

PLAGIARISM  
&  
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

# Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

at

## Furman University★

“Plagiarism” is a term describing the use of another’s words or ideas without proper acknowledgement. *The students and faculty of Furman University consider plagiarism a serious form of academic dishonesty and believe that a student found guilty of plagiarism should be subject to the penalty applied to all other forms of cheating.* Plagiarism is dishonest because its central principle is deception; in simplest terms, the *unacknowledged use of someone else’s work is in effect an attempt to deceive one’s reader into thinking that it is one’s own.* Thus plagiarism involves three categories of dishonorable action: lying through misrepresentation of one’s self, cheating through an attempt to gain academic advantage unfairly, and stealing through the appropriation of another’s work. It is essential, then, that all Furman students be fully aware of the exact nature of plagiarism in order that they be able to recognize and avoid it in their own work.

This pamphlet is not intended to be used as a legal document, but rather as educational material to inform students of the many aspects of proper acknowledgement. The examples given within are simply that – clear *examples*, not definitive illustrations.

The most obvious form of plagiarism is the wholesale borrowing or theft of someone else’s written work and the submission of that work as one’s own; for example, the submission of papers which one has not written oneself, but rather has copied from some external source such as another student’s paper, a reference work or an Internet web site. This kind of plagiarism is easily identifiable and avoidable.

But plagiarism does not consist solely of such simple theft of another’s written work. It may, for example, involve a minor indebtedness to the language or ideas of another. Indebtedness may occur in varying degrees and must be acknowledged in any of the five general types of written work typically performed at Furman.

★This pamphlet was originally published as *Plagiarism and the Honor System at Washington and Lee University.* Certain institutional and campus-specific references have been changed, and references to electronic sources have been added. Furman University is grateful to Washington and Lee University for permission to reprint this material.

## **A. CREATIVE PAPERS**

Poems, plays or fiction written either for courses or for literary contests or magazines will probably not be based on specific research in secondary sources; most frequently, they originate in personal experiences or reading and no acknowledgement of sources is required or even possible. If, however, a creative work is modeled or draws heavily upon another similar work, indebtedness must be acknowledged. Literary allusions or obvious quotations (e.g., “To be or not to be: that is the question”) need not be acknowledged.

## **B. EXPOSITORY ESSAYS**

Some course work at Furman, primarily in introductory courses, involves the writing of short papers in which research is either optional or is entirely prohibited. Typically in such cases the teacher is interested in the student’s own response to the subject, not in knowledge gained through library research. Clearly, though, it is virtually impossible to avoid the use of ideas and facts acquired in past reading or course work. How, then, is plagiarism to be avoided?

A simple rule of thumb is this: *facts or opinions acquired before the assignment was made require no specific acknowledgement, but information gained after the assignment was made must be acknowledged.* And unless the teacher explicitly permits outside reading in preparation for the paper, one should avoid research, since one’s ideas and writing are inevitably influenced by such reading. The same rule of thumb applies to the use of notes and textbooks from past course work, either at Furman or in secondary school: what is *remembered* needs no acknowledgement, but what is *re-read* in preparing the paper has been researched and thus must be acknowledged. *In any case, writers should understand and follow assignments carefully and before completing assignments should consult with teachers to resolve uncertainties concerning plagiarism.*

## **C. BOOK REPORTS**

Occasionally, courses require the writing of short papers on single books or articles. Although the assignment and the paper’s title should make clear that the paper is based on work by another, the writer must nevertheless be careful to avoid plagiarism. A book report must not include unacknowledged close paraphrase or restatement of portions

of the book or of published book reviews. It should instead summarize for the purpose of commentary, and where actual phrases or sentences from the book are used, *they must be enclosed in quotation marks.*

## D. RESEARCH PAPERS

Most students at Furman, regardless of major, will at one time or another be required to write research papers, in which they read historical, biographical or critical materials concerning a particular subject and present the results of the research in a paper. The object of such research is not simply to ingest and regurgitate already published scholarship on a given topic. On the contrary, able writers analyze and evaluate their research material in order to arrive eventually at conclusions of their own. But they must recognize that their papers are substantially based on their reading and that they must acknowledge their indebtedness to the work of others.

Two general kinds of indebtedness must be acknowledged:

1. *Facts not of general knowledge.* Facts generally known, which can be easily obtained from a dictionary or some other ready source of reference, are considered “general knowledge,” and their sources need not be acknowledged. For example, the year of Robert E. Lee’s birth can be obtained from a variety of sources which need not be cited. However, a more complex set of facts such as the details of Lee’s strategy at Gettysburg cannot be considered “general knowledge”; a writer will generally use a single secondary source for acquiring such facts and must acknowledge that source. *In cases of doubt, it is better to err on the side of caution and to cite sources than to make no acknowledgment whatsoever.*

2. *Quotations and ideas derived from research.* Writers of research papers often find it useful to summarize information and ideas obtained in research or to quote directly from the work of scholars. In either case, proper acknowledgment is essential. To illustrate this point, suppose a student is doing research toward a paper on early American religious groups and finds in Daniel Boorstin’s *The Americans* the following paragraph:

The Quakers lacked neither courage nor energy. It was not so much the actual content of their creed as the uncompromising obstinacy with which they hung on to it, and their attitude toward

themselves, that were decisive. The two flaws fatal to the influence of this remarkable people on American culture were, first, an urge toward martyrdom and a preoccupation with the purity of their own souls; and, second, a rigidity in all their beliefs. The first led their vision away from the community and inward to themselves; the second hardened them against the ordinary accommodations of this world. Neither the martyr nor the doctrinaire could flourish on American soil.<sup>1</sup>

Boorstin here presents both a pair of observations about early American Quakers and a generalization about their influence on American culture based on those observations. The following paragraphs illustrate the ways in which this paragraph might be used in a research paper; the first example demonstrates correct acknowledgment while the three following are forms of plagiarism.

Example a. *Proper use and acknowledgment:*

Daniel Boorstin claims that the Quakers had little permanent effect on American culture, and identifies two related “flaws” of self-centeredness in their outlook: “an urge toward martyrdom...[and] a rigidity in all their beliefs,” qualities which he feels made them too inflexibly asocial, unable to adapt to what he calls “the ordinary accommodations of this world.”<sup>2</sup> But, while stressing the introvertedness of the Quaker world-view, he underestimates the extraordinary communal energy that it produced. The qualities he describes produced a highly functional – though admittedly self-contained and isolated – social subculture, dependent largely upon itself, that has persisted throughout American history.

The writer has either quoted Boorstin’s prose directly or has paraphrased it in language entirely of his own; furthermore, he has clearly acknowledge his debt to Boorstin’s ideas with a footnote. (This is an example of proper footnote form as prescribed by a former

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958) 34.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958) 34.

documentation style of the Modern Language Association, still used in some disciplines; other commonly used style sheets can be found in various reference works such as the *St. Martin's Handbook*.) Moreover, he is clearly using Boorstin's analysis of the Quakers rather than simply repeating it and is moving toward a conclusion of his own, one which owes something to Boorstin's but which also goes beyond it.

Example b. *Improper acknowledgement:*

Daniel Boorstin points out two central characteristics of early American Quakers: "an urge toward martyrdom...[and] a rigidity in all their beliefs." These qualities prevented the Quakers from ever profoundly influencing American culture, since the tendency to martyrdom made them look away from the community and inward to themselves, while their moral rigidity created a barrier between them and the ordinary accommodations of the world. America has never been a favorable climate for either martyrs or doctrinaires.

Here the writer properly identifies the source of his quotation. However, he then proceeds to mislead the reader into believing that what follows the quotation are his own language and ideas. They are not; while the writer has rearranged some of Boorstin's sentences, he has maintained the original paragraph's organization, ideas and even its vocabulary and is thus guilty of plagiarism. *In summaries of research, a writer has two responsibilities: to identify his entire debt, not just a portion of it, and to avoid using another author's vocabulary and structure as if they were his own.*

Example c. *Plagiarism of an idea:*

Although the Quakers possessed various important virtues, principally courage and energy, their strong adherence to their creed posed two barriers to their having a permanent effect on American cultural history. Their tendency toward individual sacrifice and martyrdom prevented them from forming communities, while their inflexible spirituality made them intolerant of the ways of others.

This student has generally managed to avoid Boorstin's phrasing and language (though his use of "courage and energy" and "martyrdom" and his substitution of "inflexibility" for "rigidity" are questionable)

and has also reordered the sentences and clauses. But he has failed to acknowledge that his pair of causes for the limited cultural effect of Quakerism is directly derived from Boorstin's analysis; thus his idea, even if not his language is plagiarized. The writer needs to indicate, either through a footnote, or through a footnote and an interjected phrase such as "according to Daniel Boorstin," the source of his argument.

Example d. *Wholesale plagiarism:*

The Quakers were both energetic and courageous. It was not so much the content of their belief as the uncompromising stubbornness with which they clung to it, and their attitude toward themselves, that were decisive. The two problems that prevented the influence of these remarkable people on American culture were, first, an urge toward martyrdom and a preoccupation with personal spiritual purity; and second, a rigidity in all their beliefs. The first pushed their vision away from society and inward to themselves; the second hardened them against the ordinary accommodations of this world. Neither the martyr nor the doctrinaire could prosper in America.

This is plainly theft. The writer has made a variety of minor changes: the substitution of "stubbornness" for "obstinacy," of "personal spiritual purity" for "the purity of their own souls," of "pushed" for "led," of "prosper" for "flourish." Nevertheless the passage is in no way his own work since neither the language nor the idea is original. Plagiarism such as this is a flagrant attempt to deceive the reader.

## E. SOURCE CITATION IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE

The development of the Internet has given both students and instructors quick and easy access to a wide range of written materials. The ease of obtaining information coupled with the seeming anonymity of authorship on the World Wide Web has tended to create confusion about the proper use and acknowledgment of Internet materials. **Therefore, it is important for students to know that the use of electronic sources – just like printed sources – in a course assignment must be properly acknowledged using the citation format indicated by the course instructor.**

When consulting a source via the Internet, students should verify that it is indeed a reliable source, with information worthy of reference in a college-level assignment. Although the Internet can be a valuable research tool (when utilized appropriately), the lack of oversight of what is posted to the web requires students to be especially discriminating in their use of these materials.

## **F. SPECIALIZED ASSIGNMENTS**

As a general rule, sources used for writing assignments should be acknowledged. However, there are assignments where footnotes or other means of acknowledging indebtedness are not properly included in the written product.

For example, some journalism assignments cannot include footnotes and some persuasive writing assignments (especially in law schools) would be less persuasive if the source of the idea was disclosed. If this is the case, a professor may tell a student in advance that the normal requirements of academic integrity and of this pamphlet do not apply to a particular assignment.

Where no proper means for acknowledging indebtedness within the assignment are available, the principles of academic integrity do not require acknowledgment. Where the person giving the assignment expressly states ground rules for the assignments different from the rules in this pamphlet, the terms of the assignment should be followed.

The following principles also apply to written work submitted at Furman:

1. *Typing of papers.* If a paper is to be typed by someone other than the student, the writer is responsible for explaining to the typist that the manuscript is to be followed exactly.

2. *Assistance in spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.* The actual composition of the paper must be the student's own work, down to the most minute detail of the writing. If you need assistance, then you should refer to a dictionary or composition handbook or you should consult your teacher, but you should not seek the help of another student. Help obtained from anyone other than the teacher must be specifically acknowledged.

3. *Finally* – and this is perhaps the most important principle of all – a writer who has any doubt whatsoever about whether or not to

acknowledge indebtedness should consult the course instructor *before submitting the paper* or should, at the very least, include a statement with the paper explaining the sources of doubt.

*NOTE: The Center for Collaborative Learning & Communication (CCLC) is available to provide assistance, unless specifically prohibited by your instructor.*



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OFFICE OF ASSOCIATE ACADEMIC DEAN  
Furman University  
3300 Poinsett Highway  
Greenville, S.C. 29613-4914