Addressing Plagiarism Series
PART 1: The Dilemma of Academic Integrity in the Information Age

Over the last several decades, increased access to technology and the development of a global internet has had a profound and democratizing effect on education. However, with this increased access to information has come a bevy of legitimate concerns regarding the potential unethical use of sources by students (and faculty), and other serious forms of plagiarism. The Council of Writing Program Administrators [CWPA] (2003), a national academic and professional association for faculty and administrators directing writing programs, argues that the increased focus on investigating suspicions of plagiarism in students’ writing may have the unintended consequence of diverting attention away from "developing students' writing, reading, and critical thinking abilities.” While the importance of emphasizing and maintaining academic integrity cannot be stressed enough, for the sake of student learning, it is equally important to consider a more nuanced understanding of how and why plagiarism happens, especially for international students and first-generation students that may not be as familiar with the conventions of academic language.

Defining Plagiarism
In the UC Davis Code of Academic Conduct (2016), instances of plagiarism as recognized by the university include the following:

- Taking credit for any work created by another person. Work includes, but is not limited to books, articles, experimental methodology or results, compositions, images, lectures, computer programs, internet postings.
- Copying any work belonging to another person without indicating that the information is copied and properly citing the source of the work.
- If not directly copied, using another person’s presentation of ideas without putting it in your own words or form and not giving proper citation.
- Creating false citations that do not correspond to the information you have used.

Although it is essential to uphold the above institutional policies on plagiarism in your classroom, researchers have argued that many of the current conversations around plagiarism fail to distinguish between intentional plagiarism and unintentional misuse of sources (CWPA, 2003; Li & Casanave, 2012, Thomas & Sassi, 2011). With this in mind, the CWPA (2003) define plagiarism in the following way: “In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately [emphasis added] uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.”

Reasons students might plagiarize
Pearson (2011) argues that the best way to defend against plagiarism in the classroom is to develop a better understanding of why students plagiarize in the first place. Doing this can help you develop teaching strategies and assignment designs that make it difficult to plagiarize. Additionally, considering the reasoning as well as the intentionality behind a suspected instance of plagiarism can help you to determine how to respond in a way that will both hold the student accountable for their actions and help them learn from the experience. The chart below outlines a few common reasons for plagiarizing, taken from CWPA (2003), Jamieson & Howard (2013), Li & Casanave (2012), and Pearson (2011):

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Common Reasons for Plagiarizing</th>
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<td>Unintentional</td>
<td>Lack of Knowledge of Ethical Citation Practices; Some students (e.g., international Students, first-generation students, etc.) may have received incomplete or inconsistent education on citation in the past, or they may lack knowledge of the more sophisticated requirements for citation in college. They may fail to devote enough attention to the stylistic requirements of citation, or may not understand the importance of those characteristics, which can lead to sloppy or unclear citations.</td>
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Tried but Improperly Integrated Sources: Many students have difficulty comprehending the complex scholarly sources they are expected to cite in college, and may consequently accidently misappropriate or misuse sources (e.g., patchwriting, misrepresentation, etc.). They may know to make a references page, but may not understand that in-texts citations are also required (or vice versa). They may know to cite some things (like quotes) but not others (like paraphrases). They may also just make honest mistakes (like forgetting to cite a source).

Cultural Differences in Attribution: The CWPA (2003) notes that differing cultural conceptualizations of ethical attribution practices may mean that “students from other cultures may not be familiar with the conventions governing attribution and plagiarism in American colleges and universities.”

### Intentional

**Panic Plagiarizing:** Students may fear that they will do poorly or even fail the assignment, or may fear being turned down if they were to ask for an extension. They might have insecurities about the quality of their writing, or may feel hopelessly confused by the project. They may have poor time management skills, or may honestly be overwhelmed by too many responsibilities (school, work, family/children, etc.).

**Intentional Cheating:** Students may have a sense that the class is unimportant, or lack the desire to complete the assignment. They may have plagiarized without penalty in the past, or seen others getting away with it. The course assignments may make it seem so easy to plagiarize that a student may feel justified in doing so.

### Additional Resources

- The [Purdue OWL](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/) provides comprehensive guides for citing in APA, MLA, AMA, and Chicago style.
- The [UC Davis Libraries](https://www.library.ucdavis.edu/) also provide comprehensive subject guides for a variety of citation styles.
- The following two resources come from the [Writing Commons](http://writingcommons.org/), a peer-reviewed, open-source resource for writers. Both resources are meant for students, and provide information about what counts as plagiarism, as well as strategies for avoiding it:
  - "Avoiding Plagiarism" (article)
  - “Avoiding Plagiarism: A Checklist for Student Writers”
- There are a number of online plagiarism-checking services that can be helpful in detecting instances of plagiarism. Some of these services are free, while others require a paid licence. It is important, however, to use these services with caution, as they are not always reliably accurate (Straumsheim, 2015), and are fraught with their own ethical conundrums (Marsh, 2004, McKeever, 2006). Here are a few examples of online plagiarism checkers:
  - Turnitin.com
  - Glatt Plagiarism Services
  - Viper
  - Plagiarismchecker.com
  - Google

### References


