Is Plagiarism an Epidemic?

Many instructors have begun to take a closer look at the growing problem of plagiarism in school, from college-age students down to the elementary level.

Is plagiarism a problem, where does it start, and how often do plagiarizers get caught?
--According to a 2003 study by Donald McCabe, 38 percent of students admitted to cut-and-paste Internet plagiarism in the previous year (Rutgers University/Center for Academic Integrity Study, August 2003).
--More than 75 percent of the students admitted to cheating, but less than half of the college faculty said they had ever reported cheating. Even in elementary schools, cheating has become so common that in a recent writing contest in Atlanta, 3 of the 10 finalists were disqualified for plagiarizing.
--Ninety percent of students believe cheaters are either never caught or have never been appropriately disciplined (US News and World Report poll).
--Eighty percent of college-bound students admit to cheating on schoolwork, yet 95 percent of them never get caught (Who's Who Among American High School Students).

How easy is it for students to buy ready-made papers?
If you are not already alarmed at the potential to plagiarize using the Internet, take a look at Cheat House (http://cheathouse.com), which advertises “THOUSANDS OF FREE ESSAYS IN OVER 130 CATEGORIES. LEADING THE INDUSTRY SINCE 1995”. A student has access to over 10,000 papers free if they agree to contribute to the database. Each article is “ranked” with a smiley face from previous customer satisfaction. Cheat House does not limit itself to sharing essays, it also advertises as a “database of essays, term papers, reports, assignments, study notes, book reports and anything else you can imagine a student benefiting from seeing. CheatHouse is also a community of students, who comment essays, rate essays, share information and tips, help each other with homework, help each other understand concepts from school and is generally a good place to start if you are sometimes stuck with your homework.”

What can instructors do to limit the incidence of plagiarism in their courses?
---- Design assignments that require each student to develop their own opinions or conduct an original project or analysis.
---- Ask for a writing sample prior to assigning a research paper or essay exam. Each student’s “voice” will have unique qualities and will become recognizable after they introduce themselves to the class and contribute to discussions online.
---- Many instructors are able to win the battle against plagiarism by structuring their assignments to include early research and require several drafts due prior to submission of the final research paper. Students will be less likely to get into a panic, thus reducing the pressure to cheat.
---- Suggestions for tightening security on Blackboard assessments are outlined in the new Ecampus Instructor Manual, which will be sent to instructors this term.

There are several Internet resources available for instructors to search for plagiarism in papers, although no system can guarantee 100 percent detection. Many instructors find it useful to search for a suspicious phrase in a search engine, such as Google. Here are a few other services that provide extensive comparisons to Internet information and databases of published works (fees or membership are required).

My Drop Box  http://mydropbox.com
Student documents are compared to (1) Internet, (2), published works in password-protected databases, newspapers, magazines, term paper mills, and online reference sites, and (3) institution’s own databases to prevent peer-to-peer cheating (with an institutional license). Options include requiring that students submit their papers directly to the website or submit drafts of their written assignments to see which parts of their papers require proper referencing. Papers being reviewed by Drop Box will be sent to back to the instructor with plagiarized sections
displayed using a different color for each source on the plagiarized document ($89.90 per year individual license, or institutional license option).

Eve2    http://www.canexus.com/eve/
EVE stands for “Essay Verification Engine.” Submitted papers are compared to information on the Internet. If Eve2 finds evidence of plagiarized work, it will record the URL from which the material was copied and report the percentage of work plagiarized from each URL, indicated on the student’s paper in red. You can download a trial version online prior to purchase (runs on Windows OS, $19.99 per license).

Turn It In http://www.turnitin.com
Turn It In is a website that checks for Internet plagiarism and is designed for students to submit reports and faculty to check students’ work. Each submitted paper is checked against (1) 4.5 billion Internet pages, (2) extensive databases of published works, and (3) database of student papers previously submitted to Turnitin (pricing is by individual, department, or campus). Turnitin has designed a module that would allow Blackboard users to use Turnitin's plagiarism prevention system without leaving the Blackboard online system. Ecampus will find out more about availability and cost of this module, if departments and instructors are interested in having this capability. (Please let us know your interest.)

We invite your discussion on plagiarism at the Ecampus on line forum: http://ecampus.oregonstate.edu/forum
(Ecampus would like to thank Beverly R. Schulz, PhD., for information provided for the plagiarism article above, from her presentation to the UCEA West Conference, 9/27/04, Guadalajara, Mexico.)

Jon Dorbolo, Department of Philosophy, will be speaking on “21st Century Plagiarism” for the Library Faculty Associations Seminar Series.
Date: November 19th
Time: 10:30 -12:00
Location: Willamette room, Valley library
Refreshments will be provided.

Jon suggests the following resources and readings:
WcopyFind (freeware)
This program examines and compares a set of documents files (such as Word files) in order to search for significant overlap of content. When two or more files are found to share significant phrases the program generates a report containing the document text with the matching phrases underlined. This makes it easy to check sets of submitted assignments for collusion (so long as they are submitted as document files). http://plagiarism.phys.virginia.edu/WCopyfind%202.5.exe

Readings
The New Plagiarism: Seven Antidotes to Prevent Highway Robbery in an Electronic Age by Jamie McKenzie http://www.fno.org/may98/cov98may.html
Actions Do Speak Louder than Words: Deterring Plagiarism with the Use of Plagiarism-Detection Software, Bear F. Braumoeller http://www.apsanet.org/PS/dec01/braumoeller.cfm