Recognizing and Avoiding Academic Dishonesty

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Understanding Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism, Cheating, and Consequences

One of the foundational concepts you all need to be familiar with as you prepare to write for this course and as you prepare for future academic and professional writing is plagiarism and academic dishonesty. If you were to look in every one of your syllabi for your classes this term and in prior terms, you would likely find a plagiarism policy explaining the consequences of plagiarizing. However, students sometimes don’t even fully understand what plagiarism is, let alone how to avoid it.

To better help you understand the definition of plagiarism and the consequences of academic dishonesty, I’ve included the IHCC Plagiarism and Cheating Policy from the 2010 IHCC Student Handbook:

Assuming ownership of another person’s words or ideas is the essence of plagiarism. Plagiarizing copyrighted material is a legally punishable offense. Plagiarizing unpublished material in school is a severe breach of academic principles.

Instructors are not required to produce the documents from which the student has plagiarized in order to prove plagiarism has occurred. Stylistic differences between the written work in question and work previously submitted by the student can easily be recognized by instructors and can constitute plagiarism. Students should be aware of the various types of plagiarism:

- Buy a paper from an internet site, another student writer, or any other source
- Turn in any paper someone else has written, whether it was given to you, you downloaded it from the internet, or you copied it from any other source
- Change selected parts of an existing paper and claim it as your own
- Combine the ideas from many sources and claim they are your own thoughts
- Use general or specific ideas from a text without using full and correct documentation telling where you got the ideas
- Copy or paste into your paper any key terms, phrases, sentences, or longer passages from another source without using documentation to tell precisely where the material came from
- Neglect to put quotation marks around words you quote from a source, even if you document the source


Cheating in any form will not be tolerated. Cheating includes (but is not limited to) copying down some other student’s answers on a test, quiz, assignment, or lab report, bringing in ready-made “cheat sheets,” knowingly and willingly supplying answers to others and using someone else’s words and ideas as though they were your own.
Both plagiarism and cheating are punishable in the following ways:

1) Automatic failure of the assignment;

2) Automatic failure of the course;

3) Expulsion from the college.

As you can see, plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses that can cost you your grade on a paper, your grade in the course, and even your academic career. At many universities, if a student is caught plagiarizing an assignment and that plagiarism is deemed intentional, an ‘X’ is permanently put on the student’s transcripts so that future teachers, transfer schools, scholarship committees, and employers know that the student has behaved dishonestly in his or her academic endeavors. That is serious business. Looking at the IHCC policy, you can see that we do not permanently mark a student’s record; however, we do take serious actions against plagiarism and academic dishonesty, and each instructor’s syllabus explains his or her own plagiarism policy (which meets the IHCC guidelines). Some instructors may choose to give you a 50% on a plagiarized assignment, some may give you a 0%, and some may automatically flunk you for the course. Very rarely does plagiarism result in expulsion from IHCC, though it is possible depending on the severity and frequency of the academically dishonest actions. For a specific description of your instructor’s plagiarism policy for this course, please see your syllabus.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty: Proper Source Integration and Plagiarism Detection

Now that you recognize the seriousness of plagiarism and maybe even realize that some of the stuff you frequently do in your own writing actually does constitute plagiarism and could get you kicked out of a course, you might be getting a bit nervous. A lot of times, after I cover definitions of plagiarism with students, several students comment that they are afraid they’ll accidentally plagiarize without knowing it or that they’re afraid of not documenting a source correctly and failing a paper. I do want to reassure you that, in most cases, if you make a minor mistake in an attempt to document sources, your instructors will be understanding and work with you. In this course, we will be working to teach you how to use paraphrases, summaries, and quotes as well as in-text and end-text citations properly so that you can learn to correctly integrate and document sources. With each assignment, you will learn a bit more about MLA documentation style and how to perform increasingly complex source integration. A writing class is a good place to make mistakes with punctuating quotations, integrating source references, and writing the bibliography page, and we recognize that you do not already know how to do all of this when you come into the course. However, we will expect you to avoid all of the actions described as plagiarism in the IHCC handbook and to attempt to integrate and document sources properly as the readings, lectures, and assignments explain and require.

One of the ways that you can learn to identify and avoid plagiarism in your own work is to use a plagiarism detection tool like Turnitin.com or Blackboard’s SafeAssign. These tools are websites overseen by professors and used to help both students and professors detect plagiarism in student writing. Students upload an essay to the website, and the website then checks the students’ work against all other Internet content and all other papers submitted to the site. This means that content
from all online content, electronic books, and fellow students’ essays will be detected in a students’ work. The plagiarism detection site will then generate a report visible to both the student and professor, highlighting borrowed content and providing a link to the original source. If students receive such a report as part of a drafting assignment, they will be able to see places where they need to paraphrase or summarize more effectively or even to quote borrowed material and will usually be given the opportunity to revise the assignment. On a final draft, detected plagiarism will be considered intentional academic dishonesty and students will not be given the chance to revise.

As with the general plagiarism policy, individual instructors across the disciplines and from school to school may choose to utilize a plagiarism detection services in various ways—some using the site to teach students about plagiarism and some using the site to catch plagiarism. However, the IHCC English Department has agreed upon a policy for the use of plagiarism detection sites, and this course will follow that policy. Please see your course syllabus for a specific description of the ways the IHCC English faculty has agreed to use plagiarism detection services.

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