach students how to right-click words” for synonyms “and scramble phrases to get acceptable scores on Turnitin,” Harrington said on his blog.<sup>66</sup>

Students have exploited other loopholes in the software to avoid detection, such as using Google Translate to translate a plagiarized passage into Spanish and then back into English so that it uses different wording from the original, according to the International Center for Academic Integrity’s Fishman, who sits on the board of Turnitin’s U.K. division.

Turnitin’s Harrick agrees the company is in an ongoing “arms race” to keep up with students’ continual efforts to defeat the software, but he says company engineers change the algorithm as such efforts pop up.

Fishman’s worries go beyond software. “The much larger concern is we’ll teach students to get around it in a mechanical way rather than learning why it’s important to document their sources,” she says, noting that the software won’t necessarily distinguish when a text match it finds is surrounded by quotes and properly attributed.

## Digital Ethics

Researchers at the Harvard School of Education have developed a school curriculum, “Our Space,” designed to help high school students identify plagiarism in writing and “fair use” of online content — when it is legally permissible to use short ex-

cerpts of copyrighted material without an author’s permission.<sup>67</sup> (See box, p. 17.) Carrie James, research director at Harvard’s Project Zero research center, which has studied children’s moral attitudes, says the curriculum grew out of interviews with students age 10 and older, who indicated they “feared getting into trouble” over how they used online sources for schoolwork.

In one unit, students must develop an advertising campaign and decide which photos from the Internet require permission for use in the students’ ads. First piloted in 2009, the unit is part of a digital literacy and citizenship curriculum used in 50 states by 40,000 K-12 schools, according to James.<sup>68</sup>

In another effort to teach teens the basics of copyright law and fair use exceptions, Harvard’s Berkman Center has designed a computer program that has teens remix music and movie content and then take a quiz on whether the remix violates copyright law.

“But this tool is hard to design,” says Berkman director Gasser, who teaches law at Harvard. “Even courts disagree over what is considered to be fair use. If it’s unclear for us lawyers, how can we teach it to students and give them clear guidance?” ■

# OUTLOOK

## Generational Divide

Some say the long-term trends in school cheating mean the emergence of a fundamentally more dishonest society. Adults who admit they cheated in high school are more likely to lie to their spouses and employers and cheat on insurance claims, according to a Josephson Institute survey of more than 5,000 people.

The same survey found that a generational divide appears to be developing: Teens 17 and under were five times more likely to believe that it's necessary to lie and cheat to succeed than adults over 50.<sup>69</sup>

"The root of the mortgage crisis was a pervasive lack of integrity at every level, and look what happened," says Josephson, who implies that American values may be evolving in the direction of countries with high rates of corruption. "Thank God we're not India, but why are those countries like that? It's because it's culturally acceptable to ask for a bribe. I'm saying it's becoming culturally acceptable to lie, cheat and steal, and this will be pervasive."

Four decades' worth of surveys show that business-school students cheat more than their peers.<sup>70</sup> As Donovan, at Dartmouth's Tuck Business School, explains, "Business students come from a utilitarian perspective, where they say, 'What the heck? Who cares about a Spanish class? It's a requirement I needed to tick off on a box, and I cheated.'"

But there's also a counter trend, she notes: "I can't think of a single student in the MBA program who didn't have some experience with a soup kitchen or Habitat [for Humanity]. They know it's part of what it takes to be a business leader."

New-media expert Aufderheide, who also is skeptical of dire predictions, says, "I would be very hesitant to blame a generation." Everyone — adults included — "is now in a world where it's much easier to copy, remix and create," she points out, adding that for the most part that's a good thing. "We never had an environment where so many people created so much. More people are writing than ever before. Think of people using GarageBand or iMovie who would never a generation ago have done that." \*

Aufderheide worries about the reverse problem — that young people will start censoring themselves. Under

legal definitions of fair use, she says, "there's a lot of copying that students could be doing" — such as putting multimedia into class presentations — but many students are afraid that would constitute plagiarizing or infringing copyright.

"College students seem to be extremely fearful about producing something that will ruin their job prospects or label them as bad actors or immoral through unlawful copying," she says, based on several studies she's conducted.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, the Berkman Center's Gasser worries that traditional ideas about plagiarism and copyright might stifle creativity. "You want news-literate kids and digitally literate kids who can use all these fantastic tools we have for expression, creativity and political engagement," he says. "I'm not convinced that sticking with old [ethical] standards and applying them from an adult perspective is the right way to go," he says.

When it comes to moral behavior, many trends for the younger generation are going in the right direction, with dropping rates of teen pregnancy, drunken driving, teen homicide, smoking and binge drinking. Yet a majority of high school and college students still admit they cheat, despite declines in self-reported surveys. "There's a second moral compass that young people have when it comes to getting ahead," *Cheating Culture* author Callahan suggests.

That moral outlook is exacerbated, he believes, by the fact that academic integrity remains a low priority among school and government authorities. "You're expelled if you're found with a joint in your locker but if you buy a term paper off the Internet there's no expulsion" at most schools, he notes.

\* GarageBand is Apple software that permits the creation of music or podcasts; iMovie is Apple software that lets people create and edit video.

"We've never had a governor who says, 'Seventy percent of students in the state university system are cheating, and you universities better do something or we'll mess with your funding,'" he says. "Until that changes, I don't think we're going to see a big dent in this cheating culture among students." ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mercer R. Cook, *et al.*, "Typo at root of cheating scandal, Letter Reveals," *The Harvard Crimson*, Sept. 12, 2012, [www.thecrimson.com/article/2012/9/12/platt-letter-reveals-scandal/](http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2012/9/12/platt-letter-reveals-scandal/).

<sup>2</sup> Donald L. McCabe, unpublished data chart, "Surveys done between Fall 2002 and Spring 2011 by Donald L. McCabe, founding president of the International Center for Academic Integrity," in email from The International Center on Academic Integrity, Oct. 5, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Alvin Wei and Brian Wei, "Cheating Ring Suspensions Held," *The Spectator* (Stuyvesant High School newspaper), Oct. 18, 2012, <http://stuy spectator.com/2012/10/18/cheating-ring-suspensions-held/>. Seventy-one students were suspended. The cheating was discovered June 18 after a cellphone confiscated from a 16-year-old junior tipped off administrators that students were sharing test information.

<sup>4</sup> "Cheat or Be Cheated? What We Know About Academic Integrity in Middle & High School & What We Can Do About it," Challenge Success, 2012, [www.challengesuccess.org/Portals/0/Docs/ChallengeSuccess-AcademicIntegrity-WhitePaper.pdf](http://www.challengesuccess.org/Portals/0/Docs/ChallengeSuccess-AcademicIntegrity-WhitePaper.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Vivian Yee, "Stuyvesant Students Explain the How and the Why of Cheating," *The New York Times*, Sept. 25, 2012, [www.nytimes.com/2012/09/26/education/stuyvesant-high-school-students-describe-rationale-for-cheating.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/26/education/stuyvesant-high-school-students-describe-rationale-for-cheating.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>6</sup> For background, see Kenneth Jost, "Revising No Child Left Behind," *CQ Researcher*, April 16, 2010, pp. 337-360. Also see Barbara Mantel, "No Child Left Behind," *CQ Researcher*, May 27, 2005, pp. 469-492.

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<sup>11</sup> Donald McCabe, *et al.*, *Cheating in College* (2012), p. 58. At colleges without honor codes, the number of students admitting cheating declined from 83 percent in 1999/2000 to 65 percent in 2002-2010.

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<sup>13</sup> Richard A. Posner, *The Little Book of Plagiarism* (2007), p. 20.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Berkman Center for Internet & Society**, 23 Everett St., 2nd Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138; 617-495-7547; <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu>. Harvard University research center that studies youth and digital media.

**Challenge Success**, P.O. Box 20053, Stanford, CA 94309; 650-723-6609; [www.challengesuccess.org](http://www.challengesuccess.org). Stanford University-based organization that works with parents and educators to foster more balanced school life for children.

**Center for Social Media**, American University, School of Communication; 3201 New Mexico Ave., N.W., Suite 330, Washington, DC 20016; 202-885-3107; <http://centerforsocialmedia.org>. Research center founded by American University communication professor Patricia Aufderheide; analyzes media and fair use issues for public knowledge and action.

**Common Sense Media**, 650 Townsend, Suite 435, San Francisco, CA 94103; 415-863-0600; [www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org). Provides information to parents and educators about children's use of the media. Its Digital Literacy and Citizenship Curriculum ([www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/curriculum](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/curriculum)) teaches students about copyright and fair use.

**GoodWork Project**, 124 Mount Auburn St., 5th Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138; 617-495-4342; [www.goodworkproject.org](http://www.goodworkproject.org). Harvard-based research project that studies young people's ethics; produced a digital ethics curriculum for schoolchildren covering plagiarism and copyright issues.

**International Center for Academic Integrity**, 126 Hardin Hall, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634-5138; 864-656-1293; [www.academicintegrity.org](http://www.academicintegrity.org). Consortium of schools, colleges and educational organizations that work to promote academic integrity.

**Josephson Institute**, 9841 Airport Blvd., #300, Los Angeles, CA 90045; 310-846-4800; <http://josephsoninstitute.org>. Conducts surveys on youth ethics and runs character education programs.

**Safe Assign, Blackboard Inc.**, 650 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., 6th Floor, Washington, DC 20001-3796; 202-463-4860; [www.safeassign.com](http://www.safeassign.com). A plagiarism prevention service, offered by Blackboard, Inc. — a provider of educational software — to help educators detect plagiarism by checking student papers against a database of published and web sources.

**Turnitin, iParadigms, LLC**, 1111 Broadway, 3rd floor, Oakland, CA 94607; 510-764-7600; [http://turnitin.com/en\\_us/home](http://turnitin.com/en_us/home). Produces software for schools and colleges to check student papers for plagiarism.

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# The Next Step:

## *Additional Articles from Current Periodicals*

### **Grades**

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Professors say students are more likely to plagiarize Internet content unless policies against plagiarism are clear and consistent.

**Gormly, Kellie B., "Internet Creates a Rise in Cut-and-Paste Plagiarism," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, Jan. 23, 2012, [triblive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/ae/s\\_778004.html#axzz2EJHY2JCT](http://triblive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/ae/s_778004.html#axzz2EJHY2JCT).**

The Internet makes it easier for students to plagiarize, but it also makes it easier for teachers to catch cheaters.

**Keilman, John, "Teachers Put to Test by Digital Cheating," *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 7, 2012, p. A1, [articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-08-07/news/ct-met-schools-cheating-20120807\\_1\\_digital-technology-calculators-quiz-answers](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-08-07/news/ct-met-schools-cheating-20120807_1_digital-technology-calculators-quiz-answers).**

Some educators say the best way to address digital cheating is to simply convince students that it is wrong.

**Namiootka, Jim, "Academic Honesty: Antiquated Ideal?" *Star-Ledger (N.J.)*, Oct. 7, 2012, p. 1, [blog.nj.com/perspective/2012/10/qa\\_is\\_academic\\_honesty\\_an\\_anti.html](http://blog.nj.com/perspective/2012/10/qa_is_academic_honesty_an_anti.html).**

The Internet has blurred the lines over what constitutes cheating, with many students creating their own definitions.

Simpson, Kevin, "Rise Attributed to Blurred Lines of Digital World," *Denver Post*, Feb. 7, 2012, p. A1, [www.denverpost.com/news/ci\\_19907573](http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_19907573).

Anti-plagiarism policies haven't caught up to the Internet age, says a Colorado State University composition professor.

## ***Punishment***

Baker, Al, "Students Are Suspended in Stuyvesant Cheating," *The New York Times*, Sept. 8, 2012, p. A17, [www.nytimes.com/2012/09/08/education/12-students-suspended-in-cheating-plot-at-stuyvesant-high-school.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/08/education/12-students-suspended-in-cheating-plot-at-stuyvesant-high-school.html).

A prestigious New York City high school suspended a dozen students after an investigation into cheating on final exams.

Beaver, Ty, "Work Starts to Fix Grading System," *Tri-City Herald* (Wash.), June 14, 2012, p. B1, [www.tri-city-herald.com/2012/06/14/1986256/kennewick-school-board-starts.html](http://www.tri-city-herald.com/2012/06/14/1986256/kennewick-school-board-starts.html).

A school board in Washington State wants to change its grading system to make students more accountable for cheating and plagiarism.

Eslinger, Bonnie, "Teen Caught Cheating Can't Return to Sequoia High Honors Class, Judge Rules," *San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News*, May 18, 2012.

A judge has ruled that a student kicked out of an honors English class for copying homework cannot return to the same class.

Gordon, Larry, "Copy, Paste, Caught: Plagiarists Beware," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 30, 2012, p. A1, [articles.latimes.com/2012/jan/29/local/la-me-plagiarism-20120129](http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jan/29/local/la-me-plagiarism-20120129).

Many top universities revoke admission offers to students caught plagiarizing their application essays.

Maffly, Brian, "Is Southern Utah University Tolerating Plagiarism by International Students?" *Salt Lake Tribune*, Nov. 26, 2012, [www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/55287015-78/plagiarism-esl-frost-program.html.csp](http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/55287015-78/plagiarism-esl-frost-program.html.csp).

Southern Utah University has placed an instructor on probation over charges he tolerates plagiarism.

## ***Solutions***

Bierer, Lee, "Cheating Forces Increased Security at Tests," *Buffalo (N.Y.) News*, April 26, 2012, p. C3.

An SAT cheating scandal has forced the test's administrator to implement new security measures on testing days.

Harrington, Rebecca, "Song of the Cheaters," *The New York Times*, Sept. 15, 2012, p. A23, [www.nytimes.com/2012/09/15/opinion/the-long-legacy-of-cheating-at-harvard.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/15/opinion/the-long-legacy-of-cheating-at-harvard.html?_r=0).

Many college students say universities need to develop better rules over what constitutes cheating.

Karon, Jeff, "A Positive Solution for Plagiarism," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 18, 2012, [chronicle.com/article/A-Positive-Solution-for/134498/](http://chronicle.com/article/A-Positive-Solution-for/134498/).

School officials can address plagiarism better with a system based on honor rather than on a culture of fear and accusation.

Martin, Jonathan, "5 Ways to Combat the Plague of Student Cheating," *The Arizona Republic*, May 21, 2012, p. B6, [www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/20120518student-cheating-myturn.html](http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/20120518student-cheating-myturn.html).

Schools can better combat student cheating by focusing more on learning than on grades and by making integrity expectations clear, says the head of an Arizona preparatory school.

Mathews, Jay, "Plagiarism and the Disappearance of Academic Standards," *The Washington Post*, July 26, 2012, p. B2, [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/class-struggle/post/how-academic-standards-disappear/2012/07/26/gJQAjOscAX\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/class-struggle/post/how-academic-standards-disappear/2012/07/26/gJQAjOscAX_blog.html).

Professors who charge students with academic dishonesty are immediately buried in paperwork, especially if students dispute accusations.

Pope, Justin, and Lindsey Anderson, "Can an Honor Code Prevent Cheating at Harvard?" *The Associated Press*, Aug. 31, 2012, [bigstory.ap.org/article/can-honor-code-prevent-cheating-harvard](http://bigstory.ap.org/article/can-honor-code-prevent-cheating-harvard).

A Harvard honor code could reduce the likelihood that students will cheat.

Riley, Sheila, "Tech Fights College Plagiarism," *Investor's Business Daily*, Feb. 28, 2012, p. A5, [news.investors.com/technology/022712-602487-technology-enables-hinders-college-plagiarism.htm](http://news.investors.com/technology/022712-602487-technology-enables-hinders-college-plagiarism.htm).

Computer programs such as SafeAssign and Turnitin are helping professors catch students who plagiarize.

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Jost, K. (2011, September 2). Remembering 9/11. *CQ Researcher*, 9, 701-732.

#### **CHICAGO STYLE**

Jost, Kenneth. "Remembering 9/11." *CQ Researcher*, September 2, 2011, 701-732.

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