



# Westmont College Plagiarism Policy

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## Westmont College is a Community of Christian Scholars

When students join our college community, they are expected, as apprentice scholars, to search for truth with integrity and accuracy. This quest requires humility about our abilities, respect for the ideas of others, and originality in our thinking. Since Westmont is a Christian community, the integrity of our scholarship is rooted in the integrity of our faith. We seek to be followers of Christ in the classroom, in the library, and at the privacy of our computers. For both scholarly and spiritual reasons, then, plagiarism and all other forms of academic dishonesty are not to be pursued in the Westmont community.

## Responsibilities of Members of the Westmont Community

In a scholarly and Christian community, each of us has a responsibility to encourage others to maintain their commitment to academic honesty. Faculty have a responsibility to educate students about refraining from academic dishonesty—in particular, plagiarism. Faculty should teach what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, and what the consequences of plagiarism are (see *For Faculty: Reducing and Detecting Plagiarism*). In addition, as part of their evaluation of student assignments, they should check for evidence of plagiarism. If evidence is discovered, faculty should confront the student, apply the appropriate consequences, and report the incident to the Provost.

Students have a responsibility to understand plagiarism and to learn how to avoid it (see *For Students: Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism*). They should refuse to allow fellow students “to borrow” or to use an assignment without proper citation, encourage fellow students to do their own work, and refrain from completing assignments for their fellow students. If a student helps another plagiarize in these or other ways, he or she is equally guilty of academic dishonesty (cf. Saupe, 1998).

## Definition of Plagiarism

To plagiarize is to present someone else's work—his or her words, line of thought, or organizational structure—as our own. This occurs when sources are not cited properly, or when permission is not obtained from the original author to use his or her work. By not acknowledging the sources that are used in our work, we are wrongfully taking material that is not our own. Plagiarism is thus an insidious and disruptive form of dishonesty. It violates relationships with known classmates and professors, and it violates the legal rights of people we may never meet.

Another person's "work" can take many forms: printed or electronic copies of computer programs, musical compositions, drawings, paintings, oral presentations, papers, essays, articles or chapters, statistical data, tables or figures, etc. (The Learning Skills Centre, 1999). In short, if any information that can be considered the intellectual property of another is used without acknowledging the original source properly, this is plagiarism.

## Forms of Plagiarism

Various types and levels of plagiarism are recognized at Westmont, and all are unacceptable in submitted assignments. Unless an instructor specifies otherwise, the following general definitions apply.

**Minimal plagiarism** is defined as doing any of the following without attribution:

- inserting verbatim phrases of 2-3 distinctive words.
- substituting synonyms into the original sentence rather than rewriting the complete sentence.
- reordering the clauses of a sentence.
- imitating the sentence, paragraph, or organizational structure, or writing style of a source (Saupe, 1998; Student Judicial Affairs, UCD, 1999).
- using a source's line of logic, thesis or ideas.

**Substantial plagiarism** is defined as doing any of the following without attribution:

- inserting verbatim sentences or longer passages from a source.
- combining paraphrasing with verbatim sentences to create a paragraph or more of text.
- repeatedly and pervasively engaging in minimal plagiarism.

**Complete plagiarism** is defined as doing any of the following without attribution:

- submitting or presenting someone's complete published or unpublished work (paper, article, or chapter) (Wilhoit).
- submitting another student's work for an assignment, with or without that person's knowledge or consent (Wilhoit).
- using information from a campus file of old assignments (Wilhoit).
- downloading a term paper from a web site (Wilhoit).
- buying a term paper from a mail order company or web site (Wilhoit).
- reusing or modifying a previously submitted paper (e.g., from another course) for a present assignment without obtaining prior approval from the instructors involved.

### **Consequences of Plagiarism**

Plagiarism may occur intentionally or unintentionally, but intent is not a factor in determining whether plagiarism has occurred or what consequences apply (e.g., Student Judicial Affairs, UCD, 1999). An analogy is the licensed driver who is responsible for knowing and abiding by the rules of the road. Ignorance does not excuse the driver if a law is broken. Likewise, a writer is responsible for knowing and using the rules for being accurate and honest in his or her writing. Pleading ignorance of the rules does not prevent the consequences from being applied.

### **Assumptions**

1. The faculty member has previously made available information about plagiarism, why it is unacceptable, and how to avoid it through proper handling and acknowledgement of others' ideas.
2. Any offense which results in a failing grade is reported to the Provost's Office.
3. When determining a consequence for plagiarism, previous offenses in other courses and class rank of the student are relevant.

### **Minimal Plagiarism**

When instances of minimal plagiarism are detected, the instructor can use these situations as an educational opportunity to discuss with the student the nature of plagiarism and the values of a scholarly, Christian community. At the professor's discretion, assignments may be rewritten and resubmitted, with or without a grade penalty.

Repeated instances of minimal plagiarism may, at the professor's discretion, be treated as substantial plagiarism. If the professor plans to exercise his or her discretion in cases of minimal plagiarism, procedures and consequences should be clearly described in the course syllabus.

Faculty are encouraged to keep records of all such instances (e.g., in the form of a report to the Provost) to help complete the picture of a student's academic record.

### **Substantial Plagiarism**

*First offense.* Ordinarily, the student receives a failing grade on the assignment that has been plagiarized, and a Report of Plagiarism is submitted to the Provost's Office.

*Second offense.* Ordinarily, the student receives a failing grade in the course, and a Report of Plagiarism is submitted to the Provost's Office.

*Third offense.* The student should be recommended for expulsion from the college. Action is taken at the discretion of the Provost.

### **Complete Plagiarism**

*First offense.* The student receives a failing grade in the course, and a report is submitted to the Provost's Office.

*Second offense.* The student is expelled from the college. Action is taken at the discretion of the Provost.

When a student is completing the first year at Westmont, whether entering immediately after high school or as a transfer student, he or she may be unfamiliar with plagiarism and how to avoid it. Students who are in their first year may be allowed to rewrite an assignment that is the first instance of substantial plagiarism. The final grade for this rewritten assignment would be reduced.

The expectation is that sophomores, juniors, and seniors who are continuing at Westmont have been educated about plagiarism in an earlier semester or year, so these students are familiar with the college's policies and procedures regarding plagiarism.

## **Delay in Detection of Plagiarism**

If instances of plagiarism are discovered after a course or a degree is completed, the level and frequency of plagiarism will be evaluated by the Provost in consultation with relevant faculty members. Consequences may include changing the grade awarded in a course or courses, delaying the awarding of the degree, withholding the degree, or rescinding the degree.

## **Procedures for Dealing with Plagiarism**

When a faculty member has reason to believe that plagiarism has occurred on an assignment, the following procedures should be carried out.

1. Gather the evidence that confirms plagiarism (e.g., make copies of assignment; get citations for, or copies of, the sources that were plagiarized). In cases where plagiarism cannot be firmly established, the professor is encouraged to meet with the student to obtain sources or to determine the student's familiarity with the paper that he or she submitted.
2. If possible, meet with the student to discuss the incident. In this meeting, the following should be addressed:
  - Describe the evidence that confirms that plagiarism occurred.
  - Listen to the student's response.
  - Review what plagiarism is, why it is unacceptable in a scholarly community, and how to cite sources properly.
  - Review the college's plagiarism policy and procedures with the student.
3. After meeting with the student, determine the consequences with the assumption that this is a first offense. Inform the student what the consequences will be if this is a first offense (e.g., send the student a copy of the report that is submitted to the Provost's Office), making sure that other students' rights to privacy are maintained (e.g., do not name the other students in conversation with the student about whom the report is filed, and block out the other students' names in the report).
4. Document the incident.
  - Complete the Report of Plagiarism form (attached).
  - Submit a copy of the Report of Plagiarism, the assignment, and the plagiarized sources to the Provost's Office.
  - Make and keep a copy of the Report of Plagiarism, the assignment, and the plagiarized sources for your own records.
5. If the Provost's records indicate that this is not the student's first offense, the faculty member will be contacted and can determine, in consultation with the Provost, whether other penalties are warranted. Knowledge of a student's prior record should be used in determining penalties, but must not enter into the decision about the presence or nature of plagiarism (steps 1-3).

After receiving a copy of the Report of Plagiarism, a student may comment on the report and submit those comments to the Provost's Office.

A student who believes that he or she has been unfairly accused or treated may appeal to the Provost.

Each semester, the Provost's Office will prepare a summary of total offenses (across all courses and all semesters) for each student for whom at least one report has been submitted. This will help to determine consequences in situations where multiple instances of plagiarism have occurred.

## Sources

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