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## A Study on the Cheating Menace in Schools

How to cheat good May 18th, 2006 I just submitted my last set of grades for the semester. This is always a big weight off my shoulders, but since it will be the last set of grades I ever submit at the University at Buffalo, it is an even greater relief. And so I think its time for me to give back as the kids say. I had a 24 hour take home (distance course, so keep home?) final exam. Students had to submit it in text and most submitted it in Word. In the exam, I noted that I expect everyone to behave honorably, and noted that receiving assistance from others or plagiarizing work was a bad idea. I would prefer that students dont cheat. Yes, they really are mostly cheating themselves, so fine. But it also reflects poorly on the community.

Rationally or not, what particularly irks me is that it is disrespectful: of me, of their fellow students, of the university, of the institution of learning, and of themselves. And did I mention of me? It is particularly irksome when their cheating implies (reminds?) that I am a fool. So, to help students across the country cheat better, saving themselves both from easy detection and from incurring the wrath of insulted faculty, and leading to a much more harmonious school environment, I offer the following tips, based on recent experience: 1. Dont cheat off family. If you are in a class of several hundred people, and you share an unusual family name with another student in the class, it is best if your reply to an open ended short-answer question is not identical, word-for-word. This is particularly true when the answer is wrong, and when it is wrong in an idiosyncratic way.

Many profs, as I do, grade blind, without reference to the names of the students, but still, its easy enough when you find something like this to track back to the names. My suggestion, in this case, is to continue to cut and paste the answer, but to legally change your name. A convenience marriage may do the trick. Dont talk British. The only people allowed to use the word colour are those with Indian surnames. Weight, you may argue, I was bourne and razed in the english countryside. I have no doubt, but your Commonwealth heritage is not easily detectable by your surname, so Im afraid you will need to switch to Amerkin spelling for work in my classes. (If you are Indian, but your surname has suffered from various Colonial incursions, Im afraid youll have to lose the Us as well.)

Otherwise, fair or not, it somehow appears that you have copied your work from another author. 3. You Google, I Google How do you think I check suspicious work? Its not like our state university is shelling out for TurnItIn. I am pretty good with that Google thingy. And changing two words wont send me off the trail. So copy from something a bit more obscure. Or and this is really tricky try making up your own stuff. 4. Dont rite to good When you write a sentence like The veil of ignorance, to mention one prominent feature of that position, has no specific metaphysical implications concerning the nature of the self; it does not imply that the self is ontologically prior to the facts about persons that the parties are excluded from knowing, you have two ways of being caught up.

First, while I make no claim of having anything approaching an eidetic memory (more like an idyllic memory), it may ring some dusty bells and heck, I might be able to pull the book you stole it from down off my shelf, even if you followed the advice of #3. If my memory fails to serve, as is frequently the case these days, Google Print might help out. The second way you can trip up

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is by following this with your original words, which tend to be less sophisticated, or equally sophisticated material from an entirely different source that simply does not seem to make sense in this particular context.

As a corollary here, try not to plagiarize the teacher. You will be less likely to suffer her ire, since it will amuse her and her colleagues to no end, but you are more likely to be caught. Steal her ideas and rephrase them in your own prose, because there is nothing teachers like more than knowing that students can write well but have no original ideas.

Malaprop big words Make sure you pick a word that sounds impervious and use it incorrigibly, or inventorate words. Well be utterly convinced of your genuinity (not to mention your precedential potential). Snuff said.

Use the word ridiculous. This almost magical word will cause any instructor to instantaneously turn off all internal plagiarism detection.

Borrow from someone who writes as badly as you do. Dont do what one of my graduate students did, and steal a text on Korean feminism from someone who wrote slightly better English than he did. Ill notice the slightly better writing, even before I notice that you have expressed no interest in or knowledge of feminist perspectives in the past. (Once kicked out of our program, he applied to the English department. No kidding.)

Edit > Paste Special > Unformatted Text This is my Number 1 piece of advice, even if it is numbered eight. When you copy things from the web into Word, ignoring #3 above, dont just Edit > Paste it into your document. When I am reading a document in black, Times New Roman, 12pt, and it suddenly changes to blue, Helvetica, 10pt (yes, really), Im going to guess that something odd may be going on. This seems to happen in about 1% of student work turned in, and periodically makes me feel like becoming a hermit. If you follow these simple rules, you are almost guaranteed to pass off your plagiarism and cheating as your own work. This will allow the faculty to remain in blissful ignorance, believing that despite the low pay they are spreading knowledge in the world, while at the same time convincing your parents to continue to pay for several more years of school, drunken orgies, and Prada bags. Your classmates who do not follow the above rules will constitute the low hanging fruit, easily picked off and tormented by mean-spirited unfulfilled teachers for their own amusement.

You, however, will rise above the fray, secure in your superious ability to act smart, even if you dont understand the text you are passing off as your own. And what if you follow all eight points and still get caught? Heres your get out of jail free card. Simply say this to your teacher (no, no one has tried these exact words on me yet), and you are off scot free: Like a postmodern version of Searles Chinese Room, I am able to re-articulate existing knowledge through my command of its (re)presentation and manipulation. Any claim to originality ignores what I like to call our ability to stand on the shoulders of giants. By this, I mean that there is a well-known correlation between book sales and height, and we should use their height to our own advantage, to avoid mud and small dogs.

Also, is it really all that original to give me an F? After all, Ive already received an F from two other profs this semester alone. Be an original: give me a C. By the way, I dont know who this ~John Rawls guy is is he even in our major? but I think its possible he cheated off me.

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Finally, and I think this is most vital, my plagiarism in this case is a clear indictment of the educational system. After all, I've been failed by my high school and by three years of university, while continually passing. I don't think it can be entirely my fault if I've gotten this far by plagiarism, and in this, my last class, you decide that it is somehow ~wrong.

Clearly, you should use this outcome as a way of evaluating your own teaching and expectations. You have my permission to use the above excuses, verbatim and without attribution, in any discussion with your respected faculty. I don't guarantee their success, but would be happy to hear from any of you who employ them as to their efficacy. Update (6/16): Be sure to read the huge number of comments below, because they have some top-notch cheating tips.

Also, a few have asked whether they can reprint, borrow this in some way. It got lost with my last blog redesign, but everything here that is original is Creative Commons licensed for non-commercial, attributed use. So have at it, just don't say you wrote it! and don't turn it in for a grade! This entry was posted on Thursday, May 18th, 2006 at 12:48 pm and is filed under Teaching.

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