

# Understanding plagiarism in the modern academic world



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Plagiarism: Whose Fault Is It? Plagiarism is nowadays considered a plague in the academic world. An issue of growing importance, plagiarism seems to be on the rise in institutes of higher education, especially in those countries where research is considered the heart and soul of modern living. The United States, Great Britain, and Australia are all suffering from the plague. The increase of plagiarism in institutes of higher education in the United Kingdom has been accompanied by significant changes in the university systems.

In particular, as elite systems have turned into mass systems, plagiarism has increased. Therefore, many researchers are of the opinion that the reasons for the increase of plagiarism may differ from country to country. Plagiarism could be on the rise across the western world, in particular, because of “changing methods of assessment – with a reduced role for formal, invigilated examinations; and the greater place now given to various kinds of coursework (for example, term papers) and projects (Ashworth, Bannister, and Thorne 187).”

The “centrality of communication and information technology in student learning” has also been held as a culprit, as the Internet allows students to easily cut and paste (Ashworth, Bannister, and Thorne 188). Of course, plagiarism is considered another form of cheating in the academic setting. Thousands of American students have reported having cheated in college. Also in the United States, cheating has increased in schools over the last thirty years.

Psychologists believe that cheating is especially rampant in those academic institutions where the focus of the student is placed on extrinsic factors and performance rather than mastery and improvement. Students who worry

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about school are also known to engage in cheating (Anderman, Griesinger, and Westerfield). Webster's New World Dictionary defines cheating as "being dishonest or deceitful (Carpenter et al. ). " In the academic setting, this equates to a deliberate attempt to deceive the instructor with regards to work that is apparently completed by the student (Carpenter et al.).

Even so, students do not learn cheating in the womb. Rather, it is society that teaches cheating to young people. In the home, cheating is understood as the deception of a spouse in terms of extramarital affairs. It is in this context that Green has mentioned ex-president Bill Clinton in his book, *Lying, Cheating, and Stealing: A Moral Theory of White-Collar Crime*. But, cheating may be observed on the streets of America as well. Drug dealers are cheating the government by engaging in illegal behavior day after day.

And, numerous other people are engaging in cheating behavior to gain unfair (financial) advantages. A few years ago, headlines around the nation were reading that firms such as Worldcom, Enron, Global Crossing and Arthur Anderson had failed to meet the American expectations of straightforward transparency in financial affairs (Whalen). As a matter of fact, cheating is the direct opposite of honest, straightforward behavior. According to one of the country's leading sociobiologists, Robert Trivers, cheating occurs when an individual receives benefits that are not reciprocated (Brown).

Hence, enjoying the company of one's child and later becoming a deadbeat dad; using the benefits of other people's credit cards through credit card fraud; in addition to receiving A's on college projects by presenting other people's work to one's teachers - are all different forms of cheating practiced in the United States today. Regardless of the examples, however, it is <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-plagiarism-in-the-modern-academic-world/>

obvious that cheating may be learned behavior, and society is at least partly if not wholly responsible for teaching young people to be dishonest.

Plagiarism and Copyrights Plagiarism in the academic world is undoubtedly connected to copyrights law of the twenty first century. There are various legal and ethical principles involved in the consideration of both academic integrity policies and copyrights law. Both are interconnected, seeing that they both require appropriate use of the works of others, where the rights of the original creators of works are given due respect and credit. Copyright infringement is punished through courts of law.

On the other hand, the university's academic integrity policy allows for strict action on the part of the university when and where plagiarism is detected in a research produced by a student. This kind of punishment may include suspension, or a student may be expelled because of academic dishonesty (Whitley and Keith). Both copyrights law and the university's academic integrity policy on plagiarism prohibits the use of other people's works by passing them on as one's own. What is more, fair or appropriate use of copyrighted material by academic institutions must be limited.

In other words, academic institutions or teachers who need to quote the works of others may only use small portions of the works. This concept of fair use in copyrights law maintains that the creative works of others may only be used for non-commercial educational or research purposes. Otherwise, the copyrights law requires that permission must be sought from the copyrights holder for use of original content. If this permission is not obtained, the entity responsible for the use of copyrighted material without permission may very well be sued.

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Even though academic institutions have limited budgets for research, the copyright law will not make exceptions to this rule (Whitley and Keith). This may be one of the reasons why academic institutions are getting stricter by the day checking their students' work for plagiarism. In other words, they are doing unto others as others are doing unto them. Despite the guidelines on fair use of copyrighted material, many scholars have found themselves facing courts of law with respect to copyrights infringement. The Joyce Estate, which protects the copyrights of James Joyce's works, has recently sued a scholar of Joyce.

In this case, as well as others, the copyrights lawyers would be expected to look into the crossing of boundaries with respect to the scholar's fair use of copyrighted material. Did the scholar use more copyrighted material than allowed? And, is the scholar about to use the copyrighted material for non-educational or commercial purposes? - These are the questions posed by courts of law involved in cases of copyrights infringement. Scholars that are found to cross the line with regards to fair use may very well have to be punished (Whitley and Keith).

Moreover, as suggested previously, the current climate surrounding copyrights infringement laws is influencing scholars to punish their students whenever the latter are found to have performed cut and paste jobs. In cases of fair use of copyrighted material, as well as in cases where the user of copyrighted material has sought permission from the copyrights holder, the law requires that the user of the copyrighted material must appropriately acknowledge that the work that is used is actually a creation of a particular creator, for example, an author.

This is where copyrights law converges with the university's academic integrity policy regarding paraphrasing and plagiarism. According to this policy, when a student employs the words, ideas, expressions, opinions, or research findings of others, he or she must give appropriate credit to the original sources. Otherwise, he or she may be punished by the university for academic dishonesty, just as the unfair user of copyrighted material has to be punished under the copyrights law.

A punishment for academic dishonesty is absolutely legitimate, according to many an educator, possibly frustrated by the strictness of the copyright laws that just would not allow him or her to use available material with the assumption that everything in the Father's Kingdom is free (Whitley and Keith). Educators condemn academic dishonesty with the belief that the teaching of ethics is one of the basic reasons for the establishment of educational systems anyway. Honest students are expected to turn into honest citizens in the future.

Academic dishonesty must be checked if society seeks to benefit itself through education. Thus, universities require students to properly acknowledge the sources of their gathered information in the academic papers they are given to work on. According to the policy on plagiarism and paraphrasing, no student is allowed to copy the words of another, unless it is indicated that the words are quotations. Moreover, all ideas of others that are used in academic papers must be paraphrased if not used as quotes.

The original sources are duly acknowledged by means of citations in APA, MLA and other formats (Whitley and Keith). All the same, educators are powerless in terms of checking cheating in the entire human society that <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-plagiarism-in-the-modern-academic-world/>

teaches young people to do away with their ideas of ethics altogether whenever they need to. In any case, copyright laws differ from the university's academic integrity policy because these laws do not only cover academic uses of material. Rather, copyright law is one of the five main types of intellectual property law in the United States.

Intellectual property also includes trademarks, trade secrets, patents, and licenses that the student does not generally have anything to do with. All the same, the honest student who turns into an honest businessman in the near future may very well have to become acquainted with these elements of the copyright law. Once again, educators expect that it is only the honest businessman who followed the academic integrity policy at university and also the copyrights law in business who would ultimately benefit society. In short, dishonesty does not make for good citizenship no matter what (Whitley and Keith).

Research has revealed that a vast number of students will admit to cheating when asked. The Internet has contributed to plagiarism as cut and paste jobs have become highly popular with students who have to turn in term papers. Many students also use the services of term paper writing companies, although the university is typically unable to detect this form of plagiarism. In addition, students who engage in cheating do not feel that it is bad practice. After all, plagiarism and other forms of academic cheating are of benefit to them whenever they can get away with them (Whitley and Keith).

The university's academic integrity policy to check plagiarism is, therefore, considered crucial. By threatening students with suspension or expulsion, it is expected to reduce cheating. Indeed, research has further revealed that <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-plagiarism-in-the-modern-academic-world/>

the university's academic integrity policy with respect to plagiarism and paraphrasing has in fact reduced cheating, and also fostered in students the need for academic honesty. Apparently, students enjoy appropriate use of other people's works. It also helps them to personally take credit for their own works.

By knowing that they have worked hard on their own projects and only used the works of others when they gave the latter due credit, students increase in self-efficacy (Ashworth, Bannister, and Thorne). These students also meet the society's definition of educated beings, that is, individuals who can honestly follow principles to benefit society. It is expected that honest students who do not plagiarize would turn into honest citizens of the future that follow the copyrights law to boot. Otherwise, copyrights infringement would be punished by the courts of law.

This is, as a matter of fact, a deterrent on the misuse of other people's works, just as the university's academic integrity policy threatens the student with suspension or expulsion when a student is guilty of plagiarism and the university finds out about it (Whitley and Keith). Confused About Plagiarism What if the student does not know enough about plagiarism to allow the academic integrity policy to benefit him or her? In other words, it is not possible that plagiarism is on the increase at the same time as academic integrity policies are stopping students from plagiarism.

What is really going on? Researchers wonder whether most students truly understand the implications of plagiarism (Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald). Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald have conducted research on students' understanding of plagiarism. The authors report their findings <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-plagiarism-in-the-modern-academic-world/>



thus: As plagiarism is a notion specific to a particular culture and epoch, and is also understood in a variety of ways by individuals, particular attention must be paid to the putting of the phenomenological question, What is plagiarism in its appearing?

Resolution of this issue leads us to locate students' perceptions and opinions within the lifeworld, and to seek an initially idiographic set of descriptions. Of twelve interview analyses, three are presented. (a) A student who took an especially anxious line, his morality having to do with the fear of being shamed were he to be accused of plagiarism in his work. (b) A student who saw academic development as the movement from dependence on respected authors such that the novice's work is near plagiaristic, to autonomy and self-assured originality.

(c) A student whose degree involved painting and art history — disciplines with very distinct understandings of plagiarism. To combat plagiarism, then, one must not assume that students have a prior grasp of the unequivocal meaning of the notion, but must accept that a process of acculturation is required (Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald 259). Plagiarism seems to be on the increase because universities have failed to explain academic integrity policies to their students as they should (Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald). Even if plagiarism is decreasing because of these policies, the problem is still on the rise.

So, whose fault is it? Of course, “ the ideological basis of all academic work is that a creative, original individual has, as an autonomous scholar, presented his work to the public in his or her own name (Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald 260). ” Based on this ideological foundation, the study of <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-plagiarism-in-the-modern-academic-world/>

Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald reveals that students who avoid plagiarism and those who do not, are doing what they do because of several distinct reasons. Most importantly, research shows that students who avoid plagiarism are not academically honest because of the academic integrity policies alone.

As a matter of fact, the first of the reasons for the avoidance of plagiarism, as pointed out by the authors, concerns the issue of individuality or selfhood, whereby a student wishes that his or her voice should be perceived as being distinct from others'. The student who avoids plagiarism for this reason understands that everybody's use of language has certain characteristics - like individual fingerprints - that cannot be copied by others. Furthermore, the student has a well developed notion of selfhood.

To put it another way, the student has experienced himself as having " a presence and an agency along with a voice (Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald 260). " The first student whose interview analysis was presented in the study by Ashworth, Freewood, and Macdonald was lacking in this respect as compared to the other two. Academic integrity policies are expected to have worked wonders in making that student produce honest work. Conclusion Ashworth, Freewood and Macdonald further report that there are plenty of students who truly do not understand plagiarism or the academic integrity policies.

Perhaps, therefore, plagiarism should be explained to students time and again. What is more, educators would find it worthwhile to relate plagiarism to copyrights law in their lectures on academic honesty. By helping their students understand that they are only doing unto the students what is done

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unto the educators, the latter are expected to get their point across. Lastly, educators should try to practice the art of forgiving and forgetting students the first time that they are found to have cheated. After all, society is partly, if not wholly responsible for teaching cheating to young people.