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A Rose By Any Other Name Would Still Smell a Cheat

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If I were to plagiarize an article on plagiarism, it would be easy since thousands of articles have been written on the topic, and many of them reside on the web. While examining free web sites relevant to the academic community, I decided there are two basic camps. There are sites that provide information to students for downloading, and there are sites that help instructors figure out which of their students have succeeded in locating the former. The two sides are surprisingly, interconnected. On the one hand the very same authors, whom students might quote are occasionally accused of plagiarism. Stephen Ambrose, Dorris Kearns Goodwin, and, yes, Shakespeare (who has been accused of snatching plots and characters) have drawn scrutiny. The Internet however adds yet another link. The vast availability of complete online sources has made the temptation to cut and paste, greater than ever. Subsequently, the acknowledgement of flagrant plagiarism in schools has prompted professors to check papers against web-based documents, and develop or locate software solutions that go beyond checking excerpts in search engines. Yet again the two sides connect when a professor runs a paper through a plagiarism detection site that then archives the paper for sale at an undisclosed paper mill. This article is a quick introduction to some of the free web sites that sell papers to students, and a look at the web sites that bust students when they use them.

Overview

Library of Congress/Copyright Law
<http://www.copyright.gov/title17>

Whether intentional or not, paraphrasing or quoting work without giving credit is considered plagiarism. For information on copyright infringement and fair use, you can go straight to the source at the Library of Congress' Copyright page. As a general rule, if you are secretly worried about getting caught, the chances are good that you are plagiarizing.

Plagiarism Resource Site, at Charlottesville, VA
<http://www.plagiarism.phys.virginia.edu/links.html>

Though it is difficult to find statistics on the prevalence of plagiarism among college students [plagiarism.org](http://www.plagiarism.org) estimates that based on the papers submitted through their site, 30 percent of students plagiarize on all of their papers. The statistics for college co-eds pale however, when compared to those of high school students. Independent studies performed at Rutgers and Princeton Universities found that over 70 percent of high school seniors had plagiarized on assignments (The Associated Press, April 19, 2002). The University of Virginia, a university that prides itself on using the honor system, drew recent attention when a physics professor accused 122 students of plagiarism as a result of comparing their papers electronically against each other, and against papers from previous semesters. As a result UVA is probably ahead of most schools at battling the problem, and created this excellent site on the issue.

Plagiarism
<http://www.web-miner.com/plagiarism>

is a simple but informative bibliography created by Sharon Stoerger for the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. You'll find background articles on intellectual property plus links for both students and faculty.

The Paper Mills

Web sites offering papers for free or for sale are called "paper mills." The going rate for a pre-written paper is \$9.95/page; double that for a custom-written equivalent. If a paper mill gives away their works for free they are generally either motivated by advertising or a real hatred of school as implied by names like schoolsucks.com, cheathouse.com, and phuckschool.com. Typing "free term papers" into Google gave me fourteen pages of URLs laden with free essays and papers just waiting to be snatched. Some examples are:

Other People's Papers

<http://www.oppapers.com>

OPP is not only a warehouse of 45,000 free papers, but also a portal to other sites for free papers. Though "donating an essay is the lifeblood" of OPP they will generously provide you with a free paper sans donation. Don't expect great quality writing, but you can always use it as a springboard to other sites like...

BigNerds

<http://www.bignerds.com>

Pretending to be a student looking to write a paper on *alternative energies* I tried my luck at BigNerds.com.

BigNerds has free essays divided up by category (including a Shakespeare section). *Choosing Science and Technology* and *Alternative Energy Resources* gave me one of the most poorly constructed essays I've read outside political stump speeches. Had I heeded the rating system before I downloaded the paper, I would have chosen a different topic. My paper got a rating of 1/10 points. The paper entitled *LSD* received the highest rating of 10, and was considerably more interesting and better referenced.

Plagiarism Busters

Interesting to note that the best way to urge students to create original works is by scaring them. A study published by the American Political Science Association's Online Journal (*The Teacher*, December 2001), showed that warning students not to plagiarize was in no way a deterrent, but showing students plagiarism-detection software prior to their assignment drastically reduced cheating. Amazingly enough, some students took the risk nonetheless.

Turnitin.com

<http://www.turnitin.com/static/index.html>

Turnitin.com is not only a good detection tool, but a great deterrent since students must physically submit their own paper into a known plagiarism detection tool. Their works are then compared not only to works previously published on the Internet, but also against other students who have handed in their papers to the site. Within 24 hours the instructor receives a color coded originality report. Though a college would pay roughly \$2-4,000 a year for a license, Turnitin.com does offer a free trial of their software for one month.

Pricing varies depending on the number of robust features selected, the type of institution, and the number enrolled students.

JPlag

<http://www.jplag.de>

Developed by a German professor, to detect software plagiarism, JPlag can also be used to detect copied student computer programming exercises. It is available for free with registration.

EVE (Essay Verification Engine)

<http://www.canexus.com/eve/index.shtml>

Though each professor must purchase their own EVE license at \$19.99, there is a fifteen day free trial. Software upgrades are provided for free or discounted, depending on the time span between purchase and release dates.

Plagiserve

<http://www.plagiserve.com/>

Plagiserve is a free anti-plagiarism web site. After registering, a professor receives an identification number and can immediately submit students papers. Within 12 hours, the professor is notified that a report is available. The site claims to check the paper against popular online reference sources and paper mills and will reference sections of the papers that appear to be stolen. This site however appears to be run by students in the Ukraine and how they fund the site is unclear, which led the [Chronicle of Higher Education](http://chronicle.com/free/2002/03/2002031201t.htm) <http://chronicle.com/free/2002/03/2002031201t.htm> to point out that Plagiserve and EduTie <http://www.edutie.com/> are very likely archiving submitted papers in order to sell them on the very same paper mills they claim to police. I tested out Plagiserve by submitting a paper I'd grabbed from a paper mill. I received an email message thanking me for my registration with Plagiserve, but no originality report. Not even after two days.

Conclusion

A student looking for a free paper, can find a seemingly unlimited number of options on the web for free, but the chances of stolen work going unpunished gets slimmer as universities grow more savvy. If you are a professor looking to encourage originality, the most economic deterrent is to warn your students, well before they hand in their assignments, that their work may be subjected to a plagiarism detection site. Finally, for a large university, a site-license to a fee-based service such as turnitin.com or EVE is probably worth the investment.

Bio:

Jackie Shane is a science librarian at the University of New Mexico and the Patent and Trademark Librarian for the state of New Mexico. She has written numerous articles on scientific information including "So you want to patent an invention" for Cyberskeptic. When she is not in a library, she can usually be found riding her bicycle (the noblest invention) or at jshane@unm.edu.

<http://www.copyright.gov/title17>

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<http://www.canexus.com/eve/index.shtml>

<http://www.plagiserve.com/>

<http://chronicle.com/free/2002/03/2002031201t.htm>

<http://www.edutie.com>