

# Anti-Plagiarism Campaign

## The Struggle for Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is the act of presenting the creative expression of others—their words, ideas, images, sounds, or other media—as your own.

A year ago, I asked a group of academically gifted students if they ever used the Web to plagiarize. They giggled a bit, looked at each other, and then smilingly responded, almost in unison: “It’s no big deal. Everyone does it. And, if you do it carefully, you’ll never get caught.”

About once a week over the past few years, a teacher has come to me with a suspicious-looking student project. Using a variety of databases and search tools, I set about searching the more unique phrases in these projects. More often than not, I confirmed our teachers’ darkest suspicions.

Through the many conversations I’ve had with other teachers, teacher-librarians, and students, I’ve come to believe that a student culture of cheating and plagiarism is pervasive. And surprisingly, few students feel any moral outrage.

According to Ann Lathrop and Kathleen Foss, authors of *Student Cheating and Plagiarism in the Internet Era: A Wake-Up Call* (Libraries Unlimited, 2000), “Cheating and plagiarizing appear to be so widely accepted by students that the byword has changed from *Don’t cheat or plagiarize* to *Don’t get caught*.”

### How widespread is the problem?

Several years ago Don McCabe, Professor of Management and Global Business at Rutgers University and founding president of the Center for Academic Integrity, ran focus groups with college-bound high school seniors. “My co-leader suggested starting directly with the question, ‘How many of you have cheated?’” Though McCabe feared that beginning a session with that particular question might “turn the group off,” he reports that “with only one exception, within 20 seconds every hand was up.”

Though McCabe’s research focus has been the university, he expresses serious concern with “the product that is coming in our front doors.” His investigations, which include surveys at 25 high schools, revealed that plagiarism is pervasive at virtually all of the schools. McCabe noted that only one of the 25 schools he studied had an honor code, an all-girls boarding school with a rich community life. “Importantly, their responses were statistically different.”

In a study of nearly 4,500 high school students, McCabe found:\*

- 74% of respondents reported one or more instances of serious test-cheating.
- 72% reported one or more instances of serious cheating on written work.
- 52% of students admitted they had engaged in some level of plagiarism on written assignments using the Internet.

\*Based on the research of Donald L. McCabe, Rutgers University. Source: “CAI Research,” Center for Academic Integrity, Duke University, 2003 <[http://academicintegrity.org/cai\\_research.asp](http://academicintegrity.org/cai_research.asp)>

The problem of plagiarism extends well beyond the student accused of cheating. Students who choose honesty are serious victims of this culture. “The student who hasn’t cheated is continually being outscored, and so more and more honest students feel they have to cheat to keep up with the cheaters,” says Ann Lathrop. She points to the prevalence of lying and cheating in the larger adult world of business and politics. “Students see cheating all around them and nothing seems to happen or the punishment is so mild.”

“Kids look to adults and society for a moral compass,” says McCabe. “When they see dishonest behavior occurring in the larger world, they wonder why they should be held to a higher standard.”

The sad fact is that cheating is widespread in our culture. But, a growing truth is that sometimes cheaters *do* get caught and that dishonest behavior is getting press. Students who haven’t bought a CD in years are reading reports of the record industry and recording artists taking action against illegal downloading.

In the recent past, plagiarism damaged the reputations of two prominent historians, Doris Kearns Goodwin and the late Stephen Ambrose. It also crushed the presidential aspirations of Senator Joseph Biden. And plagiarism seriously damaged the journalistic careers of the *Boston Globe*’s Mike Barnicle and *The New York Times*’ Jayson Blair.

In a probe of plagiarism at the University of Virginia, 45 students were dismissed and three graduate degrees were revoked. And in July 2003, a controversial New Jersey high school valedictorian lost her freshman seat at Harvard for plagiarizing in a local newspaper.

### So, why do students cheat?

Students find it easy to rationalize cheating. They cite unrealistic parent demands, competition for college and class rank, fear of failure, poor time management skills, sports eligibility, and time constraints compounded by after-school jobs and extracurricular activities. Additionally, many feel the risk of getting caught is extremely low. Their teachers are not knowledgeable enough or familiar enough with the online turf to catch them. Some think that their teachers really don’t care enough to pursue a suspicion of plagiarism.

In McCabe’s research, many students responded that they believe high school is a joke, something they have to get through. They’ll get to truly meaningful work when they get into college. Students complained of boring assignments and the stress of their after-school jobs.

### Is technology exacerbating the problem?

According to McCabe, it doesn’t seem that there has been any overwhelming increase in plagiarism because of the Internet, but “it does appear that students who were plagiarizing from written sources have switched their allegiance because of the Internet. A small number of students, about 10%, admit that they started plagiarizing because of the Internet.”

Lathrop and Foss believe that technology *has* worsened the problem. “It’s never been as easy and prevalent,” said Foss. “For kids it’s become an ‘us vs. them’ game, and that’s not the purpose of education. Some students have developed the belief that the purpose of schooling is not the gaining of knowledge, but how I can get the degree with the least amount of work.”

According to Lathrop and Foss, students vary in their cut-and-paste techniques. “Some students download and print the paper, create a title page, and hand it in. The more sophisticated [students] *massage* the text, perhaps using a thesaurus to replace words or phrases the teacher might recognize as beyond their usual vocabulary or writing style. Obvious strings of highly distinctive words can be changed or deleted if a student knows the teacher is Internet-savvy and might search for strings of words online.”

### Is all plagiarism intentional?

McCabe noted the pervasive attitude among the students he surveyed: If it’s on the Internet, it’s public information and you don’t need to cite it. “We are raising a generation of students who think anything on the Internet is free,” said McCabe. “The Internet is so anonymous and pervasive; students believe they are simply using the resources available to them.”

On the college level, McCabe found that students question the nature of collaborative work. “They are often confused over the level of collaboration allowed, even when an instructor specifically requires individual work.” McCabe found that students believe teachers do a poor job of explaining assignments and a perception exists that teachers will not spend the extra time clarifying.

At Springfield Township High School, we discovered that students weren’t clear that certain behaviors were considered plagiarism. While they might be careful about citing exact quotes, they might not be as careful about documenting original information that is paraphrased or summarized. Some were confused about the concept of common knowledge. The “if I just change a few words” approach was not uncommon, though certainly not accepted. Students who quoted excessively (and failed to use their own voices as writers) perhaps did not plagiarize, but they were certainly neglecting to create original work. Students did not clearly recognize the relationship of in-text or in-project documentation to their works cited pages. When time was tight, we discovered that some students actually invented quotes.

### Are teachers reluctant to deal with the issue?

Our students don’t *own* this problem. “Many teachers are reluctant to take a proactive stance on this issue,” said Foss. “Teacher groups won’t admit it happens, thinking that addressing it identifies the problem and that the problem can potentially mar the reputation of the school.” And teachers may be afraid of the process. “A teacher I observed went through hell with the student’s parents, even though the administration did its best to back her. Parents can be very strong in defense of little ones.”

“A significant number of faculty, about half, have ignored an incident over the past year,” noted McCabe, who explained that the most frequently cited reason was lack of significant evidence and concern over how the incident might be handled by an administrator.

## Springfield Township High School Research Integrity Policy

### Rationale

We in the School District of Springfield Township understand and value the concept of intellectual property. Therefore, we strive to teach students the ethic of responsibly documenting the ideas of others in all formats. To do so, we believe that we must not only teach the ethics and mechanics of documentation, but we must also hold students accountable for the ethical use of the ideas and words of others.

Therefore, all teachers provide the instruction and scaffolding necessary for students to use research ethically, and all students are expected to exercise good faith in the submission of research-based work and to document accurately regardless of how the information is used (summary, paraphrase, and quotation) or regardless of the format used (written, oral, or visual).

Plagiarism, in any form, is unethical and unacceptable.

### Specifically,

#### It is the teacher’s responsibility to provide:

- an assignment sheet with explicit requirements and directions
- a specific rubric for assessment of the process and the product
- checkpoints to facilitate the research process, to assist students in time management, and to provide opportunities to help students during the process
- availability for students who are having difficulty with note-taking, documenting, or formatting procedures
- clear guidelines for acceptable help from human sources (peers, adults)

#### It is the student’s responsibility to:

- meet checkpoint deadlines
- ask questions and to seek help from teachers and librarians
- follow the *School District of Springfield Twp. Research Guide* guidelines and MLA or APA format per teacher direction (available online at SHS Virtual Library)
- submit an Acknowledgments page to credit help given by others (help that has been approved by teacher giving the assignment)
- use in-text or in-project documentation accurately and appropriately
- use Works Cited and Works Consulted pages accurately and appropriately
- submit only his/her own work

#### Plagiarism includes:

- Direct copying of the work of another submitted as the student’s own (from that of another student or other person, from an Internet source, from a print source)
- Lack of in-text or in-project documentation
- Documentation that does not check out or does not match Works Cited/Works Consulted
- Work that suddenly appears on final due date without a clear provenance (does not include checkpoint process requirements)

#### Consequences and Opportunity for Learning

1. The Academic Standards Committee (includes principal, librarian, Language Arts department coordinator, department coordinator, and teacher involved in referring issue) will confer to confirm the teacher’s suspicion of plagiarism and to determine the options for the student to learn from his/her error in judgment. Upon confirmation of plagiarism, the student earns a zero for the plagiarism, the teacher files a disciplinary referral, and a member of the committee writes a letter to the student and parents to explain the decision and its ramifications, etc. Options include but are not limited to:

- No second opportunity (Ex. A senior who is not new to the high school or any student who has blatantly copied a paper from another source, i.e., Internet source or another student)
- Redoing the project (Ex. A senior who is new to the high school)
- Redoing the project from an earlier checkpoint that was satisfactorily met (Ex. An underclassman who, as determined by the committee, will benefit from the opportunity to complete the process correctly)
- Adding the appropriate documentation that is missing (Ex. An underclassman who has used a variety of sources and will benefit from the opportunity to add the necessary documentation)

#### Notes:

- The student may choose not to take advantage of the second opportunity. If so, the zero stands.
- A student may have only one “second opportunity” offer in his/her high school career.
- A second offense automatically earns a zero without redress.

2. The teacher will assess the “second opportunity” work. If satisfactory, the zero will be replaced by the lowest passing grade. If the work is unsatisfactory, the zero stands.

3. It is possible that a student will fail a course if s/he plagiarizes a project of sufficient weight. In this case, the student repeats the course or attends summer school. The student’s summer school experience must include satisfactory completion of a similar research-based project in order to earn course credit; otherwise, the student must repeat the course.

Students tend to protect the guilty. “It’s a big task to change the mindset of those not squealing on those who are cheating and robbing them of their future,” says Foss. “Teachers have to be the ones to initiate change and parents have to be partners in the process.”

### What can teachers do?

Though some students intentionally plagiarize, it is clear that many others simply don’t recognize their own behavior as unethical. Our school realized that something had to be done. It was clear we had a great deal of educating to do and that the lessons we developed had to address both cognitive and cultural issues.

We knew that we preferred a solution that celebrates honesty and prevents plagiarism to one that merely detects and punishes it. But how do you develop a culture that values academic integrity in a world where cheating and illegal copying is rampant? We recognized that, as teachers, we had to initiate change.

The first step had already begun: Three years ago we began the process of banning topical research. The state, country, president, planet, or element report (that simply begged to be copied) was eliminated. In its place, we began explicitly guiding students through more thoughtful inquiry and thesis-driven projects that valued the research *process* more highly than the final *product*. To ensure that as a faculty we were all on the same page, we planned a full day in-service to address strategies for building academic integrity and preventing and detecting plagiarism.

On the *cognitive* level, we discovered that we could clear up students’ confusion of what behaviors constitute cheating. A number of instructional tools, as well as a PowerPoint, are now available on our Web site to help teachers discuss plagiarism with their students. Among the tools are documents that explain when to quote, paraphrase, and summarize; how to effectively weave quotes into writing; how to synthesize materials from several sources; how to document every imaginable source and medium; and how to seek permission from an author or creator. We also recognized that a good product doesn’t emerge from a vacuum. We developed a variety of student tools to help them focus on *process*—organizers, reflection and conference forms—as well as opportunities for guidance at various checkpoints throughout the creation of major projects.

On the *cultural* side, a critical goal was to inspire our students to value their own academic reputation and to recognize how deeply we valued academic honesty and scholarship. Our planning team developed an Academic Standards Committee and, like an increasing number of schools and universities, drafted an Academic Integrity Policy. Language Arts chair Carol Rohrbach drafted the policy and the entire faculty contributed their comments to the draft. The final policy was posted on the Web this past spring:

**Springfield Township High School Research Integrity Policy**  
<http://mciu.org/~spjvweb/acadintegrity.html>

The resulting new policy defines plagiarism, discusses the obligations on the part of both teachers and students, and *it has teeth*. It outlines consequences for offenders and, when appropriate, suggests opportunities for learning with a second chance. It explains that a teacher is not on his or her own in addressing issues of plagiarism. The Academic Standards Committee, “which includes the principal, librarian, Language Arts department coordinator, department coordinator, and the teacher

involved in referring issue will confer to confirm the teacher’s suspicion of plagiarism and to determine the options for the student to learn from his/her error in judgment.”

### Tips for Preventing Plagiarism

On the *behavioral* and cultural level, all teachers can attack such issues as the perception of teacher apathy, the attitude that school is a joke, the absence of clear penalties, and the arrogance of students who believe they’ll never get caught. And through our discussions with our students and by modeling a respect for intellectual property in our own practice, we can address and set clear and high expectations for ethical behavior.

According to McCabe, culture is critical and an academic integrity policy or honor code is an important step in changing culture. “Having an honor code forces a dialog. Students need to know that someone cares about the issue. What they learn from fellow students is that no one cares. Somebody needs to tell them that it’s wrong. I still believe strongly that the way to approach this is to reward honesty rather than detect and punish.”

Lathrop and Foss offer their tips for creating a culture of academic integrity:

- You must have the understanding, awareness, and *support* of all stakeholders—teachers, administrators, students, parents, the school board, and the larger community.
- Develop an academic integrity policy, develop it with the involvement of all stakeholders, and enforce it fairly. Post it in every classroom and refer to it whenever possible. Consider establishing a central clearinghouse for discussing issues. A student who cheats in one class may be likely to cheat in another. Watch this issue just as you would a student with a health problem.
- Develop awareness of all existing and emerging technologies and their potential unauthorized uses in the entire school community.
- Teachers need to structure assignments to make it difficult for students to plagiarize and to challenge them to think creatively. Focus on process rather than product. Instead of collecting only a final product, have students submit research portfolios, including their notes, outlines, and other documents of the research process.

I asked Lathrop and Foss for their feelings about commercial Web sites that check student documents for plagiarized text. “Technology can be part of it but to be truly effective, you have to change the thinking of the students,” said Lathrop. “Otherwise it remains a game.”

Lathrop and Foss offer these other tips for preventing plagiarism:

- Establish a school climate where academic integrity is valued by all stakeholders—parents, teachers, administrators, students, the school board, and the larger community. Emphasize that honesty and integrity are as important as grades and test scores.
- Make sure all stakeholders understand what plagiarism is and how it can be prevented.
- Make sure your students know that you are aware of how students plagiarize, that you check for plagiarism, and that you consider it a violation of your trust and the class rules of conduct.
- Design thoughtful assignments that require students to analyze, compare, invent, and propose original solutions.

- Vary assignments and topic suggestions each semester.
- Create opportunities for students to orally present and defend their research.
- Value the research *process*, not just the *product*. Set up checkpoints throughout the process: drafts, outlines, organizers, preliminary works cited, and consulted pages.
- Keep portfolios of student writing.
- Carefully explain the degree to which collaboration (and parental help) is acceptable
- Require annotated bibliographies asking students to describe and defend their sources.
- To alleviate panic, assign shorter but more thoughtful products.

### I've done all that, but I still suspect plagiarism. What now?

You will want to avoid the awkward situation of suspecting plagiarism and having no tangible evidence. A “my-word-against-your-word” confrontation can be very uncomfortable. Lathrop and Foss have these suggestions:

- Pick an unusual string of five or six words and search it as a phrase (between quotation marks) in Google, All the Web, or AltaVista. (These search engines pick up more full text than the others.)
- Ask a teacher-librarian for help searching sources beyond the *free* Web—databases or print materials.
- Ask the student why certain phrases or words were used, or ask them to identify the location of a specific un-cited fact.
- Check to see if all citations are listed on the works cited page. Question any that do not.
- Check for inconsistencies in font, bibliographic format, text size, and layout and question them. Does the writing shift styles, especially in the middle? Ask the student why such inconsistencies exist.
- Does the paper not exactly match the assignment? Ask the student why he or she chose to take an alternate direction.
- Chat with other teachers about the student's work. Have any of the other teachers been suspicious?
- Ask to see drafts, outlines, organizers, etc. (Ask students to save them in advance!)
- Compare this piece of writing to other samples of the student's work. Look for vocabulary differences, variations in sentence length, sentence structure, etc.
- Make a copy of a section, cut it into paragraphs, and ask the student to reassemble and describe how he or she structured the paper.
- Ask the student to read aloud paragraphs with unusual vocabulary or scholarly terms. Note fluency. Have the student explain or paraphrase unusual word choices.
- Ask how some more unusual items in the bibliography were accessed.
- Ask the student to relocate sources and present them to you.
- Ask the student why no recent sources were cited.
- Discuss the paper. Ask the student to defend opinions. Why did he or she choose that specific evidence?

### Resources

Ann Lathrop and Kathleen Foss. *Student Cheating and Plagiarizing in the Internet Era: A Wake-Up Call* (Libraries Unlimited, 2000)

Lathrop and Foss's book is one of the most dog-eared in my collection. Not only do the authors offer a comprehensive view of student cheating in a high-tech, cut and paste world, they provide an arsenal of tools (handouts, surveys, strategies, and workshop activities) to help teachers, parents, and administrators develop awareness and work toward a culture of academic integrity.

### Recommended Web Sites

**Springfield Plagiarism PowerPoint**

<http://mciu.org/~spjvweb/plagiarism.ppt>

**Springfield Township High School Research Integrity Policy**

<http://mciu.org/~spjvweb/acadintegrity.html>

**The Center for Academic Integrity**

<http://academicintegrity.org/>

**Capital Community College Statement on Plagiarism**

<http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/mla/plagiarism.shtml>

**Virtual Salt: Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers**

<http://virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm>

**The Educational CyberPlayground: Plagiarism**

<http://www.edu-cyberpg.com/Teachers/plagiarism.html>

**The New Plagiarism: Seven Antidotes to Prevent Highway Robbery in an Electronic Age (Jamie McKenzie)**

<http://www.fno.org/may98/cov98may.html>

**Plagiarism (collection of online articles)**

<http://www.web-miner.com/plagiarism>

**About.com: Cheating and Education**

<http://7-12educators.about.com/cs/cheating/index.htm?terms=plagiarism>

**Plagiarism Resource Site Charlottesville, Virginia**

<http://www.plagiarism.phys.virginia.edu/>

**Plagiarized.com**

<http://www.plagiarized.com/index.shtml>

**Purdue University OWL: Preventing Plagiarism**

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r\\_plagiar.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r_plagiar.html)

**Plagiarism and the Web**

<http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/wiu/plagiarism.htm>

**Plagiarism Prevention Web Page (University of Wisconsin-Platteville)**

<http://www.uwplatt.edu/~library/reference/plagiarism.html>

**Plagiarism Stoppers**

[http://www.ncusd203.org/central/html/where/plagiarism\\_stoppers.html](http://www.ncusd203.org/central/html/where/plagiarism_stoppers.html)

**Internet Paper Mills (a long list of the cheat sites from Kimbel Library)**

<http://www.coastal.edu/library/mills2.htm>

**Cut-and-Paste Plagiarism**

<http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~janicke/plagiary.htm>

**The Writing Place: Avoiding Plagiarism**

<http://www.writing.nwu.edu/tips/plag.html>

**Writing: Plagiarism Advice for Lessons (Apple Learning Interchange)**

<http://henson.austin.apple.com/edres/ellesson/elem-writplagerism.shtml>

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