Academic Plagiarism

Academic plagiarism has a formal definition, but to state it informally simply it is using someone else's work as ones own.

It may be unintentional, merely a footnote left out, or missing quotation marks or forgetting these indicators may be a clever way to fool the reader into thinking the material is original to the author.

It is illegal, and unethical, but there seems to be an upward trend in this activity. According to recent studies here is what was determined about the rise in plagiarism:

- *"A national survey published in Education Week found that 54% of students admitted to plagiarizing from the internet; 74% of students admitted that at least once during the past school year they had engaged in "serious" cheating; and 47% of students believe their teachers sometimes choose to ignore students who are cheating"*
- *"The State of Americans: This Generation and the Next (Free Press, July 1996) states that 58.3% of high school students let someone else copy their work in 1969, and 97.5% did so in 1989."*
- *"A national survey published in Education Week found that 54% of students admitted to plagiarizing from the internet; 74% of students admitted that at least once during the past school year they had engaged in "serious" cheating; and 47% of students believe their teachers sometimes choose to ignore students who are cheating."*

Reference: www.plagiarism.org/plag_facts (link not working anymore)

Formal Definition

According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary the formal definition is:

- to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
- to use (another's production) without crediting the source to commit literary theft
- to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source

Academic plagiarism no doubt is very serious stuff. Intellectual property is protected under government guidelines. It isn't only a matter of flagrant plagiarism, where a complete passage is copied without giving credit to the author, but is also considered a crime when the following occurs:

- Improper citation [1], failure to use quotation marks around a quote, even if a footnote [2] is added giving credit
- If a sentence is used with a few words changed around, but the structure remains the same
- If a document contains so many ideas belonging to someone else even with proper credit, the work is not original and can be considered plagiarism

So What?

The written word is used to gauge a persons experience and achievement, when something is plagiarized it does not afford the reader a true opportunity to understand the writer, to gauge progress in academia. Clearly this act impacts the writers learning.

If when presented with a paper an unknowing instructor provides constructive criticism that is meant for the writer to help improve, it is wasted. The author can never know the status of their work if it is not their own.

Academic plagiarism [3] affects many people along the way. It obviously affects the person whose work has been plagiarized by not affording the author credit for hard work. It effects the person who commits' the plagiarism by not affording the person an opportunity to receive constructive feedback. By not sharing ones own ideas important milestones are missed. It effects the efforts of the instructor to gauge the material being taught as useful of not.

Generally academic plagiarism affects the academic community as a whole. Academic success is based on the ability of the institution to affect both public and corporate policy, with a high plagiarism rate the institution will lose standing and creditability.

What are the Causes of Plagiarism?

The theories abound as to the causes of academic plagiarism from stress and pressure all the way down the line to plain out and out will to deceive.

Some experts believe because competition is so great in academia that this stress to do well promotes dishonesty. The typical A/B grading system compares one student to another, but there is a learning curve that is not taken into consideration, and this system pits students against each other instead of allowing students to absorb the material being taught and presenting it as they understand it.

There is a small movement that believes a pass fail system is much more advantageous over the A/B system currently in place, and that it would reduce the incidence of plagiarism.

Easy access to papers on the internet seems only to exaggerate the incidence of plagiarism. There are literally thousands of academic papers and journal articles [4] available on the internet that it is virtually impossible to check all sources. A craft cut and paste student can easily combine enough bits and pieces

from several different papers that it is virtually impossible to detect that the paper is not an honest example of ones own work.

Than there is the school of thought that says students are just lazy opportunists that will take advantage of an opportunity to cheat.

The truth probably lies somewhere down the middle.

What Can Be Done to Stop Academic Plagiarism?

This tried and true question evokes passion in academia around the world. There are complaints from instructors that the administration will not support an instructor in enforcing the academic plagiarism rules that are set by the institution.

Most instructors do not want to spend their time trolling for information on the internet to check for cases of plagiarism. They site both time restrictions as the reason they can not double check all of the papers that are presented and also the fact that they are not investigators but instructors.

Recognizing academic plagiarism is the first step in helping to get it under control. There are certain key elements that an instructor should be able to pick up on if a paper has been plagiarized:

- The writing seems to be beyond the scope of the writer
- There are phrases or vocabulary that is part of the paper that seems to be of a professional nature
- The writing far exceeds the material that has been taught
- The material presented in the text looks familiar

If any of these key points are realized, evidence should be collected to confirm any suspicions, and discussed with the student. There are search engines on the internet that can detect plagiarism in all forms to include academic plagiarism.

In most institutions the published punishment for academic plagiarism is expulsion from the institution this is very rarely enforced. Confronting the student and of course issuing a failing grade on the paper maybe the only recourse that is a real option.

Diligence is important on the part of the instructors and the administration when it comes to both detecting academic plagiarism and punishing the same. If the punishment is negative enough it may reduce future incidence of academic plagiarism. It needs to be addressed as the very serious problem that it is.

As long as universities and institutions keep their heads in the sand and refuse to address academic plagiarism as a crime, the activity will continue.

Source URL: https://forum.explorable.com/academic-plagiarism

Links
[1] https://forum.explorable.com/in-text-citation
[2] https://forum.explorable.com/how-to-write-footnotes
[3] http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/02/
[4] https://forum.explorable.com/academic-journals