

Addressing Ethical Breaches—Encouraging Ethical Behavior

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Have you struggled with how to address an issue of dishonesty, plagiarism or ethics? Have you failed students for cheating but wondered if this was their first offense? While addressing acts of dishonesty or ethical breaches are far from fun, they are a necessary part of the **general education** of our students and are part of our responsibility as educators. (The *general education* of a Sinclair student has been defined to include oral and written communication, thinking, information literacy, and issues of values, community, and citizenship.)

The Honor Code Council and Sinclair's General Education Committee ask faculty to take a moment to reflect on the "Honor Code" and the *Student Handbook* with respect to issues of academic ethics and responsibility. The excerpts below remind us to hold fast to expectations of professionalism.

- The campus "Honor Code" encourages all members of the Sinclair community to *uphold the values of citizenship, social responsibility, and personal responsibility...to maintain the highest standards of professional and academic ethics... by being fair and honest at all times and by treating all individuals with respect.* www.sinclair.edu/about/honorcode
- Section B.4 of the *Student Handbook* defines acts of dishonesty as including, but not limited to:
 - Cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty
 - Furnishing false information to a college official or faculty member
 - Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any college document, record, or instrument of identification. . .
- Violations of Section B.4 of the *Student Handbook* should be referred directly to Janice Austin and may include the following sanctions:
 - Written warning
 - Temporary loss of privileges
 - Written reprimand
 - Monetary restitution
 - Work/service restitution
 - Referral to counseling
 - Educational assignment

Faculty members may want to review and update their syllabi regarding the definition and consequences of plagiarism and similar acts of dishonesty. **A clearly stated policy now will save headaches later.** For an example of a departmental policy on plagiarism, see the "English Department's Statement on Plagiarism" below.

Questions regarding general education at Sinclair may be directed to Lori Zakel, chairperson of the General Education Committee, lori.zakel@sinclair.edu.

Questions about the campus Honor Code can be directed to David Bodary, chairperson of the Honor Code Council, david.bodary@sinclair.edu.

Violations of the *Student Handbook*, including "acts of dishonesty," should be referred to Janice Austin, Student Activities, janice.austin@sinclair.edu.

What follows is the English department's policy on plagiarism. As you reflect on it, do you think that all departments should have their own policies or would it be appropriate for the college to have a uniform policy on plagiarism?

The English Department's Statement on Plagiarism

Plagiarism, the misuse of source materials, is unacceptable in student work. At the discretion of the instructor, the penalty for plagiarism may be a grade of zero credit, "F," with no opportunity to rewrite. Subsequent plagiarism, at the discretion of the instructor, shall be grounds for failure of the course. Plagiarism is cheating. It is unethical and a violation of the Sinclair Honor Code.

There are a variety of types of plagiarism; common types include:

1. Student submits a paper wholly or in substantial part using the exact phrasing of source material. In-text parenthetical documentation and quotation marks fail to make clear the degree of borrowing.
2. Student submits a paper closely paraphrased from source material; i.e. the original source material is simply edited with perhaps minor word changes occurring. There is an absence of reorganization of the source.

Example: Source says: "The inflated style is in itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity."

Plagiarized condensation says: "The inflated style is a kind of euphemism. A bunch of Latin terms falls on the facts like soft snow. The opponent of clear language is, thus, insincerity."

3. Student submits a paper closely paraphrased from source material, splicing together sentences from scattered segments of the original. Phrasing of the original is little, if any, changed. This constitutes patchwork plagiarism, whether documented or not, unless direct quoting has been indicated.

Example: (Source is The St. Martin's Guide to Writing, 6th ed.)

Patchwork plagiarism says (using material on page 557): *To help readers understand what is being said in an essay, writers often provide a thesis statement early in the paper.* (Then skipping to page 559, it adds more plagiarism): *Some thesis statements also include a forecast which overviews the way a thesis will be developed.*

4. Student paraphrases or summarizes correctly facts or ideas from a source, but fails to cite the source by using internal documentation.
5. Student cuts and pastes information from an Internet site.
6. Student submits a paper written by another student, a spouse, or colleague, etc.
7. Student copies source material *in toto* or using the condensation method of paraphrase (#2 above). Dummy documentation to nonexistent source material is sprinkled throughout the essay to give the appearance of *bona fide* scholarship.