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EDITORIAL

Cheaters never win

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We live in the era of cut and paste, thanks to the Internet, which provides students with countless materials to plagiarize.

If you think that's an exaggeration, do an Internet search of "free term papers." You'll find cheathouse.com, Cheater.com, Schoolsucks.com, echeat.com and Free Essay Network (freeessay.com) among the 603 million results that turn up.

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One site, 24hourtermpapers.com, even boasts of providing "custom term papers" within 24 hours (at \$23.95 per page), targeting college students who put off writing papers until the 11th hour. A disclaimer warns that "these term papers are to be used for research purposes only. Use of these papers for any other purpose is not the responsibility of 24 Hour Term Papers." Funny that they say that, because the site provides the student with a nice package to hand directly to the professor: All term papers are "sent within the due date," with a bibliography page thrown in for no extra charge.

A student who pays such a steep price for a term paper is not likely to use it only as a resource. One of the perks of being a student today is unlimited access to a slew of research tools, from the library to an online research database the institution pays for the student to use.

Student Judicial Services at the University of Texas defines plagiarism as "representing as your own work any material that was obtained from another source, regardless of how or where you acquired it." This includes borrowing ideas or even structure. And "by merely changing a few words or rearranging several words or sentences, you are not paraphrasing. Making minor revisions to borrowed text amounts to plagiarism," the Web site warns.

But those warnings go unheeded by many. The Center for Academic Integrity found last year that more than 70 percent of college students admitted to having cheated at least once, more than 60 percent admitted to plagiarizing and nearly 40 percent said they have plagiarized from the Internet.

Strict disciplinary action should follow students who are caught trying to claim someone else's work as their own. The more it goes unnoticed, the easier it is for students to keep stealing. Educators should devote time and attention to properly educating students on what plagiarism is and why it's stupid to do it.

In the end, the plagiarizer has the most to lose, whether he or she gets caught or not. Many of the online papers are not worthy of copying, especially if a student wants to excel in college. By stealing someone else's work and labeling it as their own, students forgo the opportunity to learn how to research, develop ideas and translate them into quality writing. Not to mention tarnishing a reputation, if the student gets caught.

Cheathouse.com and other sites like it might get students a passing grade in a course, but it only puts them a step behind everyone else who is developing the skills needed to thrive in the workplace. Employers won't be as forgiving as teachers or disciplinary committees. The day will come when the "I'm a student. I'm still learning" excuse will fall on deaf ears.

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