

Cheating 101: Paper Mills and You

Margaret Fain and Peggy Bates

Teaching Effectiveness Seminar: Coastal Carolina University

March 5, 1999 (Revised 3/10/2003, 3/28/2013)

This presentation is aimed at providing faculty with an overview of the current state of Internet Paper Mills, how to locate Paper Mills, how to detect plagiarized papers, how to track down suspicious papers, and how to combat plagiarism.

Cheating in school "has been around as long as organized education" (Chidley). So have term paper mills. Today with the development of Internet paper mills, we see a new twist in the term paper industry. No longer relegated to back alleys of college campuses or the ads of college newspapers, the term paper industry is flourishing, prosperous, and reaching a much larger and much younger audience.

Current State of Cheating

For lots of students, lofty ideas about honesty and integrity have very little to do with the "real" world or why they are going to college.

- Some students have no idea what an "education" really is.
- Some students have come to college to get a credential--a credential that will allow them to pursue a chosen career. How they get this credential might be less important than simply getting it.
- Some view any course not directly related to their major as a waste of time.
- Some will cheat or plagiarize to maintain high GPAs--there is tremendous pressure from parents, grad school admissions, corporate recruiters, even from themselves.
- Some are overloaded with work, school and family demands.
- Some think it is no longer "socially unacceptable".
- Some manage to make it to college thinking anything and everything on the Internet is public domain.
- Many simply do not know what constitutes plagiarism--they have not learned about plagiarism in high school.
- Some feel that 'cut and paste', patch writing, or wholesale borrowing is not plagiarism.
- Some students actually engage in this behavior out of self-defense--students in their classes are using it to excel, creating unfair competition.

Faculty Reluctance to Report Plagiarism

Another part of the problem is faculty reluctance to report plagiarism to university authorities when it occurs. This reluctance is seen in the preference for handling suspected plagiarism privately between faculty and student, as a counseling matter or not at all. Some faculty feel

that they are in the business of teaching specific subject matter, not discipline or moral values.

Circumstances in universities today, with administrations pushing student retention, litigious students, students threatening physical harm, is not conducive to "going out on a limb" to prosecute plagiarism. Then there is always the fear of "sticking your neck out" to prosecute and having the administration or trustees not only dismiss your allegations of plagiarism as insignificant but damage your career in the process..

Current State of Internet Paper Sites

Term Paper Mills have been available on the Internet since 1996 and have already gone global. We call them paper mills because despite their rhetoric, these sites are in the business of providing pre-written research papers. Most sites contain disclaimers telling potential buyers not to submit these papers for a grade, but students can and do turn in these papers as their own.

The list of [Internet Term Paper Sites](#) is just a sampling of the variety of sites available in English.

How much does it cost to get a paper?

- Some give papers away but require you to register.
- Some sites act as an exchange--you must submit a paper to get a "free" paper.
- Some sites charge only a membership fee that allows subsequent access.
- Most charge by the page, ranging from \$1-\$10 per page. They'll bill your credit card as something unrecognizable like "Research Inc." or "AmeriCorp".
- If your paper is due tomorrow and mail is too slow, you can get immediate delivery by e-mail--for an extra \$15.
- After scanning the papers available, you don't see anything suitable for your assignment--No Problem--they will custom write one for you for an exorbitant fee.
- They even run sales and summer blowout specials.

What are students really getting?

- No guarantee of quality or currency.
- Papers that may be dated or not reflective of current events and trends.
- Substandard writing and research.

In addition to the term paper mill sites, there are other options for the enterprising student. Although these sites do not have papers for sale, and the papers are posted with copyright warnings, the unscrupulous student can still copy and download a paper from these sites and turn it in as their own work.

- Web pages posted by well-intentioned academics with their own papers and those of their really good students.

- Technical papers.
- Proceedings of conferences. are posted online.
- Essays and papers posted on personal home pages.
- Using Internet search engines and searching under "term paper", "research assistance", "model papers", "research papers", or "technical papers" will retrieve both term paper sites and web pages with papers on them.

Detecting Plagiarized Papers

Using the list "[Detecting Plagiarized Papers](#)" can help professors identify some of the common giveaways of plagiarized papers. Some professors also ask students, as part of the final exam, to summarize the main points of their research paper. In addition, services have sprung up that offer to detect Internet plagiarism for a fee, such as Turnitin and SafeAssign.

Tracking Down Plagiarized Papers

Professors may be able to locate the original paper on the Internet using a variety of techniques.

- Identify a unique string of words in the paper. Using a variety of search engines, search for the phrase using quotes " ". For example: austen AND "fair share of monsters" turns up only one paper (now archived).
- Search for the title, again using quotes " ". If the student hasn't had the foresight to change the title, you may find it listed on a term paper site.
- Search full-text databases, such as Ebscohost, Gale, ProQuest, or Science Direct, to look for papers plagiarized from published articles.
- Utilize a plagiarism detection site, most of these sites charge some sort of fee.

Combating Plagiarism

In most instances it is easier to combat Plagiarism from the outset of the class than it is to deal with it later in the semester. Using term paper mills is a "crime of opportunity". Students faced with deadlines and a sense of being overwhelmed may turn to term paper mills. Students who have been guided in the research process and encouraged to think about the paper have less motive and less opportunity to turn in work that is not their own.

["Strategies for Combating Plagiarism"](#) outlines techniques and issues that professors can use in any class to lessen the opportunities for plagiarism. Research papers or projects that are designed as an integral part of the course offer students a greater opportunity to learn. Well thought out assignments are less conducive to plagiarism. In addition, students learn quickly which professors expect them to work and which don't.

Term Paper Mills are a fact of life. How we as faculty and teachers and librarians deal with them is up to us.

About the Authors:

[Margaret Fain](#) is a Librarian at Kimbel Library, Coastal Carolina University and Peggy Bates is a now retired. Ms Fain can be contacted at (843) 349-2410 or margaret@coastal.edu. The impetus for this presentation came from comments made to us by faculty and students regarding the availability and use of term paper sites