

## Using Academic Sources Responsibly

### Understanding Plagiarism

Most professional style manuals devote considerable space to citations and references, practices that give writers a formal, recognizable way to acknowledge their use of other writers' thinking, research, and arguments. Correct attribution of words, ideas, and concepts is very important to practicing researchers, since the accusation of plagiarism can lead to loss of a job, a reputation, and the chance for professional advancement.

The Modern Language Association (MLA) is the largest professional association of English and foreign language professors. Here is the definition of plagiarism from that organization's style manual for students, a definition that closely resembles definitions of plagiarism used in most American universities:

From "Documentation and Plagiarism":

Derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* ("kidnapper"), to *plagiarize* means "to commit literary theft" and to "present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* [11th ed.; 2003; print]). Plagiarism involves two kinds of wrongs. Using another person's ideas, information, or expressions without acknowledging that person's work constitutes intellectual theft. Passing off another person's ideas, information, or expressions as your own to get a better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud. Plagiarism is sometimes a moral and ethical offense rather than a legal one since some instances of plagiarism fall outside the scope of copyright infringement, a legal offense. . . .

A complex society that depends on well-informed citizens strives to maintain high standards of quality and reliability for documents that are publicly circulated and used in government, business, industry, the professions, higher education, and the media. Because research has the power to affect opinions and actions, responsible writers compose their work with great care. They specify when they refer to another author's ideas, facts, and words, whether they want to agree with, object to, or analyze the source. This kind of documentation not only recognizes the work writers do; it also

tends to discourage the circulation of error, by inviting readers to determine for themselves whether a reference to another text presents a reasonable account of what that text says. Plagiarists undermine these important public values. Once detected, plagiarism in a work provokes skepticism and even outrage among readers, whose trust in the author has been broken.

The charge of plagiarism is a serious one for all writers. Plagiarists are often seen as incompetent—incapable of developing and expressing their own thoughts—or worse, dishonest, willing to deceive others for personal gain. When professional writers, such as journalists, are exposed as plagiarists, they are likely to lose their jobs, and they are certain to suffer public embarrassment and loss of prestige. Almost always, the course of a writer's career is permanently affected by a single act of plagiarism. The serious consequences of plagiarism reflect the value the public places on trustworthy information. (*MLA Handbook*, 52–53)

Many experts in plagiarism distinguish between two types of plagiarism:

- Deliberate cheating, that is, buying, borrowing, or stealing a paper and handing it in as your own, with or without minor revisions;
- Questionable research practices, that is, using undocumented or poorly documented pieces from various sources, without distinguishing clearly among quotation, paraphrase, and summary, and without citing the sources properly (Howard, "Plagiarism").<sup>1</sup>

Clearly the first category describes acts of deception; there is no way to give a citation for a purchased or borrowed paper. The second kind is more closely described in the passage from the *MLA Handbook*: the failure to give credit to the researchers who preceded you. This kind of plagiarism can have consequences as serious as outright deception, and it can be harder to be sure when you are doing it. It also raises questions of motivation (honest mistake, hasty composition, conscious importing of chunks of other texts to fill in blanks) that can be hard to judge fairly. It is crucial in academic writing to learn to avoid misuse and miscitation of sources—accidental or not. Other kinds of writing also demand similar care about the "ownership" of writing. See, for example, the pieces in the Readings by Robert Rivard and Doris Kearns Goodwin.

## PLAGIARISM AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Notice that the *MLA Handbook* considers plagiarism to be an *ethical issue*, not a *legal issue*. According to professional ethicist Michael Davis, ethics are a matter of group consensus: "*Ethics consists of those standards of conduct that, all things considered, every member of a particular group wants every other member to follow even if their following them would mean he has to follow them*" (25, his italics). Even though ethical violations may not always be criminal (i.e., against the law), you may face blame, sanctions, or expulsion from a profession, school, or other group if you violate its ethics; simply not knowing the rules is usually not an excuse. University faculty adhere to the professional ethics established by their discipline and university, and students are expected to follow similar ethical standards. Two of the most serious ethical violations for students and professional researchers alike are fabricating data or evidence and submitting someone else's work

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as their own. By enrolling in a university and then registering for classes, students acknowledge compliance with its standards of ethical behavior, which are usually spelled out in the college catalog and/or student handbook. By the time they get to college, most students know that plagiarism can get them into big trouble: failure on a paper or in a course, or even suspension or expulsion from the university. But they may not know why.

## FACULTY AND PLAGIARISM

Why would university faculty care so much about "using another person's ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source" that they would give up the convenience of doing so in their own work? Faculty members have a very strong concern about plagiarism because many of them depend on their writing as well as on their teaching for their position in the university and for their reputation in their profession. If someone publishes another researcher's ideas as his or her own, the person who initially did the work does not get credit for considerable time and effort and may lose out on the real, material rewards that can come from academic research: promotions, salary increases, professional honors, and awards. Therefore, professors are willing to expend time and effort on giving credit to their sources, and they expect their students and colleagues to do the same. In Michael Davis's terms, the advantages of having colleagues who are careful about crediting sources are worth the bother of exerting that kind of care themselves.

Intellectual property can also be a workplace issue. Because the origins and ownership of ideas is so very important in contemporary American life and work, it is generally expected that people who have made it through college, or into positions where they do work that involves writing, understand that they cannot represent someone else's work as their own. The consequences of plagiarism in the workplace are often harsh. For example, Robert Rivard's op-ed piece in the Readings shows the scorn of an editor for a colleague who did not follow the basic ethical expectation that a journalist (even a weatherman) does not represent another person's work as his own. Rivard absolutely rejects the pleas of the audience who would overlook what he sees as the weather broadcaster's clear violation of journalistic ethics.

## STUDENTS AND PLAGIARISM

One of the ways the ethics of intellectual property directly concerns students is that the student who turns in someone else's work as his or her own may be gaining an unfair advantage over students who do their own work. However, there is another reason why students should care about plagiarism. The university is a teaching institution, and one of its functions is to give students credentials—a diploma. Most of the people who may become your employers or clients assume that a diploma means that a college graduate has adequately mastered certain advanced skills and acquired certain knowledge. The student who passes off another's work as his or her own may not have achieved this mastery. This pretense of learning cheats the students who have actually mastered the material sufficiently to be able to write about it; moreover, it is dangerous, since our world runs on the assumption that people credentialed as experts actually have expertise. Would you want to drive your car over a bridge built by someone who

plagiarized her work in an engineering course? Again, looking back to Davis's definition of ethics, the advantages of living in a world in which credentials have real meaning is worth the effort of actually requiring students to write their own papers—not just download them. It pays to avoid plagiarism because the consequences—for people in the workplace as well as students—can be very grim, at best tremendously embarrassing and at worst severely damaging to a career.

### Some Reasons Students Plagiarize

Four common reasons students plagiarize are as follows:

1. They do not understand the conventions of citation in the university or in a particular field.
2. They run out of time and panic.
3. They do not understand the material they are working with well enough to summarize and respond to it effectively.
4. They do not consider themselves to be part of the ethical community that rejects plagiarism and believe that cheating is acceptable if it leads to academic success.

Not much can be done about reason 4. From what we read in the newspapers, this is made to seem a common attitude among students, but instructors with considerable classroom experience know that while it exists, it is not as common as some people claim. Students in group 4 operate under a different set of warrants than the rest of the university, and unless those warrants can be changed, nothing much can be done except policing them. Much more common, in most instructors' experience, are students who do not document sources appropriately for the first three reasons, which are often combined.

It takes a long time to master citation practices, and many students get hung up on small points like how to punctuate references. The small points are important to maintaining a professional ethos, but the most important aspects of citation are to let a reader go back to your sources and to place your ideas in the context of what others in the field have said and done. In order to learn when and how to cite sources, reading a style guide is a start. But to become really proficient, you need to ask questions of your instructors and to notice how other writers use sources and identify them.

Sometimes students are tempted to buy or borrow a paper because they run out of time. It is easy to say that students should always leave themselves plenty of time to write. However, there is no one who has not, at one time or another, run out of time and panicked. Nonetheless, panic is not an acceptable reason to purchase or borrow a paper. There are several possibilities if you run out of time to write a paper—none of them are as good as writing a fine paper and getting it in on time, but they are always better than violating academic ethics:

- ✦ Talk to your instructor and request an extension, even if it will mean a lowered grade.
- ✦ Write a mediocre paper. If it is a paper that involves using one or more sources, be sure to cite every source whenever you refer to it. Your paper may not have much independent thought or original response, but it will be better than not having a paper or cheating to obtain one.
- ✦ Ask for the opportunity to revise the paper and get to it immediately.

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Often students put off writing a paper or working on a project because they do not understand the material they are working with. Entering a new field can involve learning a new vocabulary and figuring out new ideas expressed in unfamiliar ways, and this is often very difficult. It's useful to recognize that you are lost early enough to discuss a text with your friends, your instructor, or a tutor. Try reading each source more than once, marking what seem to be important points and annotating it with your questions and responses. Use the Focus Points: Reading Arguments in Chapter 2 (p. 21) to guide your reading, and then discuss your responses. The more you work in a field, the clearer the sources you work with will become, and the easier it will be to respond to them.

## AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

It would be easier to understand and avoid plagiarism if the actual practice of writing were as simple and straightforward as the MLA definition implies. Reread that definition at the beginning of this chapter and consider how clearly it applies to all the kinds of written work you have done or know about.

Like the Texas weather broadcaster in Rivard's piece, a student who downloads an essay from the Web or recycles a piece from the fraternity or sorority files and submits it as his or her own is simply ignoring or defying the ethical standards of the university, and, in the opinion of most university faculty and administrators, fully deserves whatever penalties the university imposes. But understanding and avoiding the more subtle kinds of plagiarism (which might be the result of careless or unclear understanding of using sources) are not always so simple. Even professional writers occasionally run into trouble. From time to time you will read in the press about writers who are accused of "lifting" chunks of their books from previous publications by other authors. Usually they are soundly scorned and chastised by their peers and colleagues, and the book may be withdrawn from publication. At such times, it seems as though it should be a simple enough matter for an author to distinguish between his or her own ideas and someone else's, but sloppy note-taking and recordkeeping can add up to a big, career-endangering mistake even for experienced researchers. Consider, for example, how the allegations of plagiarism against the popular and prolific historical writer Stephen Ambrose severely damaged his reputation. See, in the Readings, the remorseful explanation by historian Doris Kearns Goodwin of her own professional failure, which explains how her plagiarism occurred, without excusing it; also look at Abigail Witherspoon's account of students who willfully violate the ethics of the university.

## USING SOURCES TO ESTABLISH TRUST AND COMMUNITY

Using sources well is a matter of credibility as well as trust. Citation is as much a matter of *using* the authority of acknowledged sources to support your own argument as it is a matter of avoiding theft of intellectual property or misrepresenting your work. By reviewing the previous research to develop a line of argument, researchers demonstrate their understanding of and participation in a field and their involvement in its larger conversations. Academic writing acknowledges and draws on earlier work, and by

citing previous sources, you not only take part in an ongoing conversation but also establish your credibility as a participant. By citing reliable sources, researchers indicate awareness of other participants in the conversation and acknowledge its history, thereby establishing their own ethos, which is the expertise that allows them to take an informed position in the field.

Using sources entails not only bringing these earlier “voices” into a conversation, but also finding a way to write in the language of the field in your own voice—a process, as will be noted in Chapter 6—that takes a long time to perfect.

### **BROADER ISSUES OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: WHO OWNS IDEAS?**

Acknowledging the work of others in your writing is part of an ongoing process of learning and one that requires continual attention. Understanding who really “owns” a piece of writing can be complicated, because writing and learning are not simple acts and are seldom done alone or in discrete units. Students read textbooks for most courses and are expected to repeat and use the information they learn on exams and in papers. Some coursework requires not only imitation but also memorization of texts, definitions, formulae, or processes.

#### **FOCUS POINTS: ORIGINAL IDEAS AND COMMON KNOWLEDGE**

Most “original” ideas come from years of mastering a field of study. Within all fields, there is much “common knowledge,” which is not common for students because they have not yet encountered it. These contradictions are fertile grounds for discussion of how and when claims can be made about the ownership of ideas, as suggested in the questions that follow.

- ✎ To what extent are your ideas your own? How much does your thinking reflect what you have read or heard? Can you always tell the difference between your own thinking and the things you have read or learned?
- ✎ Can you sort out who said what and remember where they said it first? And is there any point in doing so? Once you say or write something, to what extent does it remain yours, and to what extent does it belong to the person who hears or reads it? Is “originality” ever possible?
- ✎ If you find yourself repeating someone else’s idea as your own, to what extent does your intention matter? If a student is supposed to be in a learning situation, isn’t the very point of education to gain ideas and information that you did not have before?
- ✎ What does originality mean if your “own” idea was discovered centuries ago and has been debated for generations, but you did not know about it?
- ✎ To what extent is imitation an important way of learning the basics in a field? When does imitation turn into misuse of someone else’s ideas or violating the author’s copyright? How does memorizing a definition from a textbook and using it to answer an exam question differ from cutting and pasting a definition from an online dictionary into a paper? What kind(s) of attribution are necessary in these cases?

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- How does computer technology change the nature of intellectual property? For example, how does the ease of downloading music, newspaper articles, and pictures change people's understanding of "ownership"?
- How compatible is a free flow of information or a free ranging of mind with a strict policing of ideas?

We learn in ways we are not always totally aware of, extracting ideas and information from lectures, discussions, and brainstorming sessions that we do not always fully remember. During the college years, a student may read hundreds of books and articles. Sometimes students are asked to memorize texts or material, and sometimes they are asked to imitate other writers or speculate about how a writer from the past might have responded to a contemporary situation. All of these are reasons for thinking about intellectual property in a wider framework of common, professional, and personal ideas, a way of thinking that includes, but is not limited to, simply avoiding plagiarism.

### Plagiarism and Imitation

Imitation can be not only a form of flattery, but also a method to learn organization, style, and ease of expression. In the past, memorizing texts and imitating a writer's style were important learning practices—as they still are in some countries and some American schools.

#### Learning through Imitation

In the following passage from his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin describes consciously using imitation to learn to improve his style, understanding, and vocabulary as a writer.

About this time I met with an odd Volume of the Spectator [an English magazine that published literature and social commentary]. I had never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the Writing excellent, and wish'd if possible to imitate it. With that View, I took some of the Papers, and making short Hints of the Sentiment in each Sentence, laid them by a few Days, and then without looking at the Book, tried to complete the Papers again, by expressing each hinted Sentiment at length and as fully as it had been express'd before, in any suitable Words that should come to hand. Then I compar'd my Spectator with the Original, discover'd some of my Faults and corrected them. But I found I wanted a Stock of Words or a Readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquir'd before that time, if I had gone on making Verses, since the continual Occasion for Words of the same Import but of different Length, to suit the Measure, or of different Sound for the Rhyme, would have laid me under a constant Necessity of searching for Variety, and also have to fix that Variety in my Mind, and make me Master of it. Therefore I took some of the Tales and turn'd them into Verse: And after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the Prose, turn'd them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my Collections of Hints into Confusion, and after some Weeks, endeavor'd to reduce them into the best Order, before I began



files look at the practice as sharing a resource, whereas many of the artists and the companies who own the copyright to works of music look at it as sharing resources that the sharers do not actually own, that is, as theft. This issue has led to a renewed and vigorous discussion of the extent to which intellectual property can be owned, of what rights are inherent in that ownership, and of how long that ownership can and should last. Copyright is a limited right, always balanced against "fair use," that is, the right of the public to have access to ideas, information, and entertainment. Copyright protects the right of authors, at least temporarily, to the profits derived from their work, but it does limit the circulation of information. This can be a serious problem in academic research, which depends on access to information. The extent and limits of copyright and fair use are generally determined by civil lawsuits, and rest on the body of legal decisions generated since the first American copyright laws were passed in the nineteenth century. New forms of art and entertainment raise new copyright issues. For example, consider the practice of "sampling" in music. Should it be seen as homage to older recording artists? Imitation? Parody? Or merely theft of the original artist's work? Should the inventiveness of musicians finding new frames for old performances be subordinated to the rights of artists to maintain the integrity of their own performances? There are no easy answers to these questions.

### PLAGIARISM, COLLABORATION, AND TRUST

Collaboration in group projects can complicate issues of who is responsible for what and who owns what part of a written document or of an idea. This issue has immediate application to students, who are often expected to work in research groups or teams. Many students find group work a mixed experience. When everyone contributes to a project with energy and intelligence, group work can be a compelling means of learning. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes group members feel exploited, particularly when some think they are doing more work or higher quality work than other group members. Moreover, group work can lead to disagreements about who owns the documents a group produces, and how such documents should be handled, including the following:

- Should a group member put a document produced by the group into a personal portfolio?
- Should a group member incorporate that document or the research from the group project into a later work to be submitted as her own?
- At what point does an expanded or modified work derived from a group project become the individual's own product?
- If an individual member uses part of the group's work, what kind of documentation or acknowledgement seems fair?

As you work with groups, try to keep track of what constitutes "common knowledge," that is, knowledge generated and shared by the research group or entire class, and what ideas or pieces of work seem to "belong" to an individual person. However, the answers to these questions vary significantly from field to field, and you should keep these questions in mind as you work in various courses and enter your profession.

## USING SOURCES TO ENTER THE CONVERSATION IN A FIELD

In spite of all these issues and disciplinary differences, most instructors agree that students must not only avoid cheating, but also learn to identify the sources that they quote from, paraphrase, or summarize (see Chapter 6). Many college instructors take a hard line on this issue. In many classes, the discussion of plagiarism often boils down to a grim series of warnings about misuse of sources and rules about formatting references. However, the ethics of documentation and citation are not only a set of prohibitions such as “do not download papers from term paper mills” or “do not lift pages or paragraphs from published sources and insert them into papers without adequate references.” Ethical citation is also a means of connecting with and drawing on the knowledge of a field—of an academic community. If you view the use of sources as part of the normal practices of a profession or field of study, a set of practices closely tied to its other activities (like conducting experiments or reading manuscripts), the processes of citation and documentation may seem less like a mountain of busywork and more like a means of establishing a place and a voice in that community. Using sources well shows that you understand the value of research at a university (where original thought is very highly valued) and helps you to place your own writing in the larger context of a field. Using sources well helps you see the circulation of knowledge that takes place as researchers read and respond to each other’s work. A new researcher is entering a conversation in which integrity is expected, and citing previous work serves to indicate shared values and growing expertise.

### Exercises

#### 3.1 PLAGIARISM AND ARGUMENT

Read the piece by Doris Kearns Goodwin in the Readings. Consider how she uses argument to explain and apologize for her mistake. Discuss with a small group the following questions and then write a short response to one or more of them.

1. Goodwin published this piece in *Time*, a popular, high-circulation news magazine, not in a professional journal. Considering the discussion of professional ethics earlier in this chapter, what purpose might addressing this wide popular audience serve?
2. Is the purpose of the piece more to apologize for or to explain her plagiarism? Do you find this to be an acceptable explanation? Is it an effective apology?
3. How does she incorporate an explanation of the work of an historian into the piece? What kind of ethos or professional position does she assume? What effect does this ethos have on you as its reader? Do you think it would affect one of her fellow historians the same way?
4. What is the effect of the first paragraph of this piece? How well does it succeed in arousing your sympathy? Does this appeal to pathos effectively support her claim?
5. Compare Goodwin’s explanation of her plagiarism to Rivard’s critique of Albert Flores’ plagiarism (see Readings). How comparable are Goodwin’s and Rivard’s underlying assumptions about right and wrong use of sources?

#### 3.2 IDENTIFYING MISUSE OF SOURCES

Summary drawn from Doris Kearns Goodwin’s “A Historian Explains Why Someone Else’s Writing Wound Up in Her Book”

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Doris Kearns Goodwin describes how fourteen years ago, not long after the publication of *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, she received a communication from author Lynne McTaggart to the effect that material from her book on Kathleen Kennedy had not been properly attributed. Goodwin realized that McTaggart was right. Though Goodwin's footnotes repeatedly cited McTaggart's work, she left out quotation marks for phrases taken word for word. Goodwin had assumed that these phrases, drawn from her notes, were her own words, not McTaggart's words. She made the requested corrections, and the matter was completely laid to rest—until the *Weekly Standard* published an article reviving the issue. The larger question for historians is to understand how citation mistakes can happen.

1. Compare the summary paragraph above to the paragraph from which it was drawn in Goodwin's full article printed in the Readings. Highlight the phrases that were changed in the paragraph above. Many people would identify an imitation this close as plagiarism even though the source is identified and a few words are changed, because the sentence structure is the same, with only a few changes in vocabulary and elimination of the authorial "I."
2. With a small group of your classmates:
  - Put quotation marks around all groups of three or more words "lifted" from the original.
  - Rewrite the paragraph with the book closed, working to get the author's point rather than her words across. (Remember that a summary also needs a reference.) If you find that you've used any of her phrases—three or more words in a row—put quotation marks around them.

Repeat this process with the following paragraphs:

Summary from Robert Rivard's "What Every Student Knows: Thou Shall Not Copy"

Editors at the *Express-News* faced no dilemma when they decided to stop publishing Flores' weather column when an alert copy editor discovered that Flores was putting his name on the work of others. No readers canceled their subscriptions, although a few did threaten to. Even if there had been cancellations, editors would have been free to act. The *Express-News* would fire any columnist or reporter caught taking the work of others and passing it off as their own. Flores' departure from KENS clearly occurred in the aftermath of events there. The newspaper did not employ Flores or compensate him for his column. They did not employ or compensate KENS meteorologist Bill Taylor, whose weather column appears twice a week in the *Express-News*. KENS management, in turn, does not employ or compensate *Express-News* writers, such as columnist Edmund Tijerina, who appear on their news programs. Both companies are equal partners in MySanAntonio.com, their shared news and information Web site, but the talent exchange is just that, a collaboration.

Summary from Alfie Kohn's "The Dangerous Myth of Grade Inflation"

The fact that people were offering the same complaints more than a century ago puts the latest bout of complaints in perspective, like those quotations about the disgraceful values of the younger generation that turn out to be hundreds of years old. The long history of indignation also pretty well invalidates attempts to place the blame for higher grades on the liberal professors hired in the 1960s. (Unless, of course, there was a similar counter-cultural phenomenon in the 1860s.) Yet on campuses across America today, academe's usual requirements for supporting data and reasoned analysis have been suspended for some reason where grade inflation is concerned. It is largely accepted on faith that grade inflation—an upward shift in students' grade-point averages without a similar rise in achievement—exists, and that it is a bad thing. Meanwhile, the truly important issues surrounding grades and motivation are obscured or ignored.

### 3.3 CORRECTING MISUSE OF SOURCES

Choose a paragraph from one of the Readings or from a source of your own choice.

1. Revise it slightly, like the paragraphs above. With your group, discuss what you did to change it.
2. Put quotation marks around all groups of three or more words “lifted” from the original.
3. Rewrite the paragraph with the book closed, working to get the author’s point rather than his or her words across. (Remember that a summary needs a reference too.)
4. Write a short comparison of the three different versions of the passage. Give your own account of how you moved from making minor changes in wording (a process often considered plagiarism) to representing the author’s ideas in your own words.
5. Prepare a visual presentation to demonstrate the process of moving from patch-writing to composing.

### 3.4 SHORT RESEARCH PROJECT

In small groups, undertake the following investigations, taking notes on your queries.

1. Find your institution’s plagiarism policy in student and faculty handbooks. How does it define academic honesty, particularly in relation to intellectual property? How detailed is the policy? Does the tone seem instructive or punitive?
2. Search your college’s Web site for other, more local policies—in departments, the library, the writing center, and even on particular course syllabi. What additional concerns are addressed in these policies? What questions are raised and answered? Do the definitions of plagiarism vary much? How about the tone—the interplay between the writer of the policy and the students for whom it is written?
3. Search the Web to find plagiarism policies of other colleges and universities and compare them with your own school’s policy. Try to find at least one college with a formal, explicit honor code (like the University of Virginia or one of the military academies like West Point or Annapolis). How does a traditional honor code supplement the school’s plagiarism policy? Using the name of the university and plagiarism as keywords, search for how violations of the honor code have been handled.
4. If your groups know any students at these schools or have had contact with them online, ask them for their point of view on plagiarism issues at their school. Consider carefully the reliability of their answers.
5. Take a look at the Statement on Plagiarism on the Council of Writing Program Administrators Web site: [www.wpacouncil.org/positions/](http://www.wpacouncil.org/positions/). How do you think it could be adapted to the needs and practices of your own class or English department? Do you see any problems with applying it?
6. Search your campus newspaper archives (either in print or on the Web) for news stories about plagiarism in the last five years. Are there any points of contention?
7. Take a look at one or more of the online “term paper mills” (like [www.schoolsucks.com/](http://www.schoolsucks.com/), [www.123helpme.com/](http://www.123helpme.com/), [www.1millionpapers.com/](http://www.1millionpapers.com/), [www.the-paper-doctor.com/](http://www.the-paper-doctor.com/), [www.cheathouse.com/](http://www.cheathouse.com/), etc.). How do their statements of purpose and values echo and defy definitions of plagiarism and academic honesty posted by the colleges you have examined?
8. Write an account of your research, either as an essay or a PowerPoint presentation, that reflects on what you think are the most significant of your group’s findings. Compare accounts with your group members, considering the different significances you have focused on.

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### 3.5 ADDITIONAL READING AND INFORMAL WRITING OR RESPONSE

1. Read Abigail Witherspoon's "This Pen for Hire: Grinding Out Papers for College Students" in the Readings (p. 276).
2. Reread the piece, this time highlighting the parts of the essay in which Witherspoon demonstrates that she does not belong to the profession that accepts the ethical prohibition of plagiarism. Where does she position herself and what basic assumptions about educational institutions does she establish as warrants for her way of thinking? Also note the parts of the argument that you have the most intense response to—either positive or negative.
3. Write a response to Witherspoon's paper, using one of the following questions as a starting point:
  - The disputes concerning the nature of intellectual property notwithstanding, can you identify any ethical common ground shared by various groups within a college? Can you see a consensus between the different layers of the university (i.e., students, administration, faculty) concerning what constitutes cheating and what constitutes fair use or fair sharing of intellectual property, or do you see mostly differences?
  - Which laws or rules about intellectual property do you and your friends normally observe? Which do you ignore? What are the major differences between the rules you follow and the rules you ignore?
  - Do you find yourself more inclined to value the protection of intellectual property or the free dissemination of knowledge and information? Does your inclination have anything to do with your field of study?