Winter 2003

Plagiarism

Melissa Cast-Brede
University of Nebraska at Omaha, mcast@unomaha.edu

Plagiarism

Melissa Cast
Reference & Education Librarian
University of Nebraska
Omaha Library

The news media today is filled with articles on plagiarism. Well known figures such as Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin parade across our newspapers charged with plagiarizing. Studies from around the country show a high number of high school and college students admitting to using others' works as their own. It's fairly clear that more should be done to prevent plagiarism. In reviewing the literature, prevention of plagiarism involves three issues: understanding why it happens, detecting it and structuring assignments to prevent it.

What's happening?

First, let us look at what is being reported. In 2001, the Center for Academic Integrity cited a study of 25 high schools that found 70% of their students admitted to cheating at some time (Center for Academic Integrity, n.d.). A less frightening number was reported in the May/June issue of *Journal of College Student Development*. Surveying a much larger pool of students from across the United States, this study found only 24.5% of college students admitting to plagiarizing Internet resources (Scanlon and Neumann, 2002). However for a class of 20, that is four students.

Many of the news reports place the blame on the Internet. After all, information is readily available and just a cut-and-paste away from a paper. Paper mills that were once limited to the back pages of comic books are doing a booming business on the World Wide Web. Schoolsucks.com reports 10,000 visitors a day and GeniusPapers.com claims to have sold 20,000 subscriptions to their services (Glasner, 2002).

Two studies call into question whether or not the Internet is the root cause. The first study was conducted in 1991 before the advent of the World Wide Web and reports numbers similar to the previously mentioned Center for Academic Integrity. In this study, Schab (1991) found that 51.5% of the high school students surveyed in 1989 admitted to turning in the work of another student. Additionally, 76.1% admitted to copying from books.

In a separate study approximately ten years later, the Center for Academic Integrity (n.d.) reported that 90% of student plagiarizers have also plagiarized from non-Internet sources. Just 6% of the students used only the Web to plagiarize. Does this mean that most plagiarizers would do it whether or not the Web was available?

Many researchers have looked to attitudes regarding cheating in today's society for answers. For instance, the New York Times recently reported on a study which found that nearly half of the college students surveyed indi-

cated they believed plagiarism to be inconsequential (Rimer, 2003). Social norms that may have once influenced student behavior have fallen by the wayside as indicated by the following quotes from high school students recorded by McCabe (1999) regarding plagiarism:

> I think times have changed. Cheating is kind of considered, I don't know, just a kind of daily thing that's out there, almost kind of acceptable. Teachers know it and students know it.
>
> Maybe when our parents were growing up or their parents were growing up, it was a lot tighter and stricter on people cheating. Today it's just not happening. I think grown-ups have gotten a little bit more with-it in terms of knowing that you're just going to kind of cheat.

It's almost a big deal if you don't cheat.

The attitude that it is acceptable behavior may be reinforced by authority figures in the students' lives. Piper High School in Piper, Kansas made headlines when a teacher resigned after being forced to change the grades of students who had plagiarized. The teacher's principal supported her but the school board under pressure from parents forced the change in grades ("Teacher Resigns," 2002).

With that as an example, why would any teacher bother to raise the charge of plagiarism? The aforementioned Center for Academic Integrity (n.d.) notes that a third of the faculty who are aware of cheating never report it.

Others point to the corporate world. The aforementioned Schab (1991) compared the results of a survey administered to high school students in 1969, 1979 and 1989. Designed to measure students' behavior regarding cheating, one of the questions asked if students agreed with the statement, "To succeed in business requires some dishonesty." From 1969 to 1989, the percentage of students who agreed with this statement grew from 32.3% to 44.6%.

Such studies and news reports support the notion that intentional plagiarism is definitely a problem our schools should be addressing, but they fail to look at the other side of the coin. In the introduction, this article made note of respected scholars who were charged with plagiarism. A closer look at their stories may indicate another trend in plagiarism: the accidental plagiarizer. Doris Kearns Goodwin had to step down as a judge for the Pulitzer Prize in 2002 when charges of plagiarism were levied against her. In response, she has blamed "sloppy note transcribing" and began working with her publisher to make corrections in future editions of her book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* (Kloer, 2002).

In Hastings, Nebraska, former Hastings College President Richard E. Hoover retired amid charges he plagiarized an e-mail message in a speech. Dr. Hoover mistakenly assumed that the e-mail was in the public domain as it had been sent to numerous individuals and was not attributed to anyone (Magner, 2000).

How many students make similar mistakes not realizing that what they are doing is plagiarism? In an interview on National Public Radio, student B. al-Jarbo communicated the frustrations of dealing with information, "I'd write a phrase and I think. I—like, 'Did I come up with this myself or did I read this somewhere else or am I rephrasing?' Like, you kind of—there's so much information, you don't really remember. I'm, like, 'Should I reference this to somebody? Like, where did it come from? (Ydstie, 2002).Åh

Detecting Plagiarism

It's been established that plagiarism has a strong presence in our schools and universities. The second step is recognizing plagiarism when it occurs. Fortunately, there are several red flags that indicate when a paper may be plagiarized or contain plagiarized work. On the Web site *Cut and Paste Plagiarism,* Hinchliffe (1998) lists several clues for detecting plagiarism:

- Check for unusual formatting or formatting that does not match what you require. In particular, check for website printout page numbers or dates, grayed out letters and unusual use of upper/lower case and capitalization.

- Notice any jargon or advanced vocabulary or sentence structure.

- Read quotations carefully. Do they sound like a quote from an interview? Are there quotes without bibliographic entries?

- Reference the original assignment. Are any portions of the assignment completely left out? Do any portions read like they were "added on" to the paper? Is it the correct type of paper, e.g. descriptive, position, first person, narrative?

- Review the bibliography. Is the correct citation style used? Is the citation style used consistently? Does it match the sources referenced in the paper? Are there many items that the academic institution's library does not have?

There are also numerous Web resources available to help. Some are free and some charge a fee. Search engines like Google and AltaVista or meta-search engines such as Metacrawler are great for finding examples of plagiarism from Web sites such as free paper mills. Also several kind-hearted individuals have created their own tools for detecting plagiarized work and freely share them via the Web.

At the University of Virginia, L. Bloomfield allows free downloads of a software program, WCopyfind, he created that allows instructors to compare a collection of papers by "extract[ing] the text portions of those documents and looks through them for matching words in phrases of a specified minimum length. When it finds two files that share enough words in those phrases, WCopyfind generates html report files. These reports contain the document text with the matching phrases underlined (Bloomfield, 2002)." The

WCopyfind software is available for download at http://plagiarism.phys.virginia.edu/.

For the detection of plagiarism involving software programming, there's Measure Of Software Similarity (Moss). Moss compares the similarity between C, C++, Java, Pascal, Ada, ML, Lisp, and Scheme programs ("Moss: A System," n.d.). Directions for obtaining an account for Moss are available at http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/%7Eaiken/moss.html.

Other products are available for a fee. EVE 2.4 (Essay Verification System) has recently been released. The EVE software compares student papers with Web sites looking for plagiarized text. A report is then generated indicating what portions of the paper have been plagiarized(Eve 2, n.d.). A 15-day trial is available at the Web site at http://www.canexus.com/eve/.

The most well-known plagiarism service is probably Turnitin.com. Turnitin.com has two components to its service. Like Eve 2.4 and search engines, it also searches the Web for sites that contain material matching student papers. In addition to this search, Turnitin.com has compiled a database of all papers submitted to them which they will also use to compare a student's paper. Turnitin.com will also generate a report indicating the degree to which a paper may be plagiarized and indicate the suspect sections. Other features include GradeMark, a tool for editing and grading papers, and GradeBook, a tool for managing assignments (Turnitin.com, 2003).

Another company of interest is Glatt Plagiarism Services, Inc. Glatt markets two CD-ROM products designed to help teachers deal with plagiarism. The first is a tutorial for students explaining plagiarism, as well as the proper way to paraphrase and cite sources. The second CD-ROM deletes words from students' papers. Students are then asked to fill in the missing words. An online self-test is also available for students to check their own work(Glatt Plagiarism Services, n.d.). Product information for Glatt is available at http://www.plagiarism.com/.

Copycatch is a product from Great Britain, similar to the previously mentioned WCopyfind which allows you to create a database of papers over a period of time and compares them. More information is available at http://www.copycatch.freeserve.co.uk/vocalyse.htm.

Deciding which detection services to use depends on your particular situation. A small consolidated school might prefer to create its own database of student articles using something like WCopyfind or Copycatch and rely on full-text search engines for Web-based plagiarism. A large school district may be more likely to have the resources to subscribe to services from a fee-based Web resource like Eve 2.4 or Turnitin.com.

Performance is also a consideration. R. Satterwhite and M. Gerein (2001) compared the effectiveness of search engines like Google, and Web plagiarism services such as Eve (the predecessor to Eve 2.4) and Turnitin.com.

The study found Turnitin.com and Google to be the most effective at identifying plagiarized material with 58% and 52% accuracy respectively. More specifically, Turnitin.com found 93% of the plagiarized materials on free paper mills and 50% from the fee paper mills. Google found 88% of the same material from free paper mills and 42% from the fee paper mills. It should be noted that since the time of this study, Turnitin.com has been continually building its database of student papers. As such, its effectiveness detecting text from fee-based paper mills may have increased.

Prevention

It is often said that prevention is the best medicine and this may be especially true with plagiarism. Trying to detect plagiarism can put the instructor in the role of police officer which may not be an appropriate or comfortable position. Taking measures to prevent plagiarism helps the instructor avoid playing detective and can additionally help students better understand the research process.

Similar to the scholars mentioned earlier, the *Guide to Plagiarism and Cyber-Plagiarism* Web site from the University of Alberta (2001) notes that many of the reasons students plagiarize relate to the research process:

> "Lack of research skills...."
>
> "Confusion between plagiarism and paraphrasing..."
>
> "Careless notetaking"
>
> "Confusion about how to properly cite sources"

Focusing on the research process can prevent plagiarism by helping the accidental plagiarizer avoid paraphrasing and citing errors, and can make it difficult for the intentional plagiarizer to misuse material. For instance, Harris' *The Plagiarism Handbook* (2001) suggests that breaking assignments into separate parts over the semester to reflect the research process can be effective. For instance, week one requires the student to submit a paragraph defining their topic. Week two or three would have the student turn in a preliminary list of references.

Making each aspect of the research process very visible can be key to successfully preventing plagiarism. Ehrlich (2000) also recommends against having just a final paper due but also requiring work throughout the semester that leads up to a final paper, such as oral presentations of topics, and research logs that outline the databases and resources utilized by the student, and the search terms used. He also recommends not accepting work that skips sections of the research process. If a student lists a book on the bibliography, it should be actually used in the paper.

Making these additional steps more visible will also help defend against the paper mills that supply rough drafts and final drafts of papers. Harris (2001)

also recommends that papers should have very specific requirements. For instance, the topic should be very narrow or specific, and/or the students should be required to fully use a particular information resource.

A side benefit to focusing so thoroughly on the research process is that students will develop increasingly more sophisticated information literacy skills. A little over a year ago, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ran the headline "An Online Course Teaches Students to Use Libraries and the Internet - and Avoid Plagiarism." Reading the article reveals that this miracle class is actually a class in information literacy (Read, 2002).

What librarians and media specialists can do

In addition to making the above mentioned recommendations for assignments to teachers, there are resources librarians and media specialists can create or make available to help their faculty. Handouts and online tutorials are examples.

One doesn't have to look far to find numerous handouts available online from schools and universities.

- University of Alberta's library provides handouts on paraphrasing, evaluating Web resources, and common knowledge. Available at http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/handouts/index.cfm

- The Big Six has a very nice online handout geared towards middle and high schools on note taking and correct citation. Available at http://www.big6.com/kidsshowarticle.php?id=78

- The *Plagiarism: How-NOT-To Guide* from the University of New Brunswick Libraries includes wonderful tips for student writers. Available at http://www.lib.unb.ca/instruction/Plagiarism.pdf

Several online tutorials are also available.

- Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, KY has online tutorials for both students and teachers on their Web site. Available at http://jcpseschool.jefferson.k12.ky.us/jcPublic/Procedures

- The Yale Secondary School in British Columbia tutorial for students not only defines plagiarism and gives examples but also addresses why students should not plagiarize. Available from http://yalesecondary.sd34.bc.ca/tutorials/plagiarism_tutorial.html

- The very thorough Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University provides handouts on a myriad of topics related to writing including paraphrasing, plagiarism, using statistics, and practice exercises. Available at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/index2.html

Conclusion

Plagiarism certainly will not just disappear. As information intermediaries, librarians and media specialists can play a unique role in the fight for academic honesty by providing accurate information about what is really happening with plagiarism, clear instruction of the research process, and direction to student and teacher resources.

Bibliography

Bloomfield, L. (2002). *The plagiarism resource site: Charlottesville, Virginia.* Retrieved October 9, 2003.

The Center For Academic Integrity (n.d.) *CAI Research.* Retrieved February 19, 2003, from http://www.academicintegrity.org/

Copycatch Gold. (n.d.) Retrieved October 7, 2003 from http://www.copycatch.freeserve.co.uk/vocalyse.htm

Ehrlich, H. (March 20, 2000) *Plagiarism and anti-Plagiarism.* Retrieved December 7, 2001 from http://newark.rutgers.edu/~ehrlich/plagiarism598.html

Eve 2. Essay Verificiation Engine. (n.d.). Retrieved October 10, 2003 from http://www.canexus.com/eve/.

Glasner, J. (2002, August 26). "Where cheaters Often Prosper." *Wired.* Article 0,1294,54571,00. Retrieved September 29, 2003 from http://www.wired.com/news/print/0,1294,54571,00.html.

Glatt Plagiarism Services. (n.d.). Retrieved October 10, 2003 from http://www.plagiarism.com/.

Harris, R.A. (2001). *The plagiarism handbook.* Los Angeles, CA: Pyrczak Publishing. 49-60.

Hinchliffe, L. (May 1998) *Cut and paste plagiarism: Preventing, detecting and tracking online*. Retrieved December 10, 2001, from http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~janicke/plagiary.htm

Kloer, P. (2002, March 24). "pla.gi/a.rize (pla' je riz') vt. to take ideas, writings, etc. from another and pass them off as one's own; Doris Kearns Goodwin says she'll confront controversy in Atlanta lecture Monday." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution.* Retrieved October 1, 2003 from LexisNexis Academic.

Magner, D. (2000, March 3). "Plagiarism charge prompts president of Hastings College to retire." *Chronicle of Higher Education.* Retrieved January 22, 2003 from http://www.chronicle.com.

McCabe, D. (1999) ÅgAcademic dishonesty among high school students.Åh *Adolescence 34.* 681-687. Retrieved October 1, 2003 from EBSCO Health Source database.

Moss: A system for detecting software plagiarism. (n.d.) Retrieved October 7, 2003 from http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/%7Eaiken/moss.html

Read, B. (2002, May 17). "An online course teaches students to use libraries and the Internet —and avoid plagiarism." *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* Retrieved May 17, 2002 from http://chronicle.com/free/2002/05/2002051701u.htm

Rimer, S. (2003, September 3). "A campus fad that's being copied: Internet plagiarism seems on the rise." *The New York* Times. (2003, September 3). Retrieved September 29, 2003 from Lexis-Nexis.

Satterwhite, R. & Gerein, M. (2001) *Downloading detectives: searching for on-line plagiarism.* Retrieved January 25, 2002 from http://www.coloradocollege.edu/Library/Course/webplag2.html

Scanlon, P.M. & Neumann, D.R. (2002) ÅgInternet plagiarism among college students.Åh *Journal of College Student Development 43.* 374-385.

Schab, F. (1991). "Schooling without learning: Thirty years of cheating in high school." *Adolescence. 26,* 839-847. Retrieved October 1, 2003 from EBSCO Academic Search Premier.

"Teacher resigns over plagiarism fight." (2002, February 2). *CNN.com.* Retrieved September 29, 2003 from http://www.cnn.com/2002/fyi/teachers.ednews/02/07/plagiarism.dispute.ap/

Turnitin (2003). Retrieved October 7, 2003 from http://www.turnitin.com/static/home.html

University of Alberta Libraries. (November 1, 2001) *Why students plagiarize.* Retrieved October 10, 2003, from http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/index.cfm

Ydstie, J. (Interviewer) & al-Jarbo, B. (Speaker). (2002, May 21). ÅgInternet & college cheating.Åh In *All Things Considered* [Radio broadcast].. Washington, DC: National Public Radio.