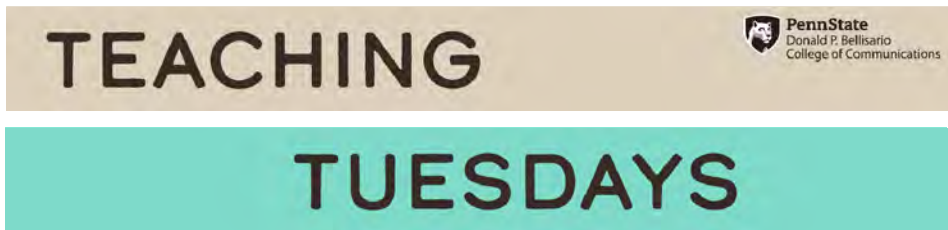


Bortree, Denise Sevick

From: Bortree, Denise Sevick
Sent: Tuesday, November 3, 2020 6:15 PM
To: L-COMM-FACULTY@LISTS.PSU.EDU
Subject: Teaching Tuesdays - Academic Integrity by Kevin Hagopian



It's Teaching Tuesday (still). And, as we all know, today is Election Day. I hope everyone has a plan to vote. This week's issue of Teaching Tuesdays examines academic integrity and cheating. As more classes move to remote delivery, faculty have expressed concerns about the rate of cheating among students. This week's column by Kevin Hagopian offers insights into why students cheat and how to help them understand its consequences. He presents a well-researched and thoughtful approach to helping students make good choices in their work. I hope you enjoy.

Election Coverage

Tune in to watch Bellisario students cover the election. [Centre County Report](#) will broadcast at 8-8:05 p.m. and 9:30-10 p.m. You can also hear coverage on [CommRadio](#) and see other content at [CommMedia](#).

Spring Wellness Days

The University has announced three spring wellness days for students and faculty: Tuesday, Feb. 9, Thursday, March 11 and Wednesday, April 7. Mark your calendar. Find out more about wellness days here:

<https://news.psu.edu/story/637285/2020/10/29/academics/dates-announced-spring-2021-semester-wellness-days>

Academic Integrity

By Kevin Hagopian, teaching professor, media studies and film studies

No student in the Bellisario College can miss hearing our shared belief that plagiarism is the mortal sin of communications research and practice, demolishing the trust that is essential to successful media communication. I've served on the College's Academic Integrity committee for several years, and it's plain that many of our students still do not internalize academic and professional integrity. Statistics on college cheating nationally show that they're part of an upward trend in cheating.



Here's what I discovered in the research I did for my First Year Seminar "Cheating.com: Originality, Plagiarism, and Ethics in Digital Communications."

1. The ease with which students can plagiarize papers is increasing. Added to “contract cheating,” in which students purchase canned papers, and “bespoke cheating,” in which students commission papers written especially for them, are rapidly growing artificial intelligence capacities. (Jonathan Bailey, “Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Plagiarism” Turnitin.com, March 21, 2018 <https://www.turnitin.com/blog/artificial-intelligence-and-the-future-of-plagiarism>)
2. The difficulty for students in understanding what is plagiarism and what is research, or what is collaboration, is also increasing. Document sharing, online collaborations, sampling, and mash-ups as legitimate art and scholarship are indexes of the permeable barrier between theft and creativity. (see Lawrence Lessig’s Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy, Penguin, 2008, for an enthusiastic defense of digital collaboration)
3. The incentives for lying in public and corporate life seem to be increasing, not decreasing, and the public debate over fake news has morphed into near uselessness for our students as they learn to be ethical decision-makers in the communications professions. (Megan Graham, “To Show How Easy it is for Plagiarized News Sites to get Ad Revenue, I Made My Own,” CNBC May 17, 2020 <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/17/broken-internet-ad-system-makes-it-easy-to-earn-money-with-plagiarism.html>)
4. The pandemic has radically increased the sense of psychological distance between teacher and student that generates increased plagiarism. In addition, increased economic anxieties, family responsibilities, and the disease itself are pressuring students as never before. (Jonathan Bailey, “Five Ways COVID is Changing Academic Plagiarism,” Plagiarism.com, October 26, 2020 <https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2020/10/26/5-ways-covid-19-is-changing-academic-plagiarism/>)
5. Recent research has focused on cheating and plagiarism as normalized aspects of student culture, not as individual failings of character, and on addressing root causes of cheating rather than punishing violators. For a very readable summary of this thinking, read Susan Blum’s My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture (Cornell, 2009).



Instead of teaching students “how not to cheat,” an approach which encourages an ethic of minimum standards rather than intellectual aspiration, I had students in my seminar spend the semester absolutely wallowing in cheating. Their final paper was required to be plagiarized, together with a commentary on their experiences. My goal was to transform students’ understanding of cheating from a taboo subject looked at from the outside into an exploration of the sociology and psychology of cheating from the inside. Here’s what I’ve learned from my students:

1. **Plagiarism itself comes with serious psychological costs**, as students are forced to invent a character for themselves through their false authorship of a paper—and then wait and wonder if the professor has guessed their scam. The debilitating sense of moral fraudulence this resulted in really surprised me. Teaching tip: Work to establish an individual relationship with your students, so that they’ll see that their academic and professional writing can be and indeed should be an expression of who they are as individuals.
2. **Plagiarism results in a profound sense of time wasted**. Students reported spending far more time than had thought they would on a ‘well-plagiarized’ paper that would be likely to pass muster, and at the end of the process, even “success” in this venture felt like failure. Teaching tip: Any work completed in good faith, no matter how comparatively weak, should give you some opportunity in it to notice and affirm future possibilities unique to the student.

3. **When students work with topics they are not interested in, they are more likely to plagiarize.** Teaching tip: work to achieve a route through a concept you have a student working on which will allow her to personalize the subject.
4. **An overemphasis on the completed product,** rather than the process, raises the perceived stakes of a low grade even higher. Teaching tip: signpost, monitor, and grade students' workflow, not just the finished product. Don't assume that everyone in your class "knows how to write a paper." Fit your assignments closely to your course, to reward students who use their work to express the specificities of the learning experience you've given them, not just general knowledge on a topic.
5. **Students don't yet see themselves as having a real stake in their profession.** They most often see themselves as college students, not as future advertisers, journalists, strategic communicators, filmmakers, media analysts and scholars, or media industry managers. In our college, that's serious. Teaching tip: use real examples from our professions, and emphasize the course of decision-making which resulted in the wrongdoing, not whether the act itself is ethical or not.

Plagiarism is not an individual problem. It erodes trust in many institutions in our society. Students learn how to plagiarize in school. We can help them learn how to write their own story instead.

Hope you enjoyed this issue. Keep an eye out for Teaching Tuesdays every Tuesday this semester. Want to read an earlier issue? You can find it in the Faculty/Staff Resources: <https://www.bellisario.psu.edu/faculty-staff-resources/teaching-tuesdays>

TEACHING TUESDAYS – Issue #10

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