From the UW Expository Writing Program’s *English 131 Instructor’s Manual*, 2018-2019

## Part Three: Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a complex concept that, depending on who you talk to, can encompass everything from forgetting to apply quotation marks to copying an entire paper verbatim or from unintentionally patching a few words together from a passage to submitting a paper purchased online. Determining what is inappropriate textual borrowing (and how to respond) requires a situated, nuanced, and flexible case-by-case understanding and response. In many circles, plagiarism is treated as a serious offense and even a criminal act, so whatever your personal philosophy regarding the ownership of language and ideas, plagiarism is a topic that deserves explicit attention in our 131 class.

**Plagiarism: A closer look**

At the broadest level, inappropriate textual borrowing can be divided into two rough categories. In the first category, there are borrowings based on misunderstandings, inexperience, and cultural differences. Examples of this category could include paraphrasing without enough change, having a friend write portions of a paper, and even copying whole paragraphs directly from an unmentioned source. The vast majority of “plagiarism” that you will experience in 131 will be of this variety, and this kind of inappropriate borrowing generally deserves a pedagogical response. The rules for citation are hardly intuitive or transparent, and many of our students will be learning the expectations of the Western academy for the first time. It is our job as 131 instructors to coach our students through the vagaries of citation practice.

While the second category is rarer, you may also experience an instance where a student is being deliberately dishonest. After spending hours and hours pouring your heart and soul into constructive feedback, painstakingly tailored to each student’s interests and needs, the sense of betrayal upon finding that a student has not submitted their own work can be intense. Even in such situations, however, we encourage you to not take such instances personally, but rather take a moment to evaluate the situation. What forces might have compelled a student to make such a decision? How might you go about explaining the situation to the student in question? What is the most reasonable response to such cases within the context of your class? What are the ethical and pedagogical consequences of allowing the student to re-write the assignment? What are the ethical and pedagogical consequences of officially reporting the student to the University? Before taking any action or confronting the student, we strongly encourage you to consider such questions, and also to discuss the situation with the EWP Director, especially if this is the first time you are handling a case of plagiarism.

**First step- Establish clear guidelines regarding plagiarism**

Before your class even begins, you can help prevent many unintentional plagiarism cases from ever arising. As you design your syllabus, assignment sequences, and lesson plans, make sure that students understand early on what plagiarism means in your class and how you will respond to it. There is a standard UW policy on plagiarism available on the EWP website and it, or a more contextually appropriate one of your own devising, should be included on your syllabus. Make sure that you also give yourself the time to explain your policies verbally early in the quarter. Whatever your own take on plagiarism, it is important that your students understand that the University, as a whole, considers it a serious offense which could even result in expulsion. See the standard UW policy on Academic Honesty below:

You should take the time to

*Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review.*

educate your students on what could be considered plagiarism at UW, particularly things that may not seem dishonest to many students (e.g., turning in the same paper for two different classes or turning in previously written work).

**Design your course to reduce students’ anxieties and to encourage unique compositions**

You are encouraged to make full use of the example assignment sequences on the EWP website and in the EWP archive. As you do so, however, it is important to consider how well your sequences scaffold students’ unique responses. Prompts that encourage students to make use of their unique set of talents and interests will increase student investment, reduce the temptation among students to make questionable textual borrowing choices and, perhaps most importantly, will improve your chances of staying sane as you read dozens of papers week-in and week-out.

It is also worth noting that some students are tempted to plagiarize because they feel their own work will not be successful, or because they have run out of time to complete an assignment and they panic. If you create room for students to ask questions about your assignments, discuss time management issues, and let students know that you understand that writing is a difficult process, you may be able to cut down on plagiarism. Some TAs find it helpful to explain to students that it’s much better for them to ask for an extension at the last minute than resort to plagiarism. Moreover, it may help to remind students that the portfolio system allows space for students to do their best along the way without penalty to their grades and provides room for revision of self-curated course projects for the final portfolio.

**When pedagogical responses fail…**

If you do find yourself in a situation in which you feel your student has plagiarized, your first step should be to contact the EWP Director to explain the situation and get advice, as there are many things to keep in mind and ways for you to respond. In the EWP, we do not uphold a mandatory policy of reporting plagiarism cases to the Office of Student Affairs, but we do ask instructors to discuss all plagiarism cases (or suspected cases) with students, and we insist that no plagiarized projects can be included in the final portfolio. Our general approach is to begin by listening to students with compassion and patience, rather than start with an approach that sees all cases of plagiarism as cheating and deserving of a strict penalty. We ask that all TAs seek consultation with the Director of the EWP when they encounter plagiarism cases for the first time (and whenever they would like additional support thereafter) prior to confronting students. In most cases, TAs resolve matters with their students without formal reporting to the University.

**Please keep in mind that it is University policy that teachers cannot independently fail a student or take disciplinary action for plagiarism or cheating without formal due process.**

If you decide, after consulting with the EWP Director, to individually handle an instance of plagiarism, the student in question will need to waive their due process before you can exercise any penalties, including simply asking them to rewrite a paper.

If the case is reported to the University, you cannot assess a penalty (or final course grade if the case occurs at the portfolio stage) until the college committee has adjudicated the case. The committee will ask the student to present his/her case against the case you have made, and then render a decision. If the plagiarism is confirmed, then you can assess a penalty, which can vary and the EWP Director can help you determine. At minimum, the student will need to rewrite the passages or papers that are plagiarized for the portfolio. If reported, the typical first ruling marks the violation of the Student Code on the student’s permanent record. A second violation usually means expulsion.

**UW Resources on Plagiarism**

For information detailing the rights that both you and your students have when faced with plagiarism as a disciplinary issue, see the Faculty Resource on Grading (FROG) website: <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/>. This site also has a detailed description of the review process: <https://depts.washington.edu/grading/conduct/reporting.html>

**Further Reading**

Bennett, Karen. “The Geopolitics of Academic Plagiarism.” *Publishing research in*

*English as an additional language: Practices, pathways and potentials,* edited

byMargaret Cargill and Sally Burgess, University of Adelaide Press, 2017, 209-220.

Evering, Lea Calvert, and Gary Moorman. “Rethinking Plagiarism in the Digital

Age.” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 56(1), 2012, pp. 35–44.

Pennycook, Alastair. “Borrowing Others' Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and

Plagiarism.” *TESOL Quarterly,* *30*(2), 1996, 201-230.