

## **Plagiarism Assignment**

**Information Literacy GEO this assignment addresses:** Uses and manipulates information responsibly, ethically, and legally. Students are assigned research papers in a wide variety of classes. They must become familiar with the legal and ethical use of information gathered for purposes of writing a research paper. This includes properly acknowledging ideas and information from consulted primary and secondary sources.

### **Objectives of assignment:**

- Students will be able to properly identify an idea that they have taken from a consulted source.
- Students will be able to properly cite a quotation or consulted idea when writing a research paper.
- Students will be able to recognize potential traps for engaging in plagiarism when writing a research paper (i.e., unintentional misuse, web research papers, etc.)

### **Preparation:**

This exercise requires the use of a computer lab for hands-on computer instruction. It requires the instructor to show the students the following: 1) website(s) explaining the law of copyright (if desired; this is optional because the objective of this assignment is a practical understanding of plagiarism in the higher education setting, particularly when writing research papers. A lengthy discussion of copyright is complicated and would divert time and attention from the topic at hand); 2) website(s) on “Plagiarism” in general, ideally with examples; and 3) correct ways to cite works consulted (may use print resources, i.e., MLA Style Manual).

The second part of the assignment requires the students to read a selected piece of material (instructor may use anything s/he chooses). It is advisable to choose an article relating to something of general or topical interest for which most people would already have some basic information or opinion (i.e., Iraq war, 9/11 abortion, etc.). This may be done in groups if enough students are present. Students must then write a paragraph or two using information gleaned from the source piece, as well as including some of their own original thoughts (this should not be a mere summary of the source piece; there should be student-supplied information pertaining to the subject, whether it be opinion or generally accepted facts). Students are required to use general information from the source article, as well as selecting one quotation.

Following the written exercise, the instructor and the class will discuss the correct and incorrect ways to acknowledge the use of consulted works in a research paper.

## **Assignment: Plagiarism in College Research Papers**

### **Part One:**

**[Note: The material in this section is taken from “Michael Harvey’s The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing”.]**

1. Show the students the following website:  
<http://nutsandbolts.washcoll.edu/plagiarism.html>

Click on “What is Plagiarism.” Go over the four points with the students.

Explain that plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person’s work and/or ideas, and the representation of the work/ideas as one’s own. It has its legal roots in Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.Code), but it is also an ethical violation. Many institutions of higher education have polices and/or conduct rules which impose penalties on students in order to discourage the practice of plagiarism. [Note: Lakeland’s policy on Academic Honesty is on the Lakeland website at <http://www.lakelandcc.edu/ACADEMIC/std&pol.htm>] and in the Student Handbook.

2. Show the students the side-by-side example on the website (Kinnock and Biden speeches).

Talk about the slight rearrangement of the words, but the borrowing of the outline of thoughts and the ideas/content in the examples. Tell them that this can still constitute plagiarism.

3. Talk about each of the points in this section: 1) Lack of attribution; 2) asserting that borrowed ideas are original to yourself; 3) imitating an outline or structure of an assertion, claim, or statement; and 4) citing once but continuing to use additional material without acknowledgement.
4. Show examples regarding generally accepted statements of fact; highlight the difference between general and detailed statements. Ask students to volunteer statements of fact; class can discuss which type they are (general or detailed with specific information; if detailed, they may require acknowledgement.
5. Explain the concept of citation in general. Then explain that there are several official citation formats which vary by discipline. Tell them that many colleges and universities use the MLA style, promulgated by the Modern Language Association. Show them web links to MLA style formats; also show them the book.

### **Part Two:**

6. Distribute copies of “Citation Station” handouts pertaining to articles, books,

- magazines, etc. Discuss handouts, pointing out most commonly used types of materials (ie., journal articles).
7. Distribute copies of your selected source article; make sure you have selected an article which has an obvious author and other bibliographic information. Have students break into groups. Have groups read the article and write a paragraph or two discussing the topic as a whole, using ideas or quotes from the source article, but adding any additional, relevant information they wish. Tell them that they must give credit to ideas, words, structure or quotes from the source article.
  8. Reassemble the class and go over the assignments. Have the students read the sections which they felt required acknowledgement. Compare what they have written to the source article. Randomly read paragraphs aloud from different groups and ask if there are other sections which were not cited that need to be cited.

**Important summation/review points:**

Finish the exercise by reviewing what they have accomplished and how this applies to their college work.

- Plagiarism is a serious offense which can have both legal and ethical implications.
- Plagiarism requires two components: 1) Failure to acknowledge or attribute original source from which information was taken; and 2) Attempting to represent the information as one's own original work (generally resulting from the failure to attribute).
- Commonly accepted facts or conclusions can be used without attribution; detailed statements usually require acknowledgement, perhaps even several times throughout the course of a research paper.
- Direct quotations, whether used verbatim or paraphrased, must be cited, either using MLA or another officially designated citation system.
- Skill in determining what needs to be cited improves with practice and experience.
- Some common pitfalls include: 1) copying, lifting, paraphrasing research papers or other information found on the Internet, where it is sometimes difficult to locate an author's name; 2) Failure to continue citing throughout the research paper after it has been done once; and, 3) Differentiating between what was read and consciously (or unconsciously) used from a source and one's own original thoughts.

**As Mr. Harvey's website states: "When in doubt, cite or ask."**

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