Plagiarism is the one unforgivable sin in the academic world. Students caught plagiarizing face penalties ranging from failure of the assignment to failure of the course or expulsion from the university. In the School of Arts & Sciences, first-time plagiarists will be added to a plagiarism registry which your instructors will consult if they suspect you of plagiarism. Students caught plagiarizing a second time will automatically be referred to the Dean for university disciplinary action. If you plagiarize, not only do you learn nothing--which means you will have completely wasted the time, effort, and money you spent in pursuing a university education--but you also run a serious risk of ending your academic career without a degree and with an enduring stigma on your academic record. DON'T DO IT!!

To plagiarize is "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own; . . . [to] use (a created production) without crediting the source; . . . [to] present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary 870).

Academic writing is an ongoing dialogue among scholars, both professionals and students. When you write an academic paper, you are entering into a textual conversation with other writers who have written on the same topic. Any time that your writing in any way gives readers the impression that words or ideas belonging to others are your own, you have stolen the intellectual property of those other writers and then lied to your readers about it. This is plagiarism.

Since academic writing is a conversation, it is both necessary and desirable to use others' words and ideas as you build your own original arguments on topics that others have visited before you. In fact, that is precisely how one enters into dialogue with other scholars. But in order to use other people's ideas legitimately, while avoiding even the appearance of having stolen their words or ideas and passed them off as your own, you must use the conventions of quotation and documentation to make it absolutely clear where your own words and ideas end and others' words and ideas begin. This may be accomplished by using quotation marks to denote direct borrowing of language from other sources and by using introductory comments to indicate paraphrases of material from other sources. To avoid plagiarism, you must also indicate precisely the location of your source material, so that your reader may easily find and consult your sources. For English papers, this task is accomplished by using parenthetical page citations in your writing wherever you have quoted material from an outside source, and by giving complete publication information about each source in a Works Cited page at the end of your paper. Follow the latest MLA guidelines for citation and documentation; they are available in any recent writing handbook and online.

Remember, plagiarism is a sin of commission, not intention: it just doesn't matter whether you plagiarized "by accident" or on purpose. Either way, you have stolen others' ideas and lied to your readers about their source. Since the entire academic enterprise depends both on the free sharing of ideas and on the giving of credit where credit is due, plagiarism threatens everything that the university does--whether or not you intended to plagiarize. Therefore, the penalties for plagiarism will apply whether or not you committed plagiarism deliberately.

Make sure you understand the definition of plagiarism and the university's policies and penalties regarding academic dishonesty, which are spelled out in detail in the University Catalog and the Student Handbook. If you have any doubts or questions about the definitions of plagiarism, the legitimate use of research sources, or whether you are committing plagiarism in one of your papers, consult with me BEFORE submitting your work. I take no pleasure whatsoever in failing students, but I will have no choice but to do so if you plagiarize in my course.
English Department Procedures for Cases of Plagiarism

Both the university catalog and the student handbook have university-wide policies on academic dishonesty with which all students and instructors should become familiar. Plagiarism is a particularly problematic and not infrequent variety of academic dishonesty that calls for more specific policy than either the catalog or the handbook offer.

As a department, we rely on individual instructors to devise their own plagiarism policies and make them known to students as part of each course syllabus or as an ancillary document referenced in the syllabus. Doing this in writing has the dual benefit of communicating the information unambiguously and providing a “legal” reference point should a student dispute your handling of a particular instance of plagiarism.

Instructors have the freedom and the responsibility to deal with each individual case of plagiarism as they see fit, tailoring the approach to the circumstances, seriousness, and degree of certainty of the offense. However, no constructive educational purpose is served by keeping such matters secret—particularly in upper-division courses populated primarily by English majors and minors. Likewise, no constructive pedagogical purpose is served by letting the most serious cases of plagiarism go un-penalized. For these reasons, the department agrees to abide by the following, minimal standards for handling and reporting cases of plagiarism in our courses.

According to the particular circumstances, instructors may choose to deal with plagiarism in any way ranging from requiring a rewrite of the assignment, to failing the assignment, to failing the student for the course, to referring the matter to the Dean of Arts & Sciences with a request to pursue university disciplinary action. (The Dean will typically not pursue disciplinary action without the recommendation / request of the instructor.) We recognize that in some courses and situations, particularly in entry-level courses, “grey-area” plagiarism may occur as part of a student’s normal learning process and should probably be engaged by the instructor on that basis. Serious cases of plagiarism, however, should be reported to both the department chair and the Dean, to be added to a registry so that repeat offenders can be identified and dealt with appropriately.

Instructor’s Responsibilities

When confronted with serious cases of plagiarism, English instructors, in addition to whatever other measures they deem educationally appropriate to the particular situation, are strongly encouraged to

1) Obtain from the student a written response to the plagiarism charge, in which the student may accept or deny the charge, demonstrate his or her understanding of how and why this instance of plagiarism occurred, and articulate a strategy for avoiding future occurrences.

2) Submit to the department chair and to the Dean of Arts & Sciences a packet of information about the case, as follows:
   a) A cover note explaining the action the instructor has taken to address the plagiarism, and/or copies of written communication between the instructor and the student about the plagiarism, including the student letter mentioned in item 1, above;
   b) A copy of the course plagiarism policy as published to students in the syllabus or ancillary document;
   c) A copy of the plagiarized student work, with plagiarized portions marked;
3) Submit all of the above materials along with the Academic Misconduct Report form, available on the Arts & Sciences / Faculty Resources web page.

Chair's Responsibilities and Next Steps

Upon receipt of the plagiarism report, the department chair will add the student's name to the department plagiarism registry. If the student's name already appears in the registry, then the case will be referred by the chair to the student's advisor. The chair will also notify the student that this action has been taken. The advisor, chair, and instructor will meet to discuss the adequacy of the student's response to the charge of plagiarism and strategy for avoiding future acts of plagiarism (see step 1, above). On the basis of this meeting, the chair and instructor may make further recommendations to the Dean concerning further disposition of the plagiarism charge. The instructor will report the results of this meeting, in writing, to the student, unless the instructor asks the chair to do so instead. Second plagiarism offenses will also be reported by the chair to the English Secondary Education program coordinator and to the Graduate Program coordinator, both of whom will have access to the department plagiarism registry.

At no stage of implementation of these plagiarism procedures shall information about a plagiarizing student's case be shared with anyone other than the individuals explicitly named in the policy.

Approved by vote of the English department faculty 11/5/2010