

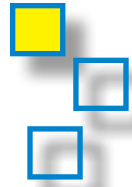
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Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426

A Lesson in Academic Integrity as Students Feel the Injustice of Plagiarism

IN AN EFFORT to make my lessons about plagiarism and the appropriate citation of sources more personal for the students in my rhetoric and research classes, I now use an assignment that forces them into the role of victim rather than thief. The results of my most recent experience with this approach were encouraging.

On a Friday approximately three weeks into the semester, I gave students this assignment: Create an original work that articulates your understanding of one of our university's core values —integrity, generosity, servant leadership, hospitality and excellence. You may express your understanding through a poem, collage, song, brief essay, short story, slide show or two-minute video.

Freshmen are introduced to these core values in our First Year Experience seminar course, and I encouraged students to invest some time in their creations. "Have fun with this project," I said. "Try to impress me and your peers with your creativity." I promised each person 60 seconds to share his or her creation with the rest of the class the following Monday.

Some of their projects were trite or carelessly assembled, but many of the projects were excellent. After everyone had an opportunity to speak, I told students to move around the room to review the projects that had been shared and to identify the one they admired most. They were free to "claim" any of the projects in the room. I told them that more than one person could choose the same project and that not all of the projects in the room had to be selected by someone. I gave no other instructions, so students were free to select their own projects or choose someone else's as the one they admired most.

Here is what happened. The students who had invested the least amount of time in the assignment selected the projects that clearly had required a great deal of creative thought and time to produce. A few of the students walked around the room and then returned to their own work. And most of the others

wandered around until they found a project (other than their own) that they liked enough to "claim" as creative and admirable.

Then I shocked them with this instruction: "Cross out the name of the person who created that project and write your own name in its place. When I grade these assignments this afternoon, I will give credit to the student, or students, who claimed the work, not to the student who created it." That is when our class session got interesting. Initially, no one spoke. Students stared at me, looked at one another for confirmation that they had heard me correctly, and then looked back at me for an explanation. I played dumb, asking if they had any questions. Of course they did. Several students asked why I would do such a thing. Two were openly angry, telling me that giving someone else credit for the work they had done was wrong. Several others said, "If I had known you were going to let someone else steal my work, I would not have wasted my time completing the assignment in the first place!"

A few students, however, were clearly relieved by this sudden turn of events. I asked one of the students, who had not done the assignment at all, how he felt about this new arrangement. He said, "Well, I feel pretty lucky right now, like I'm getting something good for free. But I also feel guilty for accepting a grade I didn't earn." He was conflicted, and the other students in the room were compassionate, not outraged, by his willingness to accept the "freebie." One of their defenses for the student's reasoning was that the consequence for taking credit for someone else's work was significantly smaller than the consequence for taking a zero for his own failure to complete the assignment.

I collected the projects, and then encouraged students to talk more about what I had just done. One student shook his head and said, "Something is going on here. This just isn't right." A few comments later, another student connected the dots: "This is a metaphor. This is exactly what we do when we plagiarize sources in our papers."

I am not naive enough to believe that all of the students were instantly convinced of the immorality of plagiarism, but I do believe more of my students understood what is at stake when they make decisions about how to use the information and ideas that they find in published sources. For a brief moment, they experienced the injustice of someone else taking credit for their work, which made them more susceptible to the appeal of academic integrity. And that's a good place to begin instruction.

Deborah Zarka Miller (Fox) is an Assistant Professor of English at Anderson University where she teaches creative writing, composition and literature.

Deborah Zark Miller, A Lesson in Academic Integrity as Students Feel the Injustice of Plagiarism, Faculty Focus, March 12, 2012; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/a-lesson-in-academic-integrity-as-students-feel-the-injustice-of-plagiarism/>] March 12, 2012.

Faculty Dev Grants Due - Apr 15
Faculty Meeting - Apr 18
Classes End - Apr 20
Exams - Apr 23-27
Commencement - Apr 28
All Grades Due - Apr 30

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*Center for Effective
Undergraduate Teaching
Carnel Learning Center, Suite 106.
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Getting Students to Read the Class Syllabus

READ THIS SYLLABUS TWICE PER DAY!!!!!!

Professor Hatch's mantra: When in doubt: read the syllabus....

READ THE SYLLABUS: It is a lot of trouble to prepare such a detailed syllabus. You should assume I had a reason for it. You must read every word in the syllabus before the second class.

Students are expected to read this syllabus in its entirety.

This syllabus and the addendum contain essential information. Please read them carefully.

PLEASE READ THE SYLLABUS CAREFULLY AND KEEP IT WITH YOU WHENEVER YOU COME TO CLASS. ALL THE INFORMATION ON THE SYLLABUS IS IMPORTANT AND INCLUDES EVERYTHING YOU NEED IN ORDER TO DO WELL IN THIS CLASS. YOU WILL ALSO BE ABLE TO DOWNLOAD THE SYLLABUS ON WEBCT IF YOU SOMEHOW LOSE THIS COPY. PLEASE DO NOT ASK ME TO SEND YOU A COPY.

I have read this syllabus and agree to the schedule and procedures stated therein.

Print name: _____
(Signed) _____
Student ID: _____
Date: _____

These examples are excerpted from real syllabi posted on the Web. Though the course syllabus contains essential information that students need throughout the semester, it's apparent that instructors have one challenge in common—getting students to actually read the syllabus. Simple pleas do not seem to work. Encouragement and threats do not seem to work. This tip provides a few creative methods clever instructors use to accomplish this feat.

READING THE SYLLABUS ALOUD

More than one professor has resorted to reading the syllabus aloud during the first class meeting. This at least ensures that students have heard all the information in the syllabus even though they may have not read it themselves.

SIGNING ON THE LINE

One simple method is to treat the syllabus like a contract, as illustrated in the last example above, and have students sign on the bottom line. Note: Though appealing in its 'official' contract appearance, this method does not guarantee full comprehension of your syllabus.

COMPUTER RESPONSES

Have students read the syllabus and send one question regarding it to the group forum on the class web site. The instructor can then post a response to the whole class.

COOPERATIVE GROUP QUESTIONS

Distribute your syllabus to the whole class. Then, divide the class into groups and have them read and prepare a list of questions about the syllabus. Have each group choose a spokesperson to ask any questions they might like about the course, the syllabus, or you, as the instructor. Be prepared for personal, and possibly embarrassing, questions not relating to the syllabus.

SYLLABUS HOMEWORK

As an extra-credit homework assignment, have students write about how the course objectives and assignments relate to their academic interests and goals.

SHORT-ANSWER SYLLABUS QUIZ

Give a 10-question, 100-point syllabus quiz. Questions might be: "Which week is Chapter 6 assignment due?" or "What will your final grade be if everything averages out to 85.32?"

A SYLLABUS QUIZ REQUIRING APPLICATION OF SYLLABUS INFORMATION

In an article titled *The Syllabus Quiz* (Raymark, P.H. & Connor-Greene, P.A. 2002), the effectiveness of developing a syllabus quiz to enhance understanding of course policies and procedures was evaluated.

On the first day of classes a quiz was handed out with the syllabus. Students were told that they would receive extra credit points if the quiz was returned by the second day of class. Out of 200 students, little more than 60% completed and turned in their quiz. Not merely a true/false or multiple choice quiz, the seven syllabus quiz questions actually asked students to apply information found in the syllabus.

The quiz was prefaced with: "Imagine that

you are the instructor for this class. Now respond to your students in a way that is consistent with what is stated in the course syllabus." Sample questions included:

- Rebecca asks whether it is possible to meet with you outside of regularly scheduled office hours.
- Tom wants to know why he doesn't automatically get a "C" since he did not miss one lecture all semester.
- Wendy overslept on the day of her first exam. Now she wants to know why you've chosen your particular make-up exam policy.
- Ann asks you to explain the purpose of the research participation points.

Of course, when all else fails, you could always include the following heading on the first line of your next syllabus:

READ THIS SYLLABUS TWICE PER DAY!!!!!!

By Sandy Chapman

Source:

Raymark, P.H. & Connor-Greene, P.A. (2002). The Syllabus Quiz, Teaching of Psychology. Vol. 29, No. 4, 286-288. Retrieved, August 27, 2007, from http://www.leaonline.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1207/S15328023TOP2904_05

Sandy Chapman, Getting Students to Read the Class Syllabus: Colorado State University; [<http://teaching.colostate.edu/tips/tip.cfm?tipid=50>]; March 26, 2012

CAMPUS VIEW

