



## BITS & BYTES

# The persistent plague of plagiarism

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This article aims to introduce the numerous library web sites devoted to the issue of plagiarism.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Surveys several web sites devoted to the issue of plagiarism and compares them against each other. The author notes the intended audience and approach in each site.

**Findings** – Many web sites examining the issue of plagiarism have been developed and are maintained by libraries. The topic of plagiarism has clearly entered the purview of librarians.

**Originality/value** – Even though all web sites examined were created by libraries, not all sites are equal. Some clearly state what plagiarism is, while others provide tutorials as the method of instruction. As such, this survey provides many options from which to choose so that one can determine which approach is appropriate for their own institution to use.

**Keywords** Libraries, Education, Electronic media, Internet, Intellectual property

**Paper type** Viewpoint

### Introduction

The practice of looking up your own name in an internet search engine like Google is sometimes called Ego Surfing, implying that it is a vainglorious pursuit. However, there are good reasons to do it. You can see if others on the web are referring to you and your work on their own web sites and, more pertinently, how they are doing so – favorably or unfavorably, fairly or unfairly. What Blue Macellari, a graduate student at both Duke and Johns Hopkins Universities, found when she looked herself up in Google this past year though was fairly shocking: she found a paper she had written six years before as an undergraduate offered for sale in three “term-paper mill” databases.

Macellari says she does not know how those businesses obtained the paper, but that they certainly did not have her permission to profit from her work. She initiated legal proceedings for the sites to cease and desist their alleged copyright infringement. Besides the personal problems encountered by Ms Macellari, the larger issue here for academic institutions is that of plagiarism, taking someone else’s intellectual property and passing it off as your own. Plagiarism is said to run rampant among students today – not to mention several prominent cases involving journalists, authors and historians in recent years. With electronic cut-and-paste techniques and the wealth of information freely available on the web, it has never been easier to plagiarize. One popular plagiarism detection service called Turnitin receives roughly 40,000 student papers daily and claims that 30 percent contain plagiarism.



Increasingly, librarians have begun to see information ethics as part of their purview and a natural extension of our traditional role as gatekeepers of information and research. As part of this function, a multitude of plagiarism-related pages have been created by librarians on library web sites to assist both students and faculty in recognizing and combating this plague of dishonesty and sloppiness.

### Pages for faculty

One fairly detailed site is Baylor University Libraries' Plagiarism Prevention and Detection page ([www3.baylor.edu/Library/BeyondLib/plagiarism.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/Library/BeyondLib/plagiarism.htm)). The page first lists such suggestions for prevention as taking the time to teach students what plagiarism is and how to properly cite material, requiring narrow research topics, current resources and copies of source materials, and assigning term paper alternatives such as oral reports. Reasons to suspect plagiarism are chronicled, as are investigation techniques such as searching full-text library databases, internet search engines, term paper mills and plagiarism detection services.

The University of Alberta's Guide to Plagiarism and Cyber-Plagiarism ([www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/index.cfm](http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/index.cfm)) explores the same territory, but goes to even greater depth in its prevention and detection suggestions. In addition, this site offers handouts on proper paraphrasing and citing as well as background on the importance of academic honesty.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison's page on student cheating and plagiarism ([www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/WomensStudies/plag.htm](http://www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/WomensStudies/plag.htm)) is a lengthy clearinghouse of online resources on cheating, term paper companies, free papers, full text databases, plagiarism detection, ways to discourage cheating, teaching students about plagiarism and other questionable practices.

The Eiche Library at Penn State Altoona's Plagiarism Resource Guide for Faculty page ([www.personal.psu.edu/dept/Eichelibrary/plagiarism.htm](http://www.personal.psu.edu/dept/Eichelibrary/plagiarism.htm)) focuses on why students plagiarize and what instructors can do to counter this. Meanwhile, the Kimbel Library of Coastal Carolina University focuses mostly on the issue of term paper mills in Cheating 101: Paper Mills and You ([www.coastal.edu/library/presentations/papermil.html](http://www.coastal.edu/library/presentations/papermil.html)).

Le Moyne College Library's Electronic Plagiarism Seminar ([www.lemoyne.edu/library/plagiarism/index.htm](http://www.lemoyne.edu/library/plagiarism/index.htm)) provides tips for investigating suspected plagiarism with search engines and offers several specific strategies for prevention, including talking about it, outlining the writing process and explaining ethical consequences. Similarly, the University of Texas at Austin's Preventing and Detecting Plagiarism page ([www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/faculty/plagiarism/](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/faculty/plagiarism/)) highlights how the library can help faculty with the problem. Even a high school library in Downers Grove, Illinois, has created a page devoted to the scourge of plagiarism ([www.csd99.k12.il.us/north/library/plagiarism.htm](http://www.csd99.k12.il.us/north/library/plagiarism.htm)), and it is a very thorough and useful site.

### Pages for students

Conversely, some sites aim at reducing plagiarism by addressing students directly. Duke University Library's Avoiding Plagiarism – Practical Strategies page ([www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/plagiarism2.htm](http://www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/plagiarism2.htm)) is aptly titled. It offers students guidance on how to avoid committing plagiarism inadvertently by giving pointed advice regarding

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gathering research materials, taking notes, documenting sources and internet copyright issues.

The Dalhousie University Library's Plagiarism and Intellectual Honesty site (<http://plagiarism.dal.ca/>) features a Student Resources page that explains what plagiarism is, how to cite and how to paraphrase. They also offer to their students online software to edit and format their bibliography and an assignment calculator that sets up a personalized schedule for writing a paper. This calculator was originally developed at the University of Minnesota and was very intelligently designed. Finally, there is an extensive multimedia presentation on conducting research ethically.

Some of the pages that are aimed at faculty also attempt to advise students as well. Two examples are Le Moyne College Library's Electronic Plagiarism Seminar: Guides for Students ([www.lemoyne.edu/library/plagiarism/students.htm](http://www.lemoyne.edu/library/plagiarism/students.htm)) and the University of Alberta's Guide to Plagiarism and Cyber-Plagiarism.

### **Tutorials, examples and tests**

A number of institutions have begun to try to reach students through online tutorials that often involve quizzes to measure students' progress. LSU Libraries' Plagiarism Guide ([www.lib.lsu.edu/instruction/plagiarism.html](http://www.lib.lsu.edu/instruction/plagiarism.html)) takes a much too brief approach. It's a one-screen quiz listing ten possible examples of plagiarism that leads to a single screen of explanation. North Carolina State University Library's Plagiarism Tutorial ([www.lib.ncsu.edu/scc/tutorial/plagiarism/](http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/scc/tutorial/plagiarism/)) consists of only five screens defining plagiarism and noting its penalties. Arcadia University Library's You Quote It, You Note It! (<http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/>) is a short Flash presentation on paraphrasing and citing. Montgomery College Library's Plagiarism Evaluation and Quiz ([www.montgomerycollege.edu/library/plagiarismevalquiz.htm](http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/library/plagiarismevalquiz.htm)) is concerned as much with the college's plagiarism policies as toward the practice itself.

In contrast to the limited approach, the University of Memphis Plagiarism Tutorial (<http://exlibris.memphis.edu/help/plagiarism/>) has several examples of good and bad paraphrasing and citing and concludes with an eight-question quiz. However, San Jose State University Library's Plagiarism Tutorial (<http://tutorials.sjlibrary.org/plagiarism/index.htm>) goes to the extremes with a 15-question pre-quiz followed by an informative tutorial and a 15-question quiz.

The best approach seems to be brief and to the point. The University of Southern Mississippi Library's Acceptable Use or Plagiarism Quiz ([www.lib.usm.edu/research/plag/acceptuse1.php](http://www.lib.usm.edu/research/plag/acceptuse1.php)) offers six illustrative examples of paraphrasing and quoting and concludes with a ten-question quiz. Fairfield University Library's Plagiarism Court (<http://library2.fairfield.edu/instruction/ramona/plugin.html>) presents a short Flash tutorial followed by a ten-question quiz. Taylor University Library's Plagiarism Tutorial ([www2.taylor.edu/library/upland/index.php?page=library\\_tutorials/plagiarism/index.html&template=templateBlank.php](http://www2.taylor.edu/library/upland/index.php?page=library_tutorials/plagiarism/index.html&template=templateBlank.php)) provides a modular approach in which subtopics can be digested in pieces. The final piece is a six-question quiz that utilizes the same book passage to demonstrate six different ways students can use or misuse the source material. Finally, the Paul Robeson Library of Rutgers University where this columnist works includes "How to Avoid Plagiarism" ([www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib/robeson\\_lib/flash\\_presents/text\\_plag.html](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib/robeson_lib/flash_presents/text_plag.html)) as part of its overall Guide to Library Research. There are three short and clever RealPlayer movies that demonstrate what plagiarism is along with a six-question quiz that utilizes

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pop culture passages as its examples. This site was designed by my colleague Vibiana Bowman who also authored *The Plagiarism Plague*, the book from which the title of this paper derived (Bowman, 2004).

Plagiarism is a major problem in the information world, and it is natural that librarians should take the lead in combating this plague. In numerous cases reference librarians work more closely with students on their papers than do teaching faculty. Even if the students rely solely on remote access, many (we hope) are gathering their research materials through library databases and thus accessing the library virtually. Because of this, we should have a vigorous web presence opposing plagiarism. It is reassuring that many libraries are doing just that.

### Reference

Bowman, V. (2004), *The Plagiarism Plague*, Neal-Schuman Publishers, New York, NY.

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