

Academic Integrity: Issues for Y2K

The importance of maintaining and monitoring academic integrity, for TAs as well as faculty members, cannot be overstated. Donald L. McCabe, Professor of Organization Management (Newark) and founder of the Center for Academic Integrity, has conducted five research projects on academic integrity; the projects reveal some interesting results, including: A) "on most campuses, over 75% of students admit to some cheating;" B) "academic honor codes effectively reduce cheating;" C) "faculty are reluctant to report students for cheating" (see "<http://www.academicintegrity.org>" for details). If item A is a staggering piece of information, items B & C point to possible areas for improvement. By establishing a clear code of conduct, and by treating breaches of that code seriously, TAs can exercise their pedagogical responsibility to prevent the violation of academic integrity. The advent of Internet and World Wide Web based technologies has introduced a new set of challenges to the maintenance of academic integrity, and points to the necessity of developing policies that can account for the new kinds of texts that are presently coming into existence. What follows, then, is a "Y2K memo" on academic integrity.

Paper Mills

In *Cheating On Tests: How to Do It, Detect It, and Prevent It*, Gregory Cizek mentions the "standard bit of college folklore" involving fraternity house files "containing copies of every examination ever given on a campus" (53) and generic papers for popular and required courses. Web technology has allowed this model of academic dishonesty to expand well beyond its "fraternity legend" status. At numerous web sites (see www.coastal.edu/library/mills2.htm for a listing) students can download (for a small cost, in exchange for another paper, or often for free) thousands of papers on almost any topic imaginable. While such a vast network devoted solely to undermining academic integrity is intimidating, the practice can be curtailed, if not prevented, through fairly simple preparation: when designing assignments, for instance, make sure that your questions are not simply repeated from earlier versions

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Attention TAs: Videotaping Service

The Teaching Assistant Project offers TAs the opportunity to have their classes or labs videotaped in order to analyze and improve their teaching skills. TAs of all disciplines may take advantage of this free service. Because colleges and universities throughout the United States are renewing their commitment to undergraduate education, hiring committees are focusing on the teaching experience of prospective job candidates. Many programs recommend that TAs have their classes observed so that a written evaluation of their teaching can be included in their dossier.

Contact the TAP office (932-7747 or acarpent@eden.rutgers.edu, or visit our web site at <http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>) to make an appointment. A technician will come before the class begins to set up the equipment and to avoid disturbing the class. TAs usually inform the class beforehand that the videotaping will take place, explain why they have been chosen to be videotaped, and assure students that they are not being evaluated.

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Academic Integrity for Y2K

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of the course, that they are tailored to the issues raised in your particular class, and that they are specific enough that they cannot be covered by the often highly generic material available online. When grading papers, watch for work that seems “canned” or formulaic, for responses that don’t address any of the assigned topics, and for unexplained or unanticipated changes in writing styles. While you may not be able to prove that a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy has occurred, you will likely be in a position to return an assignment ungraded, with the request that it be rewritten in order to respond to the specific topics you have given. Such a compromise prevents the start of the University’s formal legal process while forcing students to produce their own work.

Online Sources

Unlike the paper-mill phenomenon, which is a technologically expanded version of an existing problem, the issue of

online sources has emerged directly out of the online environment. Undergraduate students are increasingly making use of online sources, often to such an extent that teachers now regularly receive research papers whose bibliographies contain no “real” books or journal articles. Students clearly need explicit instruction in how online sources differ from more conventional ones, and how to incorporate these sources successfully into their work. Popular reference manuals such as the *MLA Handbook* and the *Publication Manual of the APA* have begun to address the complexities of citing online sources, but there does not as yet appear to be one accepted standard or protocol. There are, however, some basic considerations of which students should be made aware: a) online references are often directly or indirectly quoted, paraphrased, or compiled from other (off- and online) sources — the viability and authority of an online source must therefore be well established before it is used; b) online references are highly variable: web sites are continuously set up and dismantled, and the information contained within them is constantly being revised — often without notification c) online journals often provide abstracts of articles but not the full articles themselves - a distinction that students may

legitimately or “conveniently” overlook.

Collaboration

Professor McCabe’s studies showed “significant increases in... unpermitted collaboration,” but the parameters of what constitutes “collaboration” (and, for that matter, “permission”) have become increasingly difficult to outline. As pedagogical practice endeavors to introduce “collaborative” teaching and learning models (group work and projects, horizontal hierarchical structures, etc.), online technology has provided an appropriate medium for experimentation: email lists containing teacher and student-led discussions, web sites containing not only course information but repositories of student work with accompanying analysis — these are examples of collaboratively produced work whose authorship is hard to pinpoint and whose borders are hard to define. In the context of such potential confusion, the role of the instructor in setting and maintaining academic honesty is crucial; if you make use of online resources, be sure to outline explicitly your expectations for academic integrity.

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Letters, responses to *Tapped In*, and suggestions for articles should be directed to the Editor.

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Tapped In – The Diary of a Practicing TA

by Rupert Peals*

Last year's series of columns, as faithful readers will no doubt remember, was called "Tapped Out: The Diary of a New TA" This year, a name change seemed in order — I can no longer get away with simply exploiting my ignorance and confusion for cheap laughs and whimsically offering up far-ranging but unanswerable questions. "Tapped In," then, seems like a nice inversion; if to be "tapped out" signifies the mixture of exhaustion and over-commitment that often accompanies one's entrance into the teaching assistant ranks, to be "tapped in" is to be more balanced and more confident both in your relationship to the profession and your ability to separate your identity from it. The second part of the byline presents more difficulty; if I'm no longer a "new" T.A., what pithy adjective describes my present position? "The Diary of an *Experienced* TA?" Somewhat false advertising, given my sophomore status. "The Diary of a *Savvy* T.A.?" An even more egregious example of false advertising,

given my frequent goofy moments in the classroom. "The Diary of a *Seasoned* T.A.?" Sounds as if I've been suitably prepared to be grilled over hot coals (which, come to think of it, is a fairly frequent feeling for Teaching Assistants). "The Diary of a *happy-go-lucky* TA?" No one would buy such a radical departure from Rupert's familiar acerbic tone. I chose "practicing," then, to reflect both the increased confidence with which I approach my teaching, and the sense of an unfinished and necessarily ongoing project that needs to be constantly re-examined.

I started last year by writing about the excruciating first day of class — the self-consciousness, the physical symptoms (excessive sweating, dry mouth, shaky voice), the crisis of authority, and the general surrealism of the whole experience. I'd like to begin my second series by addressing the issue of circulation — part of what I'm now tapped into is the weird and complex social structure that links students, faculty, and administration. I am *out there*; I circulate in this particular "public" space in ways I never did when I was exclusively a graduate student. There is now a significant body of students for whom I was a teacher of record, and an associated collection of course evalua-

tion forms that constitute, for better or for worse, a large part of my institutional identity. My name is in course calendars and on departmental office lists and web pages; my email address is now in the possession of dozens of people who are largely strangers to me. I've even been asked to write recommendations, even though I stress to students the little weight my institutional status carries. On a daily level, I've begun to notice a phenomenon other TAs have mentioned — I see former students everywhere: roaming the campus, where they either hail me enthusiastically or ignore me completely; in the grocery store, where we engage in short, awkward exchanges ("Bran Flakes — trying to stay regular, Mr. Peals?"); and, one late night this summer, outside a bar on Easton Avenue, which is an encounter I'm not really prepared to have. Outside the familiarity of the classroom context it becomes clear to me how strange the student-teacher relationship really is.

Beyond "strangeness," however, I recently ran across an alarming example of my own publicity: I found, on an online "paper mill," an essay that had been handed in for a class I taught this summer. Whatever teacherly innocence I may still have possessed evaporated immediately. It has made me more suspicious than ever

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Get In Touch!

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<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>

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<http://gsnb.rutgers.edu>

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*Rupert Peals is a pseudonym

Tapped In

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before, which is probably both good and bad. It has also made me feel somehow vulnerable, as if the small space over which I have some control for 160 minutes a week has shrunk. Now that I've entered into circulation I cannot always choose the areas in which I become entangled, and in response I can see two options: to live in constant anxiety over my public persona, or to take responsibility, however paradoxically, for its unpredictable manifestations. The former is an untenable proposition; the latter is an approach I'm still trying to figure out.

Videotaping

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TAs can view the tape with a faculty member or a member of the TAP staff to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching. Among the factors that may be discussed are class goals and whether they were achieved; body language and eye contact; use of handouts and chalkboard; enthusiasm and ability to motivate students; asking questions; voice; use of humor and examples; and other relevant subjects. Through an honest dialogue on points such as these, TAs can feel confident that they are doing all they can to improve their teaching skills.

October



- 5 Dissertation & Thesis Workshop
25 Bishop Place, 10 a.m.*
- 18 Dissertation & Thesis Workshop
25 Bishop Place, 1 p.m.*
- 11 Columbus Day
Thanksgiving (Canada)
- 26 Workshop: Ethics in the
Sciences. 12 noon, Food
Science Room 102, Cook
- 31 Halloween; Daylight Savings
Time Ends

*please call 932-7034, or email Barbara Sirman at sirman@rci.rutgers.edu, if you plan to attend a workshop.

COMING IN NOVEMBER

- 5 Dissertation & Thesis Workshop
- 9 Workshop: Harassment Policies
and TAs. 25 Bishop Place, 12
noon
- 11 Veteran's Day
Remembrance Day (Canada)
- 17 Dissertation & Thesis Workshop

Teaching Assistant Project

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