Academic Integrity: Why All Students Should Care About It

As educators, our focus is helping you become better educated and preparing you for college life and the workforce. Instead of "catching" you in acts of academic dishonesty, we would rather help you understand how to avoid them and, just as importantly, understand why you should put forth the time and effort to do so.

In English 101 and 102 courses, you will learn and practice an important set of skills, using others' ideas fairly and correctly to enhance your own work, something professionals do all the time. Drawing on others' ideas is something you should do; research helps you encounter new ideas that may change or enhance your own ideas. However, you must give credit where it is due; anything that did not come from your brain must be cited.

English class is not the only place you are expected to cite borrowed material. As a college student, you are expected to take the time to cite ANY AND ALL work you use in ANY of your college assignments, including ideas, words (exact phrasing or slight alterations), charts, graphs, statistics, photographs, etc. whether taken from periodicals, books, the internet or other individuals. If you are caught plagiarizing or cheating, there are serious consequences (See handout "Plagiarism and Cheating: An Explanation to Help You"). However, you may wonder "Who cares? So what if I cheat a little here and there, especially in non-major courses?" This handout explains why it matters.

For one example, as told in Clemson University's web page about plagiarism, "Confused?",

In 2004, Keith Cook, Chairman of the Orange County, NC school board, was forced to step down. A commencement speech he delivered at a local high school sounded familiar to a newspaper reporter attending the ceremony.

When the reporter investigated, he discovered that the speech was identical to one written by Donna Shalala, former U.S. Secretary of Health & Human Services.

When challenged, Cook admitted he found the speech by searching the Internet for "commencement speeches." He failed to see what he had done wrong, however, implying that the speech's availability on the Web made it fair game for copying.

Like Keith Cook, you may find yourself in confusing situations where plagiarism is concerned?

- Do Internet sources need to be cited? [Yes.]
- How *do* you cite something from the Web if there's no indication who wrote it? [By providing all of the other information, beginning with the title.]

• What if you rewrite someone else's ideas, putting them all into your own words -- do you still need to cite? [Absolutely—people's ideas are as important as the words that explain them.]

If you are in doubt, you run the risk of unintentionally plagiarizing.

You have two choices:

1. Plagiarize by failing to attribute borrowed material.

Your risks academically[...]

A. a failing grade for the specific assignment; and/or

B. a reduced grade for the course; and/or

C. a failing grade for the course.

The specific sanction depends upon the weight of the assignment in satisfying the requirements for the course. If an instructor chooses the sanction which assigns a failing grade for the course, the instructor shall notify the division chair, the chief executive officer or designee, and the registrar . . The instructor may also recommend that the student be suspended for any academic offenses (as defined in sections 2.3.1.1, 2.3.1.2, or 2.3.1.3). Any student found guilty of a second academic violation shall be expelled from the college and shall not be allowed to enroll at any of the other KCTCS colleges for one academic year. ("Faculty Academic Sanctions" and "Other Academic Sanctions" at M.C.T.C.)

Your risks personally:

- erosion of your self-regard
- compromise of your values (Is this the kind of person you want to be?)

2. Find out how to document sources correctly.

Your risk: spending a little extra time learning to do it right

Why does plagiarism matter? Is anyone really hurt by it?

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Plagiarism short-circuits learning.

Professors assign papers [and homework] to provide opportunities to deepen and enrich your learning in a course. When you write a paper [or complete other

assignments], you go beyond what has been said in the textbook or in the classroom, and make the learning your own. When a student plagiarizes a paper [or other assignment], the student misses the chance to learn.

Plagiarism destroys the relationship of trust between faculty and students.

Students need to be able to trust their professors. They need confidence that professors are up-to-date [on] the information they present, accurate in their portrayal of texts and theories, [and] reliably fair in their evaluations of students' work.

Likewise, professors need to trust their students. They have to have confidence in the truthfulness of students' statements in class, the honesty of their efforts to learn, and their trustworthiness in the papers and projects they submit for grading.

Academic work at the college and university level depends on the give and take of ideas in the classroom, on the discussion and debates we carry on with one another, and on the honest presentation of ideas in written papers, articles, and books. In order for us to do our daily work in college, we need to have confidence in the truthfulness of our colleagues in this work—both professors and students.

Plagiarism destroys this confidence and seriously damages the atmosphere in which genuine learning takes place.

Plagiarism subverts the values central and essential to an education at this college and any other institution of higher learning:

Maysville Community and Technical College (MCTC) challenges learners to accomplish their educational, career, and personal development goals. Students gain skills and knowledge that enhance careers and improve quality of life. The college believes in the potential of each learner and strives to instill professional competence, civic responsibility, critical thinking, ethical awareness, and commitment to lifelong learning . . . ("Maysville Community and Technical College") In short, then, if you commit any offenses defined as "plagiarism" (intentional or unintentional) or "cheating," you are not really learning nor will you be able to acquire the knowledge and skills required of you in order to earn your certificate, diploma, or degree at M.C.T.C.

In addition, you are not behaving ethically or morally, and, to begin quoting Hope College again (here and below), "ethical uses of information and honesty in writing matter throughout one's lifetime." ("Why")

The fair use of information and the honest presentation of one's self are important responsibilities for career and citizenship. The habits students develop in college . . . prepare them for the kinds of writing and speaking they will do throughout a

lifetime. Honesty and fairness cannot be compartmentalized as character traits to be practiced later, "when it really matters." If a writer plagiarizes in college, is it realistic to expect that he or she won't do so later? ("Why")

Plagiarism is unfair to classmates.

A paper assignment requires all the members of a class to do a significant amount of work. When one person plagiarizes, classmates who do honest work are likely to feel betrayed and angry.

Plagiarism destroys independent creative and critical thinking.

A primary purpose of higher education is to guide students in becoming independent, original thinkers. Creative and critical thought [is] subverted when a student plagiarizes, and a basic reason for being in college is undermined.

Plagiarism carries serious consequences.

Plagiarism carries severe disciplinary and financial consequences. When a student is proven to have plagiarized a paper, he or she faces serious penalties, ranging from failure on the assignment to failure in the course. These penalties will be reported to the Provost of the college, who will enter the offense in the student's record. Repeated acts of plagiarism [can] lead to dismissal from the college.

Plagiarism in the professional world can also lead to serious consequences, including professional disgrace, loss of position, and lawsuits. ("Why")

Works Cited

- "Confused?" *Avoiding Plagiarism*. Clemson University Libraries. Adapted from Duke University Libraries' "Avoiding Plagiarism." 2 Aug. 2009. http://www.lib.clemson. edu/Plagiarism/warningsignsConfused.htm>.
- "Faculty Academic Sanctions" and "Other Academic Sanctions." 2.3.2.1, 2.3.2.2. of the *Kentucky Community and Technical College System Student Code of Conduct*. June 2002. 2 Aug. 2009. http://legacy.kctcs.edu/student/studentcodeofconduct.pdf.
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