

Chapter 5.13

Plagiarism and the Community College

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ABSTRACT

Although plagiarism is a problem in all educational institutions, the diversity of the community college student population and of the community college mission creates even more challenges. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss characteristics of community college students, define intentional and unintentional plagiarism, and provide methods that faculty can use to help students avoid both kinds of plagiarism.

INTRODUCTION

Most sources agree that plagiarism is a major problem for educational institutions (Breen & Maassen, 2005; Ercegovac & Richardson,

2004; Furedi, 2004; Martin, 1994; Ryan, 2004; Standler, 2000). In their literature review of academic dishonesty and plagiarism, Ercegovac and Richardson (2004) quote a Bronfenbrenner et al. report, *The State of Americans*, “Virtually every high school student in 1989 (97 percent) admits having let another student copy from his or her work” (p. 311). More recently, the Internet has helped make copy and paste plagiarism fast and easy; furthermore, Internet paper mills are relatively inexpensive and offer papers that are harder for teachers to detect (Bloomfield, 2004; Bombak, 2005; Edlund, 2000; Ercegovac & Richardson, 2004; Harris, 2004; Howard, 2001; Leland, 2002; McKenzie, 1998; Murray, 2002; Plagiarism.org, 2005; Rocklin, 1998; Ryan, 2004; Scanlon, 2003; Standler, 2000; Sterngold, 2004). Amazon.com has a “Search Inside the Book” feature that allows users to search for ideas and content within specific texts (Sterngold, 2004),

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certainly a valuable research tool but also a plagiarist's golden opportunity. The Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) states that the ease of Internet plagiarism "has begun to affect teachers at all levels, at times diverting them from the work of developing students' writing, reading, and critical thinking abilities."

If technology has amplified the problem of plagiarism for all educational institutions, the problem seems especially pronounced in the community college setting because of the diversity of the student population and because of the emphasis that community colleges put on meeting their students' changing needs. This chapter will define plagiarism, describe the growth of the community college and characteristics of community college students, and provide instructional approaches faculty can use to help students avoid both intentional and unintentional plagiarism.

PLAGIARISM CONFUSION

Students and faculty have difficulties with plagiarism on college campuses because the concept of plagiarism is misunderstood (Breen & Maassen, 2005; Ercegovic & Richardson, 2004; Scanlon, 2003). Even though almost every institution's Web site contains definitions of academic dishonesty and plagiarism, Breen and Maassen (2005) state that it is clear that "the existence of a policy was not sufficient in and of itself to eliminate plagiarism." Scanlon (2003) says that the "amount of misconception on this topic appears to have grown exponentially in the past few years, as access to the Internet becomes nearly universal." He cites several studies that suggest that students are not sure what plagiarism is and that they do not think it is as serious an issue as faculty does.

Faculty also may be unclear about plagiarism definitions, types, and consequences (Breen & Maassen, 2005; Ercegovic & Richardson, 2004; Scanlon, 2003). In their literature review of academic dishonesty, Ercegovic and Richardson

(2004) cite a study by Burke of faculty at a two-year college: "The fact that 86 percent of the studied faculty suspected academic dishonesty in their classroom but did not perceive it to be a major problem should be investigated further" (p. 310). They cite other studies that find that although faculty members complain about cheating and plagiarism, "many do little or nothing about it . . . It seems there is a lack of alignment between offences and punishment and a lack of communication among administrators, faculty, parents, and students" (p. 311).

The WPA Council Web site, "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism," states that students may be confused because "academicians and scholars may define plagiarism differently or more stringently than have instructors or administrators in students' earlier education or in other writing situations." For Murray (2002), these definitions vary widely even "across and within departments, allowing students wiggle room and making it tempting for faculty to ignore potential problems."

DEFINITIONS OF PLAGIARISM

McLemee (2004) cites the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of *plagiarism*: it is derived from the Latin *plagiarius*, meaning "one who abducts the child or slave of another," and "the word plagiarism was first used in its current sense by the Roman poet Martial, in the first century AD, as a sarcastic put-down of another writer who had cribbed some of Martial's verse" (p. A9). Today, most educational institutions consider plagiarism a threat to ethical standards; The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) says that "There are few intellectual offenses more serious than plagiarism in academic and professional contexts," (Stolley, 2006), and Bolkan (2006) calls it "the unoriginal sin" (p. 13).

The Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) seems to take a moderate approach to the issue, defining plagiarism in the following

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