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Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Member Misconduct to the AIS Council

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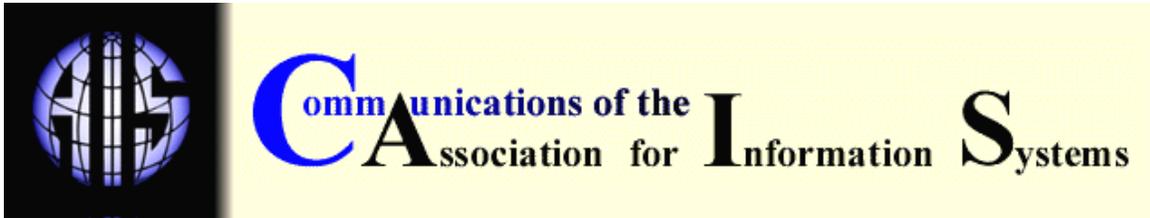
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REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON MEMBER MISCONDUCT TO THE AIS COUNCIL

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ABSTRACT

This article contains the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Member Misconduct which was presented to the AIS Council at its meeting on December 15, 2002 in Barcelona, Spain. The committee was established in response to an inquiry on plagiarism that was placed before the Council. The report includes an overview of the literature on plagiarism, the views of eight editors of IS journals, and guidelines for dealing with the issue. The Committee makes four recommendations:

1. Creation of a new standing committee of the AIS Council to deal with member misconduct.

2. A pledge of originality for every paper submitted to AIS for publication

3. A change in the way members are dismissed from AIS so it becomes the responsibility of Council

4. A member poll to determine what is considered acceptable behavior as the first step in creating an AIS code of ethics.

Keywords: ethics, plagiarism, member misconduct, paper originality, code of ethics

I. PREFACE: A FOCUS ON PLAGIARISM

At the spring meeting of the AIS Council held in Seattle, WA, USA, in June 2002, Council voted to establish an ad hoc committee on member misconduct. The committee was a direct result of Council discussion about some specific occurrences of alleged plagiarism that had been brought to the notice of Council members. Although the broader mandate of the committee was to look into what AIS could and should do about member misconduct in general, the most immediate issue of interest was plagiarism.

The motion to establish the committee read "that a committee be established to investigate the appropriation of intellectual property and the feasibility of establishing an ethics committee." According to the minutes of that meeting, the committee was asked to address such issues as:

Ensuring that authors of AIS related papers know that they are supposed to be submitting original work.
Determining what to do regarding expelling members for plagiarism. The AIS by-laws do include provision for removing AIS members at a membership meeting with agreement by 2/3 of those in attendance.
Determining whether any additional action is required with respect to the specific cases discussed at the meeting in Seattle.
Determining whether any changes in by-laws are required with regard to these issues.

Phillip Ein-Dor, the President of AIS, asked that three members of Council, all present at the Seattle meeting, serve on the ad hoc committee on member misconduct. These were Cynthia Beath, Vice-President for Publications, Joey George, ICIS Representative, and Malcolm Munro, Vice-President for Meetings. Jon Heales and Robert Davison were also asked to serve on the committee.

On August 10, Malcolm Munro and Joey George met at the AMCIS meeting in Dallas, TX, USA, to begin discussions about the mandate of the committee and what its deliverables should be. This meeting established a foundation for this report. The complete content of the report was determined through several rounds of e-mail exchanges, as was the distribution of responsibilities for the contents.

The first draft of the report was assembled on Nov. 13, 2002, and redistributed to the committee for comment and revision. The final version was made available to AIS Council members in December.

Joey F. George, Chair

II. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AIS COUNCIL

We recommend that AIS Council approve the following:

1. **Create a new Standing Committee consisting of the VP Meetings and the VP Publications and a third person.**

Commentary: The committee is unanimous in recommending the creation of a new Standing Committee to deal with issues of member misconduct and that two of the committee's members be the VP Meetings and the VP Publications.

There is a consensus on the name of the committee: Standing Committee on Member Misconduct, but support is not unanimous.

There are also a series of views as to who the third member should be: 1) AIS Publisher, 2) VP Membership, 3) a third person to be named by the President, or 4) a new VP of Ethics Policy. There is also no agreement on who should chair the committee. We are unanimous, however, in recommending that whoever gets the third seat should be covered somehow by our insurance for officers and directors, given the potentially litigious ramifications of dealing with member misconduct.

2. **Add a pledge of originality to every submission process for AIS publications.**

Commentary: This recommendation is unanimously agreed to.

3. **Change the process by which a member is dismissed from AIS from being conducted in a business meeting to being handled by the new Standing Committee before a final vote by AIS Council.**

Commentary: This recommendation is unanimously agreed to.

4. **Conduct a member poll to see what is acceptable behavior as the beginnings of the crafting of an AIS code of ethics.**

Commentary: There is a general consensus that such a poll should be conducted, but support is not unanimous.

III. ONE SOLUTION: A CALL FOR A NEW AIS STANDING COMMITTEE

We propose that a Standing Committee be created to deal with plagiarism and such other issues as the Committee shall deem appropriate. The committee would consist of three members: The Vice President for Publications, The Vice President for Meetings, and a third AIS officer. It is important, we believe, that each member of the committee be an Officer of AIS to take advantage of the insurance purchased by AIS to protect its officers, given the likelihood of legal challenges in many cases of alleged member misconduct.

The first task for the new committee would be to take into account the contents of this report and to determine whether or not there should be an AIS Code of Ethics, how cases of alleged misconduct should be handled by AIS, and penalties for misconduct, among other important issues.

Other professional societies have established institutions and processes to deal with member misconduct. They can serve as models for AIS. One such model is the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM). ACM has two clauses in its constitution (revised October 1998 and available on-line at www.acm.org) that speak to issues of member misconduct. The first deals with groups for the termination of membership:

Article 3, Section 4. Admonition, Suspension and Expulsion.

A member may be dropped or suspended for nonpayment of dues as provided in the Bylaws. A member of the Association may be admonished, suspended or expelled for demonstrating lack of integrity, or for other reasonable cause after a hearing of the case before the Council and by affirmative vote of at least three-fourths of all members of the Council. A former member of the Association who was expelled from membership can become a member only after approval of the application by an affirmative vote of at least three-fourths of all members of the Council.

The second item deals with the ACM Code of Professional Ethics. The Code is actually a part of the ACM Constitution:

Article 6, Section 7. ACM Code of Professional Ethics.

The Council shall adopt, maintain, enforce and conspicuously publish and display to all members and the public a code of professional ethics, which shall be binding on all members of the Association.

Although expulsion from ACM can only be done by a three-quarters vote of the ACM Council, ACM has also created a Standing Committee on Professional Ethics. The purpose of this committee is to promote the ACM Code of Professional Ethics among members, but it has no role in handling cases of member misconduct.

AIS addresses termination of membership in its by-laws, not in its Constitution. Expulsion comes not from a vote by the AIS Council but instead from a vote of those attending an AIS general business meeting:

BY-LAW 4. SEVERANCE AND REINSTATEMENT OF MEMBERSHIP

Section 4.1. *Resignation*. A member may terminate membership at any time by submitting a letter of resignation to the Executive Director or by failing to pay dues within two (2) months of the date they are due.

Section 4.2. *Expulsion*. A member may be expelled for conduct deemed prejudicial to AIS by a two-thirds majority of the individual members in attendance at a general business meeting where a quorum is present, provided that such member shall first have been served with written notice by certified mail, return receipt requested of the reason for the proposed expulsion, and shall have been given an opportunity to be heard by the Council and at the general business meeting. Due notice of any formal recommendations for expulsion shall be given by the Council to the members, along with a reasonable amount of documentation provided by the member whose expulsion is proposed, should the member so desire. Expelled members are not eligible for reinstatement.

We recommend that the new AIS Standing Committee on Member Misconduct review this by-law with an eye toward moving expulsion votes from a general business meeting to AIS Council. We also recommend that the Committee have some role in reviewing alleged cases of member misconduct before these cases go to Council for a vote.

IV. A CALL FOR AN ORIGINALITY STATEMENT FOR AIS SUBMISSIONS

Although it is implied in the editorial processes of most academic conferences and journals that work submitted for consideration for publication is the original work of the author(s), the author(s) is not asked to attest to that originality until the work has been accepted and the copyright form has to be signed. Many academic conferences and journals have explicit statements about the work having not been presented previously at other conferences or about the work not having been published previously in other forms, but few explicitly ask that plagiarized work not be submitted. This is perhaps because it seems obvious that the submission of others' work as your own is not acceptable.

Given that someone who would submit plagiarized work as his or her own would be unlikely to be deterred from doing so by a statement that asked him or her to attest to the originality of the work, embedding such a statement in the submission process for AIS publications may seem silly. Such a statement would, however, serve two purposes: 1) It would call attention to the seriousness of plagiarism for young and inexperienced scholars, and 2) it would help demonstrate that anyone suspected of plagiarism was made aware of the problems with such behavior during the submission process. In both cases, it would be difficult later for someone to argue that he or she did not understand that plagiarism was inappropriate.

Therefore, we recommend that the following statement be incorporated into the submissions process for all AIS publications:

"By submitting this work for consideration for publication by AIS, I attest that it is my own original work."

We recommend that the statement be incorporated into all electronic submission processes in much the same way as software vendors include end user license agreements (EULA). If a user does not click on the "I agree" button for a EULA, installation of the software is not possible. An author submitting to an AIS publication outlet should similarly have to click on an "I agree" button in order to continue the submissions process.

The committee has also discussed the desirability of requiring all reviewers of AIS publications to also pledge that they will behave ethically in the pursuit of their duties as reviewers, e.g., to respect the confidentiality and authorship of a submission. As AIS has moved to electronic review systems in which reviewers must access papers and submit reviews through a web-based system, the same mechanisms used to obtain author adherence to pledges could be used for

reviewer pledges as well. We leave this suggestion to the new Standing Committee for consideration.

V. PLAGIARISM – AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Jon Heales
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INTRODUCTION

There is a considerable body of literature relating to ethical misconduct both in the popular press and in academic publications. Because plagiarism falls within the bounds of ethical misconduct some references to more broadly-based ethical issues have been included in this review. The review looks at both books and journal papers relating to plagiarism issues in the scientific community with emphasis on literature relevant to the IS discipline.

Most of the literature relating to plagiarism concerns high school and college students and the issues concerning term papers and other assignments. There are fewer authoritative works relating to plagiarism issues in the scientific community, and still fewer relating to the information systems discipline. The biomedical discipline seems the most advanced in dealing with plagiarism where procedures for dealing with plagiarism in scientific journals and grant applications have been instituted at a national level in the USA and UK (see [ORI/AAAS, 1993; Parmley, 2000; Armstrong, 1993 and Evans, 2000]).

The references selected for this review have been chosen because each makes a slightly different contribution to the overall understanding of plagiarism. Table 1 gives details of the selected references and provides a description of each, showing the discipline to which it relates. Full references appear in the list of references below. An endnote file is attached, and is also available on request.

The literature has been grouped into the following categories; ethical issues and position papers, plagiarism as part of ethics (including definitional papers), cases of plagiarism, detection mechanisms, motivation, remedy, and prevention.

ETHICAL ISSUES AND POSITION PAPERS

In the mid 1980s information systems was a young discipline with very little by way of infrastructure, norms and rules. It was Mason who first drew the discipline's attention to ethical issues that should be considered in a changing world [Mason, 1986]. The discipline has been slow to react; however, intellectual property issues focused attention on the debate and software piracy became a major issue [Steidlmeier, 1993]. The need for a code of ethics that applies to the discipline has been raised on many occasions [Oz, 1992; Langford, 1996; Walsham, 1996; and Pearson et al., 1997], including some recent papers on the issue Davison [2000] and Kock and Davison [2002].

PLAGIARISM – RELATIONSHIP TO ETHICS

Plagiarism is considered a breach of ethical practice, and as such its treatment should be governed by a code of ethics. A number of authors have contributed to the debate surrounding this issue. The paper by Kock and Davison [2002] provides an excellent and up to date synopsis of the literature and the arguments supporting the link between plagiarism and unethical behavior.

A number of works have looked at the philosophical aspects of plagiarism including a variety of definitions and legal issues (see [Buranen and Roy, 1999; Lafollette, 1992]). Ethical issues relating to the internet, including plagiarism, are also discussed in Clarke [2000] and Roig [2001], and in the Taylor and Shim, [1993] analysis of differences between the attitudes of academics and business executives towards software piracy

CASES OF PLAGIARISM

There is a considerable volume of literature dealing with instances of plagiarism that have been detected. Perhaps the most complete work is Anderson's [1998] annotated bibliography of 623 articles relating to plagiarism and theft of intellectual property from all disciplines. Randall [2001] conducts an in-depth analysis of plagiarism, including famous acts of plagiarism in history. In other disciplines Parmley [2000] discusses the issues of plagiarism in cardiology and the medical discipline; Armstrong [1993] discusses cases in radiology.

The conference proceedings of a conference on "Plagiarism and Theft of Ideas" in the biomedical discipline contains papers discussing several cases of plagiarism, including the plagiarism of grant applications [ORI/AAAS, 1993].

One of the most prolific serial plagiarists was Constantinos Papadopoulos who was found to have submitted in excess of 20 plagiarized papers to journals and conferences in computer science [Jesshope, 1995].

In information systems, Kock [1999] identifies a recent case of plagiarism and discusses issues associated with obtaining an appropriate remedy. Some interesting letters to the editor appear in the subsequent issue of the journal (e.g., see [Gass, 1999]). Other cases of plagiarism in IS were identified in a report to the AIS which contributed to the formation of the Misconduct Committee by the AIS [Heales et al., 2002].

DETECTION MECHANISMS

Detection of plagiarism to date has been mainly by victims and journal referees. The use of database searches has made acts of plagiarism far more transparent, with a much greater likelihood of plagiarists being discovered. There are also a number of software programs specifically designed to detect plagiarized work [Shivakumar and Garcia-Molina, 1996; Shivakumar and Garcia-Molina, 1999]. Cho et al. [2000] describes the use of similar technology to improve the performance of web search engines.

The handbook by Harris [2001] focuses on college student plagiarism and is highly recommended. Many of the strategies for preventing, detecting and dealing with plagiarism apply equally well to the scientific arena.

MOTIVATION

A number of authors have looked at the motivations for plagiarism in the scientific community [Parmley, 2000; Goodstein, 2002; Harris, 2001; and Randall, 2001]. Goodstein [2002] cites three factors present in cases of misconduct: perpetrators were under career pressure, knew what the result would be if they did the work anyway, and third, were in a field where experiments were not expected to be precisely reproducible. Simple monetary gain was not found to be a factor. Fitzgerald [2000] looked at plagiarism motivations in the field of journalism, but reached no conclusions.

REMEDY

A number of authors discuss the difficulties in bringing a plagiarist to justice [Armstrong, 1993, Kock, 1999]. However, several have been successful, and much can be learned from their approaches [Levai and Toth, 2002].

Perhaps the most significant remedy from an IS perspective relates to the Euro Par 95 conference where action was taken by the CACM to pursue the plagiarizer. The CACM was successful in obtaining an apology and a letter agreeing to destroy all copyright materials in the plagiarizer's possession [Denning, 1995].

The Office of Research Integrity and The American Association for the Advancement of Science have made significant progress in dealing with plagiarism, mainly in the biomedical arena [ORI/AAAS, 1993]. The Conference on Plagiarism and Theft of Ideas was sponsored by the Office of Research Integrity and The American Association for the Advancement of Science in Association with the American Bar Association. Several cases of plagiarism are documented, including the plagiarism of grant applications. In some cases institutions issued citations, and in other cases investigations were not warranted. Even in cases with significant allegations, many institutions have given reprimands without reaching findings of misconduct. However, in other cases, findings of misconduct have been made and severe sanctions have been imposed by institutions and by the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) or the National Science Foundation (NSF).

PREVENTION

Strategies used in deterring college student plagiarism have been quite successful. For example, Braumoeller and Gaines [2001] discusses the successful use of broadcasting the use of detection software, McCabe and Treviño [2002] the use of honor codes, and Harris [2001] discusses other measures.

Auer and Krupar [2001] cite the need for education and the role of librarians in this endeavor.

In the medical arena, Evans [2000] reports the measures taken by the UK's Medical Research Council in the development of procedures for dealing with cases of suspected plagiarism. The procedures include remedies, sanctions, and appeals (see also institutional developments in the USA in [ORI/AAAS, 1993]).

Table 1. References Relating to Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct

Citation	Title	Description	Discipline
[Anderson, 1998]	Plagiarism, Copyright Violation and Other Thefts of Intellectual Property	An annotated bibliography of 623 articles relating to plagiarism and theft of intellectual property.	All
[Armstrong, 1993]	Plagiarism: What is it, Whom Does it Offend and How Does One Deal with It?	Highly recommended. Examines several aspects of plagiarism including scenarios for junior faculty reporting plagiarism. Revered academic plagiarized work of a junior faculty radiologist. When contacted, the plagiarizer who responded that it was a remarkable coincidence and that great minds think alike. The victim decided not to pursue the matter	Radiology
[Auer and Krupar, 2001]	Mouse click plagiarism: The role of technology in plagiarism and the librarian's role in combating it.	Paper examines the role of librarians and recommends their role should be expanded to include the education of library users, to increase their awareness of the ethical and legal implications of using information	All
[Braumoeller and Gaines, 2001]	Actions Do Speak Louder than Words: Deterring Plagiarism with the use of Plagiarism-Detection Software	Experiment on university students found that advertising the use of plagiarism-detecting software had a marked effect on the degree of plagiarism in assignments.	Political Science
[Buranen and Roy, 1999]	Perspectives in Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World	An edited collection that offers and explains various definitions of plagiarism and intellectual property. The papers include issues in copyright law; imitation and originality in classical rhetoric; sociohistorical perspectives; and late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century notions of authorship in student publications and textbooks.	All
[Cho et al., 2000]	Finding replicated web collections.	The paper describes how to efficiently identify replicated documents and hyperlinked document collections to improve web crawlers, archivers, and ranking functions used in search engines.	All
[Clarke, 2000]	Ethics and the Internet: The Cyberspace Behaviour of People, Communities and Organisations.	The paper discusses findings of a study about the relations between ethics and the Internet. Makes recommendations.	All

[Davison, 2000]	Professional Ethics in Information Systems: A Personal Perspective.	A broad look at ethics in the IS discipline, encompassing the profession and the societies that govern its members. The paper intends to stimulate discussion and call for greater professionalism in the discipline.	IS Profession
[Denning, 1995]	Plagiarism in the Web	CACM Editorial discussing the outcome of the EURO PAR '95 conference plagiarism allegations. ACM pursued the plagiarizer and obtained an apology, together with a letter agreeing to destroy all copyright materials in his possession. ACM stated that it will vigorously protect the integrity of its Scientific literature.	Computer Science
[Evans, 2000]	The Medical Research Council's approach to allegations of scientific misconduct.	The paper reports the UK's Medical Research Council (MRC) introduction of policies and procedures for inquiring into allegations of scientific misconduct. The policies and procedures are under trial for two years. The MRC adopts a stepwise approach: preliminary action; assessment to establish prima facie evidence of misconduct; formal investigation; sanctions; and appeal. The MRC focuses on education and training in good research practices to help prevent research misconduct.	Medical
[Fitzgerald,]	Why they do it	Superficial examination of plagiarism amongst journalists. Paper looks for answers as to why, but reaches no conclusion.	Journalism
[Gass, 1999]	Solving the plagiarism problem	Letter to the editor in response to [Kock, 1999].	Information Systems
[Goodstein, 2002]	Scientific Misconduct	Paper cites motivating factors for misconduct. Claims that most plagiarism is in the areas of medical biosciences.	All
[Harris, 2001]	The Plagiarism Handbook. Strategies for Preventing, Detecting and Dealing with Plagiarism	Highly recommended. The book is focused on college student plagiarism, but many of the strategies regarding detection are useful in the academic arena.	All
[Heales et al., 2002]	Academic Plagiarism in the IS Community: Report prepared for the AIS Executive Committee, June, 2002	Report to the AIS detailing seven cases of plagiarism in the IS community.	Information Systems
[Jesshope, 1995]	The Plagiarism Story	Plagiarism at the EURO-PAR'95 Computer Science Conference. Constantinos Papadopoulos was found to have submitted in excess of 20 papers to journals and conferences.	Computer Science
[Kock, 1999]	A Case of Academic Plagiarism	Highly recommended. Paper dealing with plagiarism in IS. Efforts to obtain satisfaction by junior faculty member fraught with difficulty and frustration.	Information Systems

[Kock and Davison, 2002]	Plagiarism in IS Research: Do We Need an Ethics Committee?	Highly recommended paper discussing the need for an ethics committee in IS. Paper cites ethical violations to support argument.	Information Systems
[Lafollette, 1992]	Misconduct in Scientific Publishing	Highly recommended. The book takes a pragmatic view of plagiarism and all aspects relating to scientific publication. The work needs the additional perspective of modern technology and the internet.	All
[Langford, 1996]	Ethics and the Internet: Appropriate Behaviour in Electronic Communication	Paper laments the lack of institutional control over electronic material. Focuses mainly on inability to sensor pornography, but principles apply to all media.	All
[Levai and Toth, 2002]	How to use major parts of a paper previously published by others to write a new one. An allegation of plagiarism by Indian authors	An interesting paper highlighting amazing similarities between the original paper and the plagiarized version. The authors prove the allegation that Indian authors plagiarized major parts and conclusions of their 1997. What is interesting here is that this paper is published in the same journal as the plagiarized paper. This must be how the journal settled the attribution issue.	Organic Chemistry
[Martin, 1994]	Plagiarism: A Misplaced Emphasis	The paper adopts the view that institutionalized plagiarism, including ghostwriting, political speech writing, and attribution of authorship to bureaucratic elites, should be eliminated and that such practices should give proper attribution. Includes a hypothetical analysis of plagiarism in a self-managed society where the formal hierarchy has been eliminated. Plagiarism in such a society would be reduced.	All
[Mason, 1986]	Four Ethical Issues of the Information Age	Editorial introducing ethical issues into the IS arena.	Information Systems
[McCabe and Treviño, 2002]	Honesty and Honor Codes	Paper examines the benefits of an honor code at college level. The paper demonstrates that if applied properly, and a culture of honesty is fostered at the student level, the incidence of cheating and plagiarism can be significantly reduced.	All
[ORI/AAAS, 1993]	Conference on Plagiarism and Theft Of Ideas	Excellent documented proceedings of a conference on plagiarism held by the ORI/AAAS. "Conference on Plagiarism and Theft of Ideas" Sponsored by the Office of Research Integrity and The American Association for the Advancement of Science, AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility, and AAAS National Conference of Lawyers and Scientists in Association With the American Bar Association. Several cases of plagiarism are documented, including the plagiarism of grant applications, the proceedings documents the actions taken by institutions.	Medicine

[Oz, 1992]	Ethical Standards for Information Systems Professionals: A Case for a Unified Code.	Compares codes of ethics for five professional codes. Recommends the adoption of a single code for the IS profession.	Information Systems
[Parmley, 2000]	Plagiarism - How Serious Is It?	Editorial from the Journal of the American College of Cardiology. Cited themes from a conference on Plagiarism sponsored by the US Department of Health and Human Service's Office of Research Integrity. Plagiarism was seen to be a significant problem.	Cardiology
[Pearson et al., 1997]	Measuring the Importance of Ethical Criteria Behavior	Paper highlights need for greater emphasis on ethical issues as a result of increased access and reliance on IT. Focus is on IT professionals and the need for a common code of ethics.	Information Systems
[Randall, 2001]	Pragmatic plagiarism: authorship, profit, and power	An in-depth examination of plagiarism, including famous acts of plagiarism in history.	All
[Roig, 2001]	Plagiarism and paraphrasing criteria of college and university professors	Examination of definitions of plagiarism resulting from experimentation.	Psychology
[Shivakumar and Garcia-Molina, 1996]	Building a Scalable and Accurate Copy Detection Mechanism	The paper examines the technical aspects, including the capabilities of plagiarism-detection software. In fact Shivakumar built his PhD around the development of such software.	All
[Steidlmeier, 1993]	The Moral Legitimacy of Intellectual Property Claims: American Business and Developing Country Perspective	The paper examines two sides of the argument over intellectual property (IP) rights; developed countries advocate strong protection, while developing countries only support weak protection. The paper calls for change in socioethical legitimation of the property rules that govern IP; change of management towards a global stakeholder model; and a building up of a coherent international public policy process. Plagiarism will continue to be an issue as long as technology continues to outpace arrangements set up to manage it.	Information Systems
[Taylor and Shim, 1993]	A Comparative-Examination of Attitudes toward Software Piracy among Business Professors and Executives	The paper found that academics had a more tolerant attitude towards software piracy than company executives. Possible explanations given included the degree and type of job-related supervision; identification with the organization vs. the profession; and social-desirability bias.	
[Walsham, 1996]	Ethical Theory, Codes of Ethics and IS Practice	Paper calling for support of ethical theory in IS. Ethical theory should be used to underpin the study of ethics in the IS discipline.	Information Systems

VI. THE VIEWS OF EIGHT EDITORS OF IS JOURNALS

Cynthia Beath
University of Texas at Austin

To understand better the prevalence of plagiarism in the field of information systems, as well as current practices for dealing with suspected incidents of plagiarism or other types of intellectual dishonesty, I interviewed a small number of editors of IS journals. My sample included 8 editors-in-chief or past editors of top tier and second tier journals. All requested anonymity. I asked four broad questions:

1. Whether they had been given any formal or informal advice about how to handle or process suspected incidents of plagiarism or intellectual dishonesty by their predecessors or the owners of their journal;
2. Whether they had ever given any formal or informal advice to their successors or associate editors about how to handle or process suspected incidents of plagiarism or intellectual dishonesty;
3. What types of incidents they'd been faced with in the past, if any; and,
4. How they'd handled those incidents, or what rules of thumb they had for dealing with such incidents.

In a nutshell, this is what I learned:

1 & 2. None of the editors I talked to had been given <u>any</u> formal or informal advice about how to handle problems of plagiarism or intellectual dishonesty by the editors that preceded them or their journal publishers or owners. As one editor said, "I ought to know by now what to do." More to the point, perhaps, none had provided any formal or informal instructions to successor editors or associate editors about what to do when they encountered ethical challenges. One editor did say that after a plagiarism incident surfaced, the editorial director at the publishing house (a for-profit publisher) was very firm in his advice and very assertive about dealing with the offending author. A few said that they would typically consult with senior colleagues before taking action, but one said he would NOT consult with colleagues, out of concerns for about creating a liability for defamation.

3. Prevalence: Half of the editors had encountered significant plagiarism, ranging from outright copying of entire submitted articles to more limited copying of passages (e.g., from literature reviews) or instruments. In general the editors of top-tier journals believe that their journals do not receive submissions that are completely plagiarized, perhaps because of the greater chance of being caught.

All the editors I talked to had experienced a variety of forms of intellectual dishonesty, such as inadequate citations, over-exploiting of data in multiple papers, misrepresenting intention behind methods, deliberately holding back part of a model (as one said, "like the publican watering down the gin"), not referencing related papers, as well as violations of publishing rules or norms such as making parallel submissions. Several mentioned that intellectual dishonesty sometimes seem to be mainly the result of poor training. Most said that when confronted on these issues, authors generally would withdraw the paper (if the problem surfaced before reviews were completed) or would not revise and resubmit the work (if the problem surfaced as part of the review process).

Several of the editors I spoke with said that conference papers, reports that are not widely distributed, and unpublished dissertations seem the most vulnerable to being plagiarized.

4. If and when they suspect serious plagiarism, the editors I talked to would turn first to their legal advisors, probably starting with the journal owner. As one said, "These matters can become very

'ugly.'" Most of the time, the editors I talked to deal with problems of intellectual dishonesty or violations of submission rules by asking for explanations or changes, or by rejecting the manuscript. Some argued that papers that are intellectually dishonest are generally rejected because they do not make a contribution. One said that intellectual dishonesty is very difficult to root out, but that "the market" takes care of the problem. And, as noted above, it is often impossible to distinguish between ignorance and intellectual dishonesty.

In general, it appears that editors are reluctant to confront authors who are intellectually dishonest, seeking to avoid litigation, and to be fair, if not also gentle with the poorly trained. There are exceptions, of course. Some editors described incidents in which they had taken personally risky steps such as contacting editors at other journals about dual submissions, alerting administrators or dissertation supervisors about ethical breaches, or contacting authors of possibly plagiarized sources.

Other comments:

One editor pointed out that while the large publishing houses probably have the resources to pursue plagiarism charges, AIS and MISQ probably don't. Two others pointed out that an editor who makes a charge of plagiarism, especially in England or Australia, is personally liable for making a disputable accusation, if not also for defamation, even if the charge is accurate. Another suggested that our Universities might have the institutional clout to help those who feel they have been wronged by plagiarists, even if the journals don't.

While it wasn't part of my "protocol," I did get suggestions from some editors that AIS should also look into the ethics of reviewers and editors, especially of special issues. Their point was that reviewers also have opportunities to act unethically – sitting on manuscripts for too long, rejecting manuscripts by competitors or with competing views, cronyism, etc. My sense was that editors have far weaker norms about reviewer behavior than they do about author behavior, so I think this is a good point.

Other suggestions:
- Follow up interviews with some of the big publishing houses might unearth some formal directives for editors that we might leverage.
- AIS should determine whether our insurance policy does (or could) protect editors from defamation charges.
- AIS should archive all submissions and reviews in perpetuity, to support the evaluation of future claims of authenticity of a submission.
- AIS could provide an archiving and authentication service to the field. Authors would submit original material to AIS. AIS would then compare it to the archive and then archive it if it was original. AIS could provide some form of certification of originality for these authors. We could require such certificates for CAIS and JAIS, and we could encourage other journals to require them or favor them.

VII. DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM: BEHAVIORAL GUIDELINES FOR COMPLAINANTS AND EDITORS[1]

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Plagiarism is a grievous act in a community in which creating and disseminating knowledge is its distinguishing purpose. Plagiarism is fraud because it involves misrepresenting the ownership of

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[1] This section was revised on January 13, 2003 by its author.

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someone else's intellectual property. These guidelines will be of assistance to you if your work has been plagiarized or you serve as a journal or proceedings editor and suspected plagiarism has been brought to your attention. Only plagiarism by faculty, and not students, is addressed. Though intended primarily to advise AIS members and editors of AIS journals and proceedings, the advice should be equally useful to others.

As with any other form of valuable property, you may be called upon to "prove" your ownership - or as in the case of intellectual property, "authenticate your authorship" if challenged. But having done so, you have reason to expect support from your institutions, and appropriate redress once your case has been dealt with. Institutions – in this case university employers, editors and publishers – thus have a responsibility to fairly investigate allegations or complaints, levy penalties, provide remedies, and inform all parties concerned.

The likelihood that you will ever be involved with plagiarism as either a victim, editor, or university administrator is small, regardless of how frequently it may occur on a worldwide basis. Hence, if it does occur, you may not have anyone available with experience who can advise you as to what to do, what not to do, whom to inform, whom not to inform, and in general, how to trigger the necessary institutional investigatory mechanisms and policies which may be in place. Below we provide some guidelines which may provide you with useful direction.

One difficulty in proposing guidelines to deal with plagiarism is that each case will have its own unique characteristics. First, plagiarism itself occurs in many forms ranging from the blatant and obvious through to the subtle and well camouflaged. This range includes boldly expropriating the unedited contents of an entire article through to careful rewriting to hide the source. Other acts may involve fraudulent data manipulation, data theft, and data misrepresentation. Yet other acts may involve the spurious claim to an important or novel idea, even when that idea has been discussed publicly making it very difficult to establish the true "owner". A second problem in proposing guidelines is that each of us has a different propensity for confrontation and "doing battle". One person may prefer a highly aggressive approach while another may prefer to proceed in a quiet, low-profile, non-confrontational manner. One individual may wish to exact the severest penalty possible including financial compensation whereas another may be satisfied with an apology and a restorative remedy. Third, plagiarism is highly difficult to define because of the range of commonly accepted practices which have developed within particular disciplines and also because significant legal, cultural and attitudinal differences exist throughout the world. Whose standard should prevail when practices are diametrically opposed? These and other realities preclude the development of a "one size fits all" approach. The guidelines proposed herein acknowledge a North American perspective on ethical behavior and assume the existence of university mechanisms to deal with academic misconduct. Your circumstances may be different and you are advised to draw upon these guidelines as you see fit.

Below we provide guidelines for the victim, journal or proceedings editor, and by implication, deans.

GUIDELINES FOR A "VICTIM"

Get Some Perspective

Victims report that dealing with plagiarism can be a highly stressful and unnerving experience. In an effort to fight back, an accused plagiarist may counter-claim original authorship, arguing that you are the plagiarist, thereby forcing you to defend yourself. You may become the person scrambling to find evidence that you are the original author. The accused plagiarist may also threaten legal action which, though completely without foundation, may intimidate you sufficiently that you drop the allegation. Overall, emotions such as frustration, anger, and general anxiety may be part and parcel of the situation.

But however stressful the situation may be for you as the victim, take comfort from the fact that the pressure on the plagiarist is far greater. First, you probably possess evidence and documents

to prove your ownership and the plagiarist can be made to know it. Furthermore, for an academic found guilty of plagiarism, the range of consequences may include loss of employment, significant legal costs, substantial legal judgments (as in copyright infringements), and general public humiliation and embarrassment. The serial plagiarist will also have to worry that all previous publications including the doctoral dissertation are likely to come under close scrutiny with the possibility of the degree itself being revoked. These are severe psychological pressures with which to deal.

The above may lead you to conclude that faced with such disastrous penalties, the plagiarist is likely to respond as aggressively as possible and go to whatever lengths are necessary to defend against the accusation. In fact, the plagiarist is at least as likely to eventually, if not immediately, recognize the futility and weakness of his position, and the devastating consequences of losing, and instead attempt to resolve the situation to minimize the damage. Depending on the circumstances, the plagiarist may attempt to work out some kind of accommodation and remedy but failing this may simply resign his academic position and quietly withdraw from the scene. Universities with an eye to their own reputation and with an understandable desire to avoid an enormously time-consuming investigation may be quite willing to acquiesce in, or even bring about, this face saving gesture. Unfortunately, such a resolution may not be entirely satisfactory to you as the victim since no apology may be forthcoming, no public admission of guilt offered, and no financial restitution provided. You may have to be content with little more than a paragraph in the publication outlet in which the plagiarism occurred giving you credit as the original author though you may also be able to take satisfaction from removing a plagiarist from the academic scene.

In general, the perspective you should adopt as a victim is that asserting your true and deserved authorship is stressful but you are likely to succeed if you follow these guidelines. This "success" however may consist of little more than a public correction. Thus, before you decide to proceed, try to think through the consequences on both sides, and the minimum remedy you are willing to accept. Factors you need to consider are the importance of your plagiarized research, prominence of the publication outlets involved, and how egregious the plagiarism was. As plagiarism occurs in degrees of severity, public profile, and importance so too may the consequences to you as a complainant. Ultimately, you have to decide how important is it to you, what remedy will be satisfactory, what punishment you feel fits the crime, and the likely outcome for both yourself and your transgressor.

Establish the Plagiarism

Before you allege plagiarism, either publicly or privately, be absolutely certain you have a convincing case. This may pose little difficulty when an entire article or substantial chunks of your text have been used unaltered. But beyond this, judgment comes into play, and the less obvious the plagiarism the more difficult it may be for you to make a convincing case to others. You may find it necessary to undertake a paragraph by paragraph analysis of the suspected plagiarism against your own publication, even watching for unique phrases or expressions which appear in both articles. Tables, charts, graphs, and an analysis of the references may provide you with further evidence, especially if these are unique in particular ways.

Chronicle each piece of evidence, large and small, and satisfy yourself both that plagiarism has occurred and that your evidence will be convincing enough that others will agree with you. You may wish to show your evidence to a trusted colleague, someone with a mature perspective and your best interests at heart. The more emotional you are about the situation, the less likely you are to be objective and realistic about your case.

Document Your Authorship

If you are convinced you have been plagiarized and that you have the evidence to convince others, your next step is to document your authorship. In other words, before you make any

public allegations, develop as much evidence as you can that plagiarism has occurred and that you are the original author. We believe that the more overwhelming and convincing you are at the outset, the more readily sympathetic and supportive others will be toward your case. The stronger your evidence, the greater the pressure which may be brought to bear on the plagiarist to resolve the situation.

Some of the materials you may gather to document your authorship could include the following:

- photocopies of each of the published articles (showing your earlier authorship);
- your acceptance letter from the editor;
- editor's initial feedback and reviewers' comments on the initial submission;
- rejection letters and reviewer comments if the article had been submitted elsewhere before being submitted to the journal in which it was published;
- any initial submitted drafts;
- related working papers, conference proceedings and research grants;
- email correspondence with editors;
- email correspondence with co-authors;
- letters of agreement with organizations regarding data collection;
- affidavits from academic colleagues with whom you may have discussed this work;
- affidavits from business contacts in organizations in which you collected data or conducted field interviews;
- your doctoral dissertation and associated documentation (if you or the plagiarizer drew upon your dissertation)

Dated materials are particularly important in this situation since they can serve as the strongest evidence of your original authorship. But even your analysis to establish plagiarism may assist you here. For example, one victim's bibliography cited an obscure foreign-language source which was highly unlikely to be available to the alleged plagiarist. This proved to be a strong piece of evidence that the plagiarist could not be the original author.
The above suggests in the first instance that an excellent defensive measure against a future act of plagiarism is to conscientiously maintain a paper trail. Set up a file and accumulate in it all documentation related to the research and publication. For computer files, save and back up early drafts. But failing this, and especially if the important documents such as editorial correspondence are missing, you may have to request copies from the editors in question. Unfortunately, as editors serve for only a few years and may well destroy documents pertaining to their service, copies of such correspondence may simply be unavailable.

Notify Your Administrative Head

It may be unwise for you to directly contact your alleged plagiarizer. Doing so may expose you to threats of legal action, pleadings for sympathy and understanding, or otherwise bring you into a relationship with the plagiarizer which may affect your ability to behave in your best interests. Furthermore, having your institution act on your behalf gives you legal protection if you have acted in "good faith". In other words, if there are legal repercussions, your university will deal with them. For these reasons, and the general perception in the legal community that pursuing damages for plagiarism is not worthwhile, there may be limited value, if any, in obtaining private legal counsel to seek legal protection or to pursue damages. In general, your main objective at this stage is to have your dean bring pressure to bear on the plagiarizer by registering a formal complaint with the plagiarizer's dean while you stay out of the direct line of fire.

Hence, as the next step in moving forward, meet with your dean and department head. Present the evidence you have gathered regarding the plagiarism and your proof of original authorship. Make this formal request for assistance to the dean in writing. Make no direct accusation no matter how strong your evidence. Simply point out the facts including the similarities between the publications involved and the evidence regarding your original authorship. As suggested earlier,

keep in mind that the dean will probably have never dealt with plagiarism previously and is likely to be unclear as to how to proceed. At the same time however, most institutions have policies and procedures in place to deal with all forms of academic misconduct including plagiarism. Making your dean aware of your own institution's procedures will serve to educate the dean that similar mechanisms will likely exist at the institution of the alleged plagiarizer, and that your dean can trigger such mechanisms by lodging a complaint with the plagiarizer's dean. Suggest also to your dean the wisdom of discussing the matter with the academic vice president of your University as well as the University's legal counsel before lodging the complaint.

The dean's complaint letter must draw upon your evidence of the alleged plagiarism and your original authorship. The letter must contain sufficient evidence, and suggest that other evidence is available, to convince the alleged plagiarizer's dean that an investigation is in order. The dean's letter should also indicate the remedy you seek, i.e., a letter of apology, a letter notifying the respective journal editors, and so on. There is little purpose in suggesting internal punishments, including dismissal, as these will be mandated by the respondent's (i.e., the alleged plagiarist's) university policies. Your dean will have to exercise some judgment as to the most convincing evidence to include while making a commitment, subject to your agreement, to provide the remaining evidence should a formal investigation require it. Furthermore, again, as the respondent's dean is likely to be similarity inexperienced, your dean may be able to expedite matters by suggesting that the other dean investigate local processes for dealing with complaints of academic misconduct. The most likely outcome is that the respondent's dean will meet with the respondent for some explanation. This may possibly result in some effort by the plagiarist to contact you directly either by telephone or electronic mail. Avoid any such discussion or interaction for the reasons mentioned previously.

Depending on the inclinations of the respondent's dean, hard information as to progress may be difficult to come by. If the respondent's dean lodges a formal complaint of academic misconduct, action on the case may take months.

Notify the Editors

Your next objective is to engage the editors of the appropriate journals or conference proceedings in your campaign for redress. This includes editors of both the publication in which your article appeared and the publication in which the plagiarism appeared. (We acknowledge the more difficult challenge you may face in the event that your manuscript was never accepted for publication but later saw print under someone else's authorship.) The editors need to be sensitized to the negative appearance of being involved in a plagiarism case, possible copyright transgressions, and your desire for a remedy in the form of a public correction of original authorship and removal of the offending article. In general, as with deans, assume the editors will have little idea as to how to handle your case (though editors are more likely to have dealt with previous plagiarism events than deans have).

As in meeting with your dean, submit a formal letter to the editors providing evidence of both the plagiarism and your original authorship. And as with the letter to your dean, make no specific allegations. Rather, describe as carefully as you can the various similarities between the two articles and the most convincing evidence that you are the original author. Provide documentation as required to best make your case. Then suggest that the editors contact the author of the offending piece and the author's dean for an explanation of the similarities and for evidence of original authorship. Suggest also that the editors remind the respondent of the potentially severe penalties which may flow from such cases and that a swift resolution of the issue may be best for all parties concerned. Point out to the editors that among the "severe penalties" of which the respondent should be made aware are possible (U.S.) statutory damages of up to $100,000 for each copyright infringement (see *Copyright Law and Scholarly Electronic Publishing*, Office of General Counsel, University of Texas System, 1996)

Indicate what actions you would like the editors to undertake by way of personal remedy. For an electronic journal, this would likely include removal of the entire offending article from the archive with an authorship correction to appear in its place along with a link to your original article; for a hardcopy journal, an announcement regarding the plagiarism and your original authorship and discontinuance of reprints of the offending article. Last, request that you be kept regularly informed as to how your complaint is being dealt with.

When an instance of plagiarism lags the publication of the original piece by several years, both the plagiarist's source and the original authorship may be easily established. But if this is not the case, you may be particularly interested in knowing how the plagiarist gained access to your manuscript. One possibility is that your manuscript may have come into the hands of the plagiarist while the plagiarist served as a reviewer for any of the publications to which you submitted your work. Though you should not expect the editors to divulge the names of the reviewers, you could nonetheless request that they check as to whether or not the other author did in fact serve as a reviewer of your paper. While you may get no immediate response, should the editors discover that the other party reviewed the paper, they may find your case even more compelling. More important however, they may decide to inform the respondent and the dean that they are aware the respondent had access to the original manuscript as a reviewer. You should also sensitize the editors to the importance of moving on your complaint with dispatch as a means of reassuring the scholarly community that plagiarism will not be tolerated among the ranks of the reviewers for their journal.

Note that you are under no obligation to inform the editors that you have also initiated an inquiry through your dean. In fact doing so might result in the journal editors choosing to await an outcome from the respondent's academic institution. Instead, your goal is to have all editors involved make contact with both the plagiarizer and the dean to increase the pressure to resolve the case either through an admission of guilt or through a formal investigation at the respondent's institution.

Be Patient!

Depending on how the plagiarist and other actors in the piece behave, your complaint may be resolved within weeks or may take many months. If the plagiarist somehow acted innocently, suffers from some serious personal problems, used uncharacteristically bad judgment under pressure, or simply loses the nerve to mount a defense, the situation may be wrapped up quickly. This is not an uncommon occurrence considering the difficulty of establishing a falsehood if hard evidence exists regarding the truth. However, if the plagiarist chooses instead to deny having plagiarized and opts to be subjected to some kind of formal inquiry, a resolution will take time. Furthermore, if the case is complicated, the inquiry may never produce a resolution to your satisfaction. Your work is done, aside from perhaps being required to provide additional documentary evidence regarding your case.

GUIDELINES FOR AN EDITOR OF AN AIS JOURNAL OR PROCEEDINGS

Journal editors are the critical arbiters in deciding what peer-reviewed work enters the public record. The peer viewing process must of course be fair but so too must the process for dealing with disputes over authorship. A single messy mishandled case of plagiarism can sully the reputation of a journal for years. Yet plagiarism is an uncommon experience and consequently you may be uncertain as to how to deal with it. The guidelines proposed below enable you to obtain "arm's-length" advice in assessing the apparent legitimacy of a serious complaint and suggest how to bring about a formal investigation. The expression "serious complaint" implies that the guidelines below are intended only to deal with those cases which you as an editor are unable to sort out and/or which may be serious enough to require AIS to lodge a formal complaint with the alleged plagiarist's university. Situations less serious such as those which you may be able to resolve in correspondence with authors will not require these guidelines.

Contact the Association for Information Systems and Other Editor

Common sense would suggest that a plagiarist would have no interest in drawing attention to his fraudulent activities and is therefore unlikely to initiate the first complaint. Or to put it the other way around, the individual first registering a complaint of plagiarism is likely the original author. However, the many different ways by which plagiarism can occur can give rise to disputes over which reasonable persons can disagree. By the same token, there is also the possibility, however remote, that mischief may be afoot and your good editorial offices are being unwittingly recruited in the act.

Whether you have published an article that is alleged to be plagiarism or alternatively is alleged to have been plagiarized elsewhere, your eventual responsibilities are the same -- to establish if plagiarism has occurred, determine who is the original author, and provide such remedy as is appropriate for the injured party and your journal. If the plagiarism allegation came in the form of a complaint from an author, request whatever evidence the complainant has available to establish the plagiarism and original authorship. Unless the evidence looks patently frivolous and clearly without merit, contact the AIS president and request that the Standing Committee on Member Misconduct promptly examines the evidence and takes further action as required. The principle here is that as the journal of which you are editor is directly involved, and you may have been personally involved in accepting one of the articles, an arms-length group should decide how to proceed. (Note that if you have received information from some source other than a complainant that plagiarism may have occurred but it is unclear as to who is the original author, you are advised to contact both parties and request evidence on behalf of the Committee). Also, notify the editor of the other journal involved (if appropriate) of the possibility of plagiarism and cite the articles and authors in question.

Committee on Academic Misconduct Considers Evidence

The requirement of the Committee is to decide if: 1) insufficient evidence has been submitted to conclude that either plagiarism or authorship issues are in dispute; or 2) sufficient evidence has been submitted to justify a further inquiry. In the former case, the Committee should so inform the complainant and suggest that if more convincing evidence is available it must be provided before the Committee will take any further action. In the latter case, the Committee should contact the author named in the complaint (and that author's dean) and request an explanation of the apparent similarities between the articles in question and ask for evidence of original authorship. The Committee should make clear however that no conclusion has been reached regarding any of the issues in the case, but that if a satisfactory explanation is not provided promptly, the Committee may request a formal investigation by the respondent's university.

Committee Requests Formal Inquiry

If the respondent disputes the complaint and provides counter evidence, this new evidence will be examined by the Committee. Once again, the Committee should advise one of two courses of action: 1) that insufficient evidence exists to warrant recommending any further action on the part of the Association and the original authorship is no longer in dispute; or 2) that sufficient evidence exists, or that important aspects of the evidence are sufficiently in dispute, to warrant requesting a formal investigation. The Committee may also consider the option of referring the matter back to the editor should the Committee feel the editor may be able to effect a solution acceptable to all parties. In either case, both the complainant and the respondent shall be informed by the Committee and if further action is decided upon, the Committee shall write to the appropriate dean requesting a formal investigation by the University. This should trigger the institutional mechanisms present at that institution for the investigation of academic misconduct.

Note that in the above scheme, neither the editor nor the Association for Information Systems as the journal sponsors/publisher undertakes the final adjudication of the matter. This approach recognizes the very limited resources available to the Association, especially problematic in time-

consuming complex cases, and depends upon the academic institutions with their greater resources and ability to command evidence to bring about a final resolution. The process also shifts the legal exposure to Association officers (who enjoy legal protection unlike editors) and to the institution of the alleged plagiarist. This is clearly a compromise as far as the Association and the journal are concerned since it also shifts the initiative for a final decision regarding the alleged plagiarism to the investigating University. However this process may be fairer to the individual being investigated since institutional mechanisms will provide the opportunity for a personal appearance by the respondent, appeals to the process, and protection of the respondent's rights through the participation of a faculty association representative. Last, also note that should the Committee decide at any stage to take no further action, this in no way precludes the alleged victim from directly requesting a formal inquiry from the alleged plagiarist's university.

The Editor Undertakes Redress

If the case becomes resolved either by an admission of misconduct by one of the parties (such as by a resignation or letter of apology) or by an institutional investigation, the editor must now take steps to redress the injustice done to the victim. As indicated in Guidelines for the Victim, for an electronic journal, this would likely include removal of the entire offending article from the archive with an authorship correction to appear in its place along with a link to the author's original article; for a hardcopy journal, an announcement regarding the plagiarism and the original authorship and discontinuance of reprints of the offending article. In any case, the editor should fully consult with the author as to the redress desired. The Association may also wish to consider further disciplinary steps which might include revoking the offender's AIS membership and barring that author from publishing in any of the Association's journals or proceedings or from registering at any of the Association's sponsored conferences. Last, national and local funding agencies should be informed if plagiarism has been established.

Closing Comments

The guidelines above are perhaps most suitable for cases where documentary evidence can be obtained to establish authorship with a high degree of certainty. However, plagiarism cases occur in varying degrees of severity and in many different forms. In cases where the plagiarism is less egregious, more difficult to ascertain, disputable, or the complainant can be satisfied by a modest solution, less formal remedies and processes should be used if possible.

VIII. IDEAS FOR CODES OF CONDUCT, PRACTICE AND ETHICS

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Organisations like the ACM, BCS, IEEE and APA have extensive and detailed codes of conduct and codes of practice. These may extend to tens of pages and reams of detail. They certainly cover plagiarism-type issues, but much more as well. It seems that plagiarism issues are best dealt with within a more general code of ethics, rather than separately, for the simple reason that it is the more general code of conduct/practice/ethics that stipulates preferred behaviour and identifies penalties for infringements.

These codes are often prefaced by the generally identified responsibilities of members of the society, i.e.: contribute to society, avoid harming others, be honest/trustworthy, be fair and avoid discriminating, honour copyrights, patents and other forms of intellectual property, respect the privacy of other people, and be sure to safe guard confidentiality. Plagiarism certainly comes under one or more of these general responsibilities, and so penalties will also be so subsumed.

Most of these general clauses are probably not so controversial, though of course the devil is in the details – or lack of details. What does become apparent is that all of these codes seek to standardise a set of behaviours for their members. This is much easier said than done, and

practically much easier to implement when the members are located within a single national/societal or professional culture. When there are members from different professions, then definitions vary and relative weight varies. When there are members from different societal cultures, then this introduces complications of a different nature, i.e. in the very moral ethos that pervades the society where those people live. Certainly, it cannot be assumed that similar moral standards apply universally. Whilst that is also easy to observe, it is much harder to be specific about what the differences are – and at the same time to avoid stereotyping people with terminology that is gratuitous at best, offensive or discriminatory. Some form of survey of the membership is essential if we are to reach even the most fragmentary and partial agreement on what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. I am wary of the notion that some of us are more ethical than others – and therefore have some innate right to develop standards which should apply over others. Each of us has his/her own standards or principles, and each of us applies these principles in daily life. But each of these sets of principles forms the basis for an individual approach to ethics and decision making. Reaching consensus on ethical principles is highly desirable, but the effort implied by this objective should not be underestimated.

All that said, I do think that codes are important. My personal belief is that simpler codes are more likely to be read, to be understood and to be implemented in both word and spirit. The APA solution is certainly comprehensive (see attached file), but I doubt anyone reads it – and in this sense it fails. The best form of enforcement, in my view, is the form that minimises the bureaucratic overhead, and this is self-enforcement; enforcement that is premised on an understanding of what the code entails, broad agreement (by each individual member) with the spirit of the code and the intent to do one's best to abide by it. In the same spirit, if external enforcement does become necessary, then it needs to follow concise and precise guidelines – with an appropriate forum for appeals.

Considering the codes promulgated by the various professional societies, I found the BCS' separation of code of conduct and code of practice to be a useful model to consider emulating. These two relatively short documents are attached. The code of conduct is a more general document, with various proscribed and prescribed behaviours identified. The code of practice applies in greater detail to the practice of being, in the case of the BCS, a chartered computer engineer or IS professional (the BCS includes both computer scientists and information systems professionals).

Most societies are extremely unspecific and short on details when it comes to the penalties. It might appear that members know the rules and abide by them. The lack of detail is indicative of the caution with which the societies approach the whole issue, which I assume to be fraught with legal consequence, liability, potential for being sued, etc. My personal feeling on penalties is, as with codes themselves, one that favours simplicity. It seems that the most simple operationalisation is one that mandates an annual 'renewal of membership' process. Such a renewal is by invitation – one has to be a bona fide member, essentially, who has paid dues and followed the rules. I acknowledge that this may somewhat detract from our much vaunted academic freedom, not to say other freedoms, and may even be seen as dictatorial by those accustomed to challenge authority at every available juncture, but it is more or less workable. The members whom we don't want to re-invite, we don't re-invite. It avoids legally unpleasant details such as guilt and so the potential for litigation. I note that the AIS is incorporated in the US (I forget which State), and so evidently this kind of recommendation has to be verified within the legal environment in that jurisdiction.

I do note that any system of penalties can only be enforced against members (and potential members if you like). People who do not belong can do what they like – in that any AIS code will not apply to them. Whether non-members can ask for an investigation of a member I leave to the Ethics Committee.

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APPENDIX I. CODES OF CONDUCT, PRACTICE, AND ETHICS

Note: The following is an alphabetical list of URLs where codes of conduct, practice, and ethics referred to in Section V can be found.

Academy of Management http://www.aomonline.org/
Code of Ethical Conduct: http://www.aomonline.org/aom.asp?ID=&page_ID=54

American Psychological Association (APA) http://www.apa.org
Ethics Office: http://www.apa.org/ethics/homepage.html
2002 Code of Ethics: http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html

Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) – http://www.acm.org
Code of Ethics: http://www.acm.org/constitution/code.html

British Computer Society (BCS) http://www.bcs.org
Code of Conduct: http://www1.bcs.org.uk/portal/showSection.asp?contentid=3224&link=/
DocsRepository/03200/3224/default.htm
Code of Practice: http://www1.bcs.org.uk/portal/showSection.asp?contentid=3223&link=/
DocsRepository/03200/3223/default.htm

Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) http://www.ieee.org
Code of Ethics: http://www.ieee.org/portal/ index.jsp?pageID=corp_level1&path=about/
whatis&file=code.xml&xsl=generic.xsl