

## **A Campus Fad That's Being Copied** *Internet Plagiarism Seems on the Rise*

**SARA RIMER**

**A** study conducted on 23 college campuses has found that Internet plagiarism is rising among students.

Thirty-eight percent of the undergraduate students surveyed said that in the last year they had engaged in one or more instances of "cut-and-paste" plagiarism involving the Internet, paraphrasing or copying anywhere from a few sentences to a full

paragraph from the Web without citing the source. Almost half the students said they considered such behavior trivial or not cheating at all.

Only 10 percent of students had acknowledged such cheating in a similar, but much smaller, survey three years ago.

This year's study, organized by Donald L. McCabe, a management professor at Rutgers University, surveyed more than 18,000 students, 2,600 faculty members and 650 teaching assistants at large public universities and small private colleges nationwide. No Ivy League schools were included.

"There are a lot of students who are growing up with the Internet who are convinced that anything you find on the Internet is public knowledge and doesn't need to be cited," Professor McCabe said. 5

The survey solicited students' comments about cheating, and one student wrote, "If professors cannot detect a paper from an Internet source, that is a flaw in the grader or professor."

Another student wrote: "One time I downloaded a program off the Internet for my class. I hated the class and it was mandatory so I didn't care about learning it, just passing it."

Forty percent of students acknowledged plagiarizing written sources in the last year. As with the Internet cheating, about half the students considered this sort of plagiarism trivial.

Twenty percent of the faculty members said they use their computers, such as the turnitin.com site, to help detect student plagiarism.

Twenty-two percent of undergraduates acknowledged cheating in a "serious" way in the past year—copying from another student on a test, using unauthorized notes or helping someone else to cheat on a test. 10

"When I work with high school students, what I hear is, 'Everyone cheats, it's not all that important,' " Professor McCabe said. "They say: 'It's just to get into college. When I get into college, I won't do it.' But then you survey college students, and you hear the same thing."

The undergraduates say they need to cheat because of the intense competition to get into graduate school, and land the top jobs, Professor McCabe said. "It never stops," he said.

One of the students from the survey wrote: "This isn't a college problem. It's a problem of the entire country!"

Professor McCabe said: "Students will say they're just mimicking what goes on in society with business leaders, politicians. I don't know whether they're making excuses for what they've



already done, or whether they're saying, 'It's O.K. if I do this because of what's going on.' "

- 5 Many of the colleges involved in the survey have begun trying to fight cheating by educating both faculty members and students on academic integrity and revising school policies.

Princeton University was not involved in the survey, but it is among the schools that have been taking steps to make sure students know that it is wrong to use material from the Internet without citing the source.

"We need to pay more attention as students join our communities to explaining why this is such a core value—being honest in your academic work and why, if you cheat, that is a very big deal to us," said Kathleen Deignan, Princeton's dean of undergraduate students.

There has not been any noticeable increase in cheating at Princeton, Ms. Deignan said, with 18 to 25 cases reported a year. Administrators have noticed, however, that sometimes students and parents do not understand why it is wrong to "borrow" sections of text for a paper without providing attribution, Ms. Deignan added.

Princeton students are also concerned, and they have organized a campus assembly on integrity for Sept. 21.

- 6 "We live in a world where a lot of this is negotiable," Ms. Deignan said. "Academic institutions need to say, 'This is not negotiable.' "

## CHEATING: WATER-BOTTLE TRICKS

Some of the comments submitted anonymously by college students who took part in a survey about cheating:

- If teachers taught better we wouldn't have to cheat.
- Maybe schools and parents should focus on learning instead of grades.
- You can't stop it. . . . Some people were just raised that way—"do whatever you have to do."
- In my freshman biology class, our professor would give us the answers to the test once we finished and turned in the test, so we could figure out what we missed before he got them out to us. One student turned in the test, went back to get his book bag and gave the sheet of paper to his friend who was still taking the test.
- Someone I know once soaked the label off a water bottle, printed up a fake label, copied notes onto the back of the fake

label, and pasted it back onto the water bottle. During the test, he had the water bottle on his desk. He'd take a drink, read the exposed line through the bottle and write down the answer.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Rimer states that the number of students copying from the Internet without citing the source is increasing. Do students not recognize that copying from electronic sources is stealing from another person? Explain.
2. Discuss the validity of the following statement: "If professors cannot detect a paper from an Internet source, that is a flaw in the grader or professor."
3. What is "trivial" plagiarism? Are students missing the point of plagiarism and the issue of ethics? Explain.
4. What percentage of "students acknowledged plagiarizing written sources" within the year before Rimer wrote this article?

### Questions for Writing

1. "Students will say they're just mimicking what goes on in society with business leaders, politicians." If people in high-profile positions behave unethically, does their behavior give others a license to make immoral decisions in their lives—for example, plagiarizing material for a research paper? Analyze this topic in an essay.
2. Write a persuasive essay convincing readers either that plagiarism is unacceptable or that it is acceptable.