

# Internet helps catch cheaters

Professors are finding more ways to identify papers that have been plagiarized, thanks to new Internet resources

By Leon Tovey  
Oregon Daily Emerald

"Plagiarism/Cheating: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course or at this University: Your work must be 100 percent your own. If you are caught cheating on exams or quizzes or plagiarizing in your written work, you will fail the course."

During the first week of classes, every student will see the above policy — or some variation of it — on syllabi in courses ranging from ENG 207 to ECON 201.

With the number of reported cases of "academic dishonesty" — a catch-all term for cheating and plagiarism of any kind — on the rise, students can be certain that someone, somewhere, will be watching.

According to Chris Loschiavo, director of Student Judicial Affairs, the number of reported cases of "academic dishonesty" doubled last year from 66 reported cases during the 1999-2000 academic year to 125 reported cases during the 2000-01 academic year.

But that's not to say that students are cheating more, he said — they're just getting caught and reported more.

"I think those numbers are more a function of myself going out and explaining the Student Conduct Code to the faculty," he said. "Cheating has always been a big problem, but now more faculty members are reporting it."

One reason for that might be the Internet. While access to the World Wide Web has made it easier for students to buy papers for classes,

it has also made it easier for instructors to catch them. Plagiarism detection services like Turnitin.com allow instructors to check papers for plagiarism even before they read them. The site compares submitted papers with millions of documents on the Web, looking for matching sequences more than eight words long.

In some cases, it doesn't even take that much to catch a plagiarist. Loschiavo points to a case a few years ago involving a student who was assigned to write a paper discussing the pros and cons of marijuana legalization as part of a disciplinary sanction (the student had earlier been caught with marijuana).

"In that case we just typed in the title of his paper," Loschiavo said. "We got him in three minutes."

Punishment for first-time offenders is usually limited to an "F" in the class and a warning from Student Judicial Affairs. Students caught cheating more than once, however, can face suspension — although that punishment is usually reserved for those who Loschiavo feels "just don't get it."

Those who "don't get it," Loschiavo said, sometimes fall into the category of people who don't realize that what they're doing is wrong.

According to John Gage, head of the University's English department, the increasing dependence on Internet research has raised confusion about the citation of facts in papers.

"Some students are actually believing that cutting and pasting is honest work," he said. "We need to be clearer about what constitutes research."

That sentiment is echoed by Daniel Pope, head of the history department, who feels that the

## Academic Dishonesty

Number of reported incidents of academic dishonesty at the University of Oregon:

1998-99: 46

1999-2000: 66

2000-01: 125

SOURCE: Chris Loschiavo,  
director of Student Judicial Affairs

availability of information on the Internet has complicated the issue of plagiarism and what can be done to combat it.

"I try to avoid the issue of plagiarism by giving fairly structured paper assignments," he said. "For example, I might assign books with different outlooks on a subject and assign students to compare and contrast those specific books."

However, Pope doesn't claim to be completely immune to plagiarists. If people have the desire to cheat, he said, they will probably find a way to do it. In such cases, he said, it's nice to have a way to catch those who use the Internet to cheat.

For his part, Loschiavo warns those who may be considering using a Web site, such as school-sucks.com, that Internet paper mills — sites that provide papers to students — make no guarantees about the quality of the papers they offer.

"People who use these sites could be getting an 'A' paper or an 'F' paper," he said. "And professors do figure out pretty quickly what a student is capable of. Chances are they'll get suspicious and do a search."

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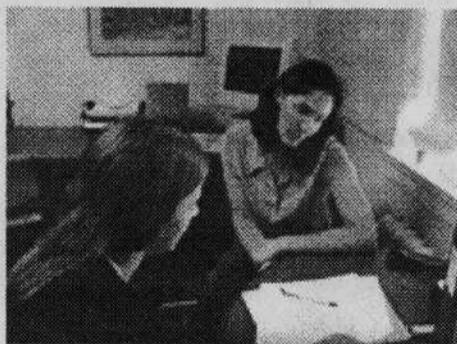
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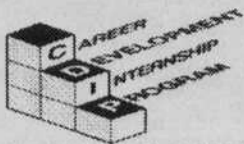


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