



# EMERSON COLLEGE

## **Plagiarism Policy**

*(Issued by the Academic Policy Committee and approved by the Faculty Assembly May, 1983, and updated and approved by Faculty Assembly, October 2005.)*

### **I. Introduction**

Plagiarism is the use of the words and ideas of another as if they were one's own and without acknowledgment of their source. Plagiarism is stealing, and constitutes a serious offense against any ethical code, be it scholastic, artistic, or professional. Plagiarism can be committed intentionally, or it can happen inadvertently, due to careless note-taking, or to a lack of knowledge of the conventions by which sources are credited, or even because of a misunderstanding on what constitutes original thinking.

Plagiarism is unethical in any context, and especially so in college, where the development of personal integrity and original thinking are the primary goals. Emerson College is no exception. Indeed, Emerson's specialized nature as a preparer of professional communicators makes the issue of plagiarism more critical, and more complex, than it might be elsewhere. In all Emerson's areas of specialization, the accurate and honest communication of ideas is fundamental.

What follows is an attempt to a) clarify the nature of the risks involved in plagiarism, b) to identify the various types of plagiarism at risk at Emerson College, and c) to reaffirm and expand upon the mechanism by which plagiarism may be obviated.

There are aspects of academic honesty other than plagiarism to which the student or faculty member is expected to adhere. Other examples of what might be considered inappropriate or dishonest academic behavior can be obtained from the Director of Graduate Studies.

The submission of materials which are purchased from various "term paper" companies or from another student is considered by the faculty to be a blatant disregard of the regulations involving plagiarism. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work, the work of another, or any work which he or she has not honestly performed, or to pass an examination by improper means, renders the offender liable to immediate suspension. The aiding and abetting of a student in any dishonesty is likewise held to be a grave breach of discipline. The sabotage of another student's work, or simple theft of academic materials,

theft or damage of library materials or College equipment used for academic purposes, or lying, will subject the violator to the severest penalties. A lack of awareness of the regulations governing plagiarism and cheating on the part of the student does not exempt a student from the responsibility to abide by the College's regulations governing the matter.

## **II. The Nature of the Problem**

Any form of creative work, whether academic, professional, or artistic, is composed of three essential elements: research, analysis, and critical reintegration. These elements are interdependent and cyclical. Without research, no acquisition of knowledge is possible; without analysis, the useful application of that knowledge is not feasible; and without critical reintegration, no new knowledge can be developed. Colleges and universities exist as environments in which the pursuit, analysis, and institutions of higher learning have a responsibility to supervise the process that leads to those goals, and thus ensure its furtherance. (The process is, of course, further protected, both within and outside education, by copyright laws.)

Plagiarism, intentional or otherwise, is a major threat to this process. If the products of research of any kind are displayed in any form without being duly credited, the advancement of understanding becomes mired in the rehashing of old information; fresh analytical and/or creative thinking is lost in the confusion, at both individual and societal levels and individuals are neither given credit or blame for their labors.

In addition, the accurate crediting of sources serves as something of an education shorthand, in which footnotes and bibliographies function as guideposts for those concerned with pursuing specific aspects of the information presented.

In addition to the other harms caused by plagiarism, it almost certainly is causing misunderstanding and committing a fraud upon the readers and viewers of the material.

Thus the scrupulous and accurate crediting of sources, via the accepted forms, is critical to the effective sorting and communication of information. Only in the presence of such crediting can the three elements of the intellectual/creative process be recognized for what they are, either by the individual communicator or by those receiving the information.

## **III. Types of Plagiarism**

### **A. Print Media**

While plagiarism can occur in any area of endeavor, it is most commonly thought

of in terms of expository writing (research papers, theses, essays, etc.). Generally the types of plagiarism occurring in this area can be sorted into two categories.

The most obvious is plagiarism in which a writer simply copies from a text not his own. The work of another is presented, word-for-word or nearly so, under the name of one who has not written but only copied. This, as noted, is a matter of simple theft, and there is little question about the motive of anyone who commits this offense against the academic (or any) community. A defense often used by undergraduates accused of this kind of plagiarism is the claim that their high school teachers regularly accepted reports copied from encyclopedias or other books, without any crediting of sources. Whatever the truth of this, it should be understood that the practice is not acceptable at Emerson College.

The other, more common type of plagiarism is often referred to as "mosaic plagiarism." It can be committed by the astutely dishonest thief, in a deliberate attempt to deceive; or by a well-meaning, but uninformed or careless writer, who takes research notes poorly or who misunderstands the forms required for accurate crediting. In mosaic plagiarism, words are not copied directly, but are changed or rearranged; original sentences or even whole paragraphs are often interspersed with the plagiarized material. Unless properly credited, however, that plagiarized material is no less theft in this type than in the first, nor can it be any more tolerated at Emerson College.

## **B. Non-Print Media and the Arts**

The issue of plagiarism is certainly not limited to expository writing. Equally subject are the non-print media -- television and radio and the visual and performing arts. While the lines may be less easily drawn in these areas, the principles remain the same: the work of others must be credited as such.

Proper crediting format differs in these areas, certainly, from the footnote/bibliography forms accepted in expository writing, but they should be no less carelessly observed. In radio broadcasting, for example, quotes or bodies of material taken from other sources must be identified verbally, either in the course of conversation or in spoken "footnotes" at the end of a programming segment. Film/video crediting may occur either in the sound track or by way of written on-screen credits, typically at the end of a tape or film. Program notes may cite credits for artistic exhibitions or performances.

Emerson students producing work in any of these areas are expected to be familiar with the appropriate forms and to use them scrupulously.

## **C. Shadow Areas**

Three areas of confusion are frequently encountered in the process of crediting

sources.

The first, essentially formal, centers on the use of paraphrasing or direct quotation from a source. Both are common and accepted ways to cite research, but confusion often arises as to whether they require formal crediting. In the case of paraphrasing, it must be remembered that while the words may indeed be one's own, the ideas they express are not; and those ideas must be formally credited to their source. When one uses direct quotations, it is not enough to set them apart, visually, with quotation marks; both quotations and paraphrased passages must be footnoted.

A second area of confusion surrounds the use of "public" or "encyclopedic" information. This is information that is generally assumed to be shared by everyone, and it need not be credited. (If one refers, for instance, to the fact that in the standard decimal system two plus two equals four, there is no need to cite an arithmetic book as a source.) What information may be safely assumed to be "public", however, is often uncertain. A good rule of thumb here is to credit anything that was new when one encountered it in the course of research since it is better to appear naive than dishonest.

The third common area of uncertainty is more or less specific to the creative arts and may be referred to as "artistic quoting." Often, creative material produced by others (a photograph or a piece of dialogue for instance) may be used in one's own work for the purpose of commenting on its original style, attitude, technique, etc. The key questions for crediting here is, again, familiarity. One would probably not need to cite sources for the Mona Lisa, for example, or for "To be or not to be"; but the sources of more obscure references do need credit.

Students who are found guilty of plagiarism or cheating will be subject to receiving the grade of "F" for the course, and an official record of such action becomes part of the student's permanent file. One offense of this nature makes the student liable to immediate academic suspension. Any further offense results in dismissal from the College. The submission of materials which are purchased from various "term paper" companies or from another student is considered by the faculty to be a blatant disregard of the regulations involving plagiarism.

The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work, the work of another, or any work which he or she has not honestly performed, or to pass an examination by improper means, renders the offender liable to immediate suspension. The aiding and abetting of a student in any dishonesty is likewise held to be a grave breach of discipline. A lack of awareness of the regulations governing plagiarism and cheating on the part of the student does not exempt a student from the responsibility to abide by the College's regulations governing the matter.

For more information regarding Procedures, Hearing Options for Students, and

Sanction Options view the [Academic Misconduct Guidelines](#).

*The committee is indebted to the President and Fellows of Harvard University for permission to draw heavily from their brochure, "The Use of Sources for Papers in Expository Writing" (Richard Marius, 1988) in the preparation of this section of the report.*