

The crime of PLAGIARISM : Revised on 29 February 2008

- a) **In view of several recent instances of plagiarism**, let me remind you all that plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offence: one that consists of the following three possible circumstances. Though all are equally wrong and equally offensive, this discussion pertains largely to the first condition.
- i) The deliberate copying (though not necessarily fully word for word) of one or more passages from some other source, whether published or on the internet (web) without using quotation marks, or without clearly offsetting the quoted passages, and without proper attribution.
 - ii) The acquisition and presentation of an essay produced by someone else, and acquired from some other source: an 'essay bank' (whether or not online), from a friend, or fraternity, etc., whether or not paid for.
 - iii) The submission of an essay that the student wrote and handed in to another course.
- b) **Do Footnotes excuse you from the charge of plagiarism:?**
- i) Some students wrongly and foolishly believe that they can escape the charge of plagiarism by properly citing the source in a footnote.
 - ii) **WRONG!!** If you fail to provide quotation marks or other indications of a direct quotation, you leave the impression that the wording is yours, but that you are attributing some of the facts or ideas to another source. Thus your doing so still consists of both theft and academic fraud.
- c) **A general prohibition against using direct quotations:**
- i) In any event, you have all been strictly warned against and indeed prohibited from providing direct quotations, beyond a few words, except from primary or original sources, cited as evidence.
 - ii) Furthermore, you are required not just to provide quotations marks and the source citations, but also to introduce the source of the quotation: to indicate clearly where it came from (who was the author) and why it is important for your argument.
- d) **Plagiarism is a serious academic offence, indeed a crime (to repeat: of theft and fraud). If you are convicted, you will be severely punished for it.**
- e) **If we find any concrete evidence of plagiarism, the following will take place:**
- i) You will be summoned to a meeting with me and the TA, where the evidence for plagiarism will be presented. In most cases, we discover plagiarism by using Google for the suspected passages; and that usually reveals plagiarism. Furthermore, most students reveal their acts of plagiarism through abrupt changes in style -- especially through presenting copied passages that can not credibly be the work of a student.

- ii) You will be allowed to present your defence to establish that you did not deliberately commit plagiarism. But a clear warning: you cannot and may not excuse yourself from the charge of plagiarism by contending that it was unintentional, especially not when it appears to have been deliberate. A common but unacceptable excuse is that the student 'forgot' to use quotation marks. In any event, we professors are not allowed to make such judgements -- that is for the decanal committee on Academic Offences.
- iii) You also cannot avoid a charge of plagiarism by claiming that you did change some words. If the passage copied is essentially the same as the original, even if not everywhere word for word, and you did not indicate that it was a quotation, the charge of plagiarism will still stand.
- iv) If you fail to convince us of your innocence, I will then present the evidence, along with a report from me and from the TA, to the Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies, who will then present the case, with this documentation, to the office of the Dean of Arts and Science for judicial action.
- v) Please clearly understand that, in doing so, we (I the professor and the TA) are not convicting you of any offence. We instead contending that there is a prima facie case for proceeding with a decanal judicial inquiry. At the same time, to repeat what is stated above, for more emphasis: we are not permitted, once we find such a prima facie case, to exercise our own judgement on this matter: that is entirely up to the office of the Dean of Arts and Science. So, do not even try to ask us to ignore the case -- i.e., to 'have mercy' on you. Seek mercy from the Dean's office (and, best of luck to you!)
- vi) The Dean of Arts and Science's Office of Student Conduct will then summon you for an interview, to defend yourself against these charges or to plead guilty. This interview or meeting is usually chaired by an older professor serving as the Dean's Designate; and usually I attend all such cases involving my own students (sometimes also with my TA). Also attending, and offering both evidence and advice, are officials from this office who will have examined every line written in your assignment, and checked it (usually by using Google) for all possible incidences of plagiarism.
- vii) If you plead guilty, and this is a first offence, you will probably get off with the minimum penalty (see below). If you know that you did commit this offence, then you are indeed best advised to agree and to plead guilty. Please note and understand carefully that a defence consisting of such statements as: 'I did not intend to commit plagiarism' or 'I did not realize that I was committing plagiarism', or 'I had intended to hand in a revised version', etc. will have no merit and no effect in alleviating your well merited punishment. Ignorance of the law is no excuse in any court; and you are expected to have read and to have understood the course outline, Instructions on Writing Term Essays, and this web document on plagiarism.
- viii) You will be judged on the basis of what you had submitted (wrote), in comparison with the sources from which your copied the passages of concern. Read note 6

above again, carefully.

- ix) If you still deny your plagiarism, and the Dean's office is convinced by the case that is presented, you will have a formal hearing before a decanal judicial tribunal for academic offences -- whose punishment, if you are found guilty, may be very severe, and thus more severe than the penalty levied at this interview (i.e., if you plead guilty): involving suspension for one or more years, or even formal expulsion from the university, though usually only for repeated offences.
 - x) The normal penalty, for a first offence, is zero for the essay and a reduction of the same value for the essay -- for this course, 20 marks, and thus for a total loss of 40 marks -- from your final grade (virtually ensuring failure on the course). Please note the fairness and equity of this penalty: obviously the penalty for plagiarism must be more severe than the penalty of zero for not handing in an essay at all; for the latter is not an academic offence, while plagiarism most certainly is!
 - xi) A conviction for plagiarism provides an exception to the provision that students may base their term mark (60% of the total) on the best three of four submissions (three essays and the mid-year test). Obviously, a student guilty of plagiarism cannot have the penalty of a zero grade, if inflicted by the Dean's office, erased in this fashion; and thus the zero grade penalty must stand. I will, however, consider taking an average of the four pieces of term mark, with the zero weighting for the plagiarized essay.
 - xii) Furthermore, a citation of the conviction will also be applied on your record, for one or more years (sometimes to graduation); and that citation will certainly prevent you from entering graduate school, law school, medicine, or any other professional faculty, and may provide a serious obstacle in seeking employment. In other words, you risk ruining your life by committing plagiarism.
- f) Another dire consequence: most students who are charged with plagiarism suffer severe mental anguish. Not because (or certainly not chiefly because) they experience guilt; but rather because they fully anticipate the dire consequences that they face, and the often long delay in adjudicating these charges.
- g) **Can you escape your fate by dropping the course:?**
- i) If you think that you can escape this fate by dropping the course, think again! Once you are accused of plagiarism, your registration in the course is frozen; and only if you are acquitted of the charge will you be allowed to drop the course (and then, only by the due date). If you do succeed -- apparently -- in dropping the course, you will be reinstated once formal charges have been filed against you. **THERE IS NO ESCAPE!**
 - ii) Furthermore, according to a recent letter from the Dean's office, to a student accused of plagiarism: 'The notation of "GWR" (grade withheld pending review) will be placed on your academic record, and until this matter is resolved you will be ineligible to graduate, regardless of the number of credits you have completed'.

h) **Thus avoid all temptations and all circumstances that might lead to plagiarism:** The answer is simply: DO NOT COPY LONG PASSAGES from your secondary sources (articles, books, essays, web documents, etc).

i) Learn to take notes by making a brief summary or précis of these passages.

ii) Take notes in point form: not in complete sentences

iii) In composing your essay, do not copy your notes.

i) **Indeed, you are best advised to do the following, in writing your essay:**

i) Read over your notes, taken from your research sources: one note only per source, per page

ii) Using your notes, construct an outline of your essay, in point form

iii) Then set your notes aside;

iv) Write your essay without directly looking at your notes, except for references.

v) Re-read your notes to ensure that you have incorporated all the main points in your outline and in your arguments.

j) **For further considerations on Plagiarism, and how to avoid it:**

i) See this important web document (found on my Home Page): How Not to Plagiarize, at this URL: <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html>

ii) See also The University of Toronto's web document on Policies and Procedures: Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters: most recent version, dated 1 June 1995, at this URL.

<http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.html>

iii) See also the following article that appeared in Maclean's Magazine, on 12 February 2008, with the title: U-Fraud: The Great University Cheating Scandal, at this URL:

<http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/PlagiarismMacleans.pdf>

iv) Finally, those students who may be considering a resort to plagiarism because they have severe difficulties in writing term essays -- because of inexperience, language difficulties, etc -- should seriously consider using the services of the U of T-sponsored Writing Plus: Academic Skills Workshops, 2007 - 08. Here is the URL for the pdf file:

<http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/WritingPlusUofT.pdf>

- v) They should also consult the TA for the course, me (the professor), and the services of your college Registrar's Office. If you need help, seek it, and seek it well before your essay is due!!