

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY IS NOT JUST ACADEMIC

by Lisa Rapple M.Ed RRT



The classroom is the first arena for Health Care students to demonstrate they have the moral integrity necessary to work in the medical environment. Health Care programs typically require a significant amount of paper writing; research papers and case studies particularly. Professors of academia are charged with the task of reviewing these papers not only for accurate and substantive content, but also to ensure that the content is referenced properly and is of the students own hand.

The instructor must insure that before students begin writing papers they are instructed in how to avoid plagiarism and how to properly site their sources. Quoting or introducing an idea that is someone else's must be credited back to that original source using citations and references. Students in science-based disciplines usually use APA styling guidelines (the American Psychiatric Association). Liberal arts may use MLA styling guidelines (the Modern Language Association). Once completed papers are returned to the instructor. If there is plagiarized content it is important that the instructor determine that to be the case. Intentional plagiarism can be the first indicator that a student may not have the moral fiber required to function in the medical arena where false documentation is insupportable and dangerous.

It is only fair to instruct students on how to avoid plagiarism and how to properly site their sources first. If you feel a student has unintentionally plagiarized it would be prudent to give them additional resources and get the resource librarian involved. To be clear, from this point on I will be talking about intentional plagiarism.

When evaluating student papers for plagiarism, professors require extra scrutiny to route out plagiarism. The game of plagiarism has taken on a new player: the Internet. The students of today are very-much Internet savvy. And the Internet is teeming with resources for the unscrupulous. Professors need to be able to hold students "feet to the fire" to follow an honest path in the field of health care. All health care professionals must have veracity and integrity.


Understanding the traits of a plagiarist will help you to identify them. The plagiarist of today, as I said earlier, is Internet savvy. But, they also assume that anyone over 30 is not. You can use that to your advantage. Because they don't expect you to check them, they don't cover their tracks when they plagiarize. They are typically lazy and bold as well. So, they don't go to great lengths to find "good" material.

Now let's consider some facts about Internet searches and materials as they are found on the Internet. When searching a topic on the Internet it will very quickly produce material that is less than scholarly. Again, we have the lazy plagiarist who will nab those first few sources in the search. So look at the scholarly value of the references they use. Many times a student is assigned a disease process or a one-to-two word topic. That is where the lazy student will start. They will Google those terms. And you can too.

Here are some clues that a paper may contain plagiarized material: As you read a paper you can usually hear the student's "voice" in the phrasing and structure. I found it that way over years of grading papers. I even had students with accents and as I read the papers I could hear them speaking in that accent. Typically Health Care programs are small and you get to know each student very well. This is an advantage because you will be able to pick out phrases that may seem awkward or anomalous; something that is not in the student voice. Be suspicious if words are used that you don't think the student can pronounce or spell. We'll use these phrases to bust our plagiarist.

Also, consider the student's performance against the characteristics that I described earlier. Do they display enthusiasm and interest or frustration and argumentativeness? Are they motivated or always trying to negotiate an easier assignment.


How to use the internet to bust a plagiarist: Using an Internet search engine is a good place to start. You can learn more about search engines at Search Engine Watch (<http://www.searchenginewatch.com>) Pick your favorite search engine. With the Internet growing so rapidly, search engines will produce different hit lists. Here are a few: HotBot, Excite, Google, Infoseek, Yahoo, Lycos, Snap. Search using the phrases that you identified as awkward or out of voice. Also search the assigned topic and title. Search using a long phrase from the first paragraph of the paper. Plagiarists take material from the first few paragraphs of an original document, as well as from the "findings" and "conclusions" sections of the originals. Michael Bugeja of Ohio University demonstrates how this works:



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CIRCLE READER ACTION CARD # 41

ON A LIGHTER SIDE with Andy Rooney



If there was a vote held to choose our favorite season of the year, I suppose Spring would win. (I capitalize the seasons but seldom use the subjunctive "were.")

There are people who prefer Summer and others who are ecstatic about Fall. Winter is the least favorite season of everyone except skiers. I like Spring, but both Winter and Spring have been a disappointment this year. We didn't get enough snow to shovel or ski on and now Spring has hardly sprung at all. The temperatures have moved from the 30s to the 80s. Neither temperature is "Spring". It was 39 on the thermometer outside my bedroom window on a recent morning and 81 when I went home at 6 that night. I don't think the robins have come bob-bob-bobbin' north yet and if they did they must have gone back down where it's warm. They must be confused.

Fall, or Autumn if you prefer, is often beautiful — but just as Spring is the beginning of everything, Fall is the end. The leaves are pretty but they're dying and it's getting cold. What fun is that? One thing we don't want from a season is too much of the same weather. In Summer we don't want too much heat - in winter too much cold.

Years ago we used more energy in Winter than in Summer because we kept ourselves warm by burning coal to heat water in our radiators. In Summer we opened the windows in the hope that some cool air would come in. Those days are gone. Now we close the windows in Summer just as we do in Winter because we're trying to cool our homes with what we call, strangely I think, "air conditioning." We don't "condition" the air. We cool it.

It's strange, too, that we sometimes burn something to keep ourselves cool. If the temperature in your house is 60 degrees

and you want it to be 70, it costs less to warm it up 10 degrees than it costs to cool it down 10 degrees.

They've done a good job heating and cooling cars. A car can be a refuge when it's too hot or too cold. We had a Packard when I was young and it was a beauty but there was no heater in it and I remember freezing in the back seat. I don't think air conditioning had been invented yet. If it had been, manufacturers weren't putting it in cars.

The hottest I have ever been was in Bombay, India. I don't know how the Indians live there. It reached 112° one day and I lost my enthusiasm for working, eating, sleeping or even living.

The coldest weather I've ever been out in was 124 degrees below the hottest day. That was 12 below zero on a mountain in Vermont where I was skiing. I had on good, warm clothes and I loved it. Today, as I write, it's a delightful sunny day and about 70 degrees. I felt sorry for the weatherman I heard on the radio this morning. He didn't know what to say. Weathermen are at their best when they have bad weather to tell us about. Usually we already know what the weather by looking out the window. For some reason we also like hearing it from them. The weatherman didn't know what to say. He'd have been better reporting about a foot of snow.

I think one goal of our scientists should be to control the temperature of the whole earth and keep it around 70 degrees. If the scientists are successful, we'll be wearing the same clothes all year 'round. No more seersucker suits, no more fur coats.

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"In busting a recent plagiarism case about advertising and ethics, I entered into a meta-search engine the uncommon phrase 'indispensable guarantors' and the clumsy locution 'Considering advertising's social impact'. Nothing but plagiarism — five Web sites containing the same source document"

To refine your search I would recommend using MetaCrawler (<http://metacrawler.com>) MetaCrawler is a meta-search engine. What this means is that it produces a hit-list from several Search Engines. Dogpile and Mamma are two other meta-search engines. These meta-search engines will allow you to search for an exact phrase taken from the student's paper. Look for "phrase" or "advanced search" at the meta-search engine home page and use this option. A Boolean search is NOT useful in a search engine. (Boolean searches use connectors such as AND, OR, NOT) Save the Boolean for searching Library Databanks.

Next you may want to search online magazine archives. Boolean searches are useful here. Search journals that you have cited in class or cited in your writings. And search archives of journals in your particular discipline (i.e., respiratory care, nursing, polysomnography, etc).

Usually plagiarists won't steal from log-in or password protected sites. They won't bother. If you are able to implement these ideas you have a good chance of substantiating a claim of plagiarism.

Be aware also that papers can be purchased on-line for relatively inexpensive cost. I won't list the sites here for prudence

sake. But realize that prepared papers are out there on all kinds of topics related to Respiratory Care, Nursing, and other health care fields. I found papers on Nitric Oxide, Pulmonary Rehabilitation, you name it and it's out there for sale. Look for older or dated materials in the reference list as a clue that a paper might be purchased. But your best bet is to go to these sites and see if your student's paper title is listed there. At least you'll know how much they paid for it.

One other search worth doing is to Google your student's name and then Google your name. If they are on a discussion board or chat room talking about their plagiarism you may get a hit this way. Wow, a confession on line. That would be too easy.

Lastly, don't forget that the resource librarian can be an excellent resource for you in busting a suspected plagiarist. Librarians are very literate in the Internet and in professional writing. So, please ask for help if you are convinced you have a plagiarist and can't quite find the source.

And students, if you are listening, please ask for help in preparing your work if you suspect you may be treading the line of plagiarism. Keep your intentions honorable. You'll learn more by taking the honest path of integrity versus the lazy path of plagiarism. You risk failing, expulsion, humiliation, and ultimately losing out on a successful and satisfying career in health care.

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