



Students Need Our Help Understanding Plagiarism

Although BYU students may be less likely to purchase papers to submit, they do need help to identify and avoid plagiarism.

Urban legend: “A teaching assistant encountered an instance of plagiarism in her class. She returned all the papers and said to the students: ‘Someone has committed plagiarism. If you confess, I will work with you to teach you how to improve and won’t [turn you over to the Honor Code office].’ Nearly all the students in the class, maybe seventeen out of twenty, confessed to varying types of plagiarism” (p. 11). (Blum, S. D. [2009]). *My word! Plagiarism and college culture*. Cornell University Press.)

Why Do Students Plagiarize?

Inadvertent	Plagiarism is often students’ attempt to enter the discourse community when they are unfamiliar with the rules. Students may not understand they should not use their own previous papers.
Pressure to do well in a class	School pressure may encourage plagiarism and cheating: “Many students don’t work as hard as faculty would like them to or believe they do: faculty expect thirty hours of studying a week; students put in on average about eleven. Students . . . take strategic measures to minimize their workload” (Blum, 2009, pp. 105-106).
Procrastinated an assignment & did not leave sufficient time to complete the assignment	Young people may feel they cannot afford to fail. “In these circumstances plagiarism might strike many students as a logical option: for those who are focused entirely on external goals such as high grades, a degree, or admission to the next level of education,” to simply make their lives easier, or they run out of time (Blum, 2009, pp. 140-144, 152).
Society blurs the line between illegal and unethical behavior	Students may have a history of getting away with cheating, which may also contribute to their belief that cheating is not a big deal. For example, downloading music illegally. Current beliefs that integrity in writing is “flexible” depending on a person’s needs (Blum, 2009, p. 86). For example, the movie stars who bribed school officials to allow their “insufficiently prepared children” to enroll.

Pressure to succeed in preparation for grad school	Cheating is often a “consequence of the high-stakes nature” of the paper and or education (p. 23). For example, “Harvard rejected more than one thousand applicants with perfect SAT scores, and Princeton rejected thousands of students with perfect GPAs” (pp. 98-99). Some parents “prime” children to succeed in school by enrolling their children in selective pre-schools (Blum, 2009, p. 99).
	A belief that “the end justifies the means.”

How Can We Help?

Teach students how to correctly use scholarly sources in their own writing

“Students must be persuaded of the value of citing . . . and instructed over time in how to do it” especially within our disciplines (Blum, 2009, p. 165).

Perhaps we should approach this instruction differently instead of merely threatening students with Honor Code violations.

Chances of catching student plagiarism (intentional or inadvertent) are slim; therefore, students need to be **taught** how to cite correctly because it is the ethically correct thing to do (not just to avoid punishments).

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