
The Presence of and Attitudes to Cheating

By Shawn McQuaid

University is meant to be a place where, among other things, students can learn to express and refine their own thoughts, ideas and knowledge. Unfortunately, some students on occasion pervert the system by trying to take credit for the work of others, or by trying to obtain answers and information by methods other than their own work. Professors and students alike accept the fact that dishonesty exists, but many professors, happily, have great faith in the honour of students. English Department Head Fran Frazer says that, "Each of us (the professors) is assuming integrity." President Elliot commented similarly in saying, "I assume people to be honest, and have to be given reason to doubt before I even believe that there is cheating; then I look for it;" While cheating may exist, it's comforting to see educators hold such faith in their students.

One form of cheating that is sometimes misunderstood is plagiarism. This is copying the work of others and deliberately, knowingly trying to pass it off as your own original work. Some students unknowingly plagiarize by drawing too closely off a work; other students are not even aware that copying is a crime. While professors acknowledge the existence of plagiarism,

they also realize that many students plagiarize unintentionally. Professor Veer of the History Department says that some students don't understand plagiarism, and think that they only need to credit direct quotations and not ideas and closely reworded passages from the works of other authors. "I think I've had cases borne of ignorance, not intent," Veer recently stated. Professor David Weale (of the History Department) said, "There's also a sense in which we are all plagiarizers. We're always unconsciously drawing on the wisdom and ideas of others." This view, echoed by several other professors, puts to us that it may be difficult to tell whether or not a thought or concept can ever be entirely original in nature, since so much has been written on various subjects. Professor Ledwell of the English Department and others, try to prevent unintentional plagiarism by encouraging independent thinking on the part of students. In the final analysis, though, true criminal plagiarism is only the attempt to pass off the work of theirs as your own, Classics professor Doctor David Buck summed it up by saying, "There's no crime unless there's a guilty mind."

What about those few guilty minds, though?