

English 1101

Student: Alex De Nadai

Teacher: Judy Iakovou

“How to be an Honest Cheater”

When one thinks of an academic "cheater," often images come to mind of cheat sheets, copied homework, stolen ideas, and term papers for sale. However, almost never is cheating associated with passing in your own original work. Nevertheless, many authorities, including the University of Georgia, have instituted a clause to ban such behavior. Behind complex rhetoric, a policy that is supposed to cover "academic honesty" oversteps its bounds. Part Two Section C Sub-Division vii of the Georgia Academic Honesty Prohibited Conduct List serves to prohibit the following: "Submitting for academic advancement an item of academic work that has previously been submitted (even when submitted previously by that student) for academic advancement." Essentially, the authorities refuse to accept original work that a student has done simply because he or she chose to use it previously. Neither deception nor unjust advantage over other classmates is involved--only turning in work that you have done yourself. This policy does nothing other than make it more difficult for the hard working, forgotten student who had a moment of brilliance and felt it could be used in varying forums. Reusing your own work from another class is neither cheating nor immoral or unfair. Unfortunately, it is currently being used to punish the innocent under the same series of policies that cover those who knowingly lie, cheat, and steal.

Often the language to describe reusing work done for past assignments is clumsy and wordy to the point that it becomes difficult to quickly refer to it in a simple, straightforward manner. So for the purposes of this discussion, a single word will be used repeatedly to refer to a certain behavior: recycling. In the context of this argument, recycling occurs when a student extracts parts of his or her own previously completed work for academic advancement and reuses them in a new, separate work for the same purpose. With this set, a more fluent dialogue about the issue can be established.

A generic definition of academic cheating is as follows: The use of falseness or deception when turning in work that results in an unfair advantage over other honest students. Most university policies regarding cheating or "academic honesty" fall under this generic definition. It is not absolute, but for the most part it does encompass the spectrum of behaviors that result in an unjust advantage over other students and lying about one's own effort. Now one might question: how does recycling use falseness or deception to gain an unfair advantage over other students? The simple answer is that it does not in any way, shape, or form. Recycling simply allows a student to more easily demonstrate accumulated knowledge in multiple forums. Why should a student be penalized for honestly applying original, hard-gained work as he or she wishes?

This leads to the question about what is in fact wrong with recycling. Is it morally unreasonable or socially unjust? One argument is that a single assignment is used to measure a student's capacity to perform a certain amount of work on a subject. However, what is the purpose of school if not to teach? This argument advocates for busy work. There is no purpose for a student to complete an assignment twice other than to see if he or she can grind it out. This leaves the purpose of school being to evaluate how hard one can work, not to teach. If a teacher is trying to emphasize a specific concept that was not part of the student's previous work, that is

fine, but what is wrong with him applying some of the work he has accomplished? How is it different if he learned the material before or after taking a certain class? The only difference is in the amount of work achieved. Most parents would not be happy if they learned that school was merely a tool to work their children senseless while not learning anything. And by banning recycling, this is the exact doctrine that a university promotes.

Establishing that school is supposed to have a purpose behind its work is important. An English grade is usually based on a measurement of a student's command of the material taught. If it was a measure of how hard a student can work, a teacher could very well assign the aforementioned examples as required work. Since it is a measure of knowledge, why are students being penalized for demonstrating their knowledge? The rules barring recycling become censorship, barring a student from fulfilling all criteria of the assignment how he or she pleases. If original work that a student submits would receive an excellent grade, then it should be accepted, regardless of how the student completes that work (given that no unfairness to other students or deception is involved). If a history teacher wanted to require his students to read his textbook upside down, it would be just another way of arbitrarily creating a rule telling students how to learn without a justifiable reason.

Many times stern words such as "cheating" and "academic honesty" are used to justify a policy prohibiting recycling. It is appropriate to address how recycling fits into these categories, if at all. There are some universally accepted acts that fall into the line of "cheating." Turning in an assignment that was done by someone else is cheating. It is an attempt to deceive the teacher into thinking that a student has accomplished something that he or she has not. How does passing in your own work constitute lying about your accomplishments? It doesn't, and should not be associated with this idea. Another common definition of cheating is copying answers on a test. Again, this deceives the teacher into thinking the student possesses command over knowledge that he or she does not. How is recycling an attempt to lie about one's own knowledge? It is an honest demonstration of one's own knowledge! Once again recycling is not cheating any more than original research is cheating, unless one judges grades on a scale that measures effort without purpose. If one wants to measure raw effort without purpose, then recycling is cheating. Then again, there are plenty of simpler ways to measure one's ability to achieve without purpose; a teacher can have students do sit-ups for an English grade, or read five issues of *People Magazine* for a math grade. Obviously, neither of these ridiculous examples would be used because they are indeed examples of work without reason.

Other reasons for the prohibition of recycling are just as unwarranted. One such "justification" is that recycling is the easy way out, that the process of learning does not take place. If this is true, please explain why, if a seven-year-old boy is gifted and has college-level intellect, should he not be allowed to skip even one grade level because he has not done the work? With regards to recycling, the process of learning clearly has taken place, since the student has demonstrated enough familiarity with the topic to earn a grade that without such a recycling policy would be accepted. If a teacher says, "use the scientific method in your research and explanation," then the student should use the scientific method. If there is clear reason for a new sort of learning by experience which recycling prevents, then it is reasonable. But if students are instructed, "demonstrate your knowledge of Shakespeare," or any topic for that matter, then why should they be penalized for demonstrating their knowledge of Shakespeare just as the teacher requests? If the teacher wants a certain type of process to occur, it must be explicit, and it must have a reason, or again the issue is raised of achievement without purpose. However, the current policy barring recycling includes all assignments, including ones that ask

the student only to profess his or her knowledge. If a certain process is intended to occur, then that process must be justified as worthy. But a rule barring recycling cannot cover the spectrum of all course work, especially in an age when at the very least, a significant portion of assignments ask only to demonstrate knowledge. Should a 5th grade math teacher disallow a student's answer to a question using division because he or she did that same problem in 2nd grade? If a teacher wants a certain procedure done on the division, that is acceptable, but it is unjust to have a rule that simply bans all previous work, which is what a recycling ban effectively does.

The University of Georgia Student Honor Code states that "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty in others." How is recycling dishonest? Moreover, the recycling ban falls under the category of "Lying/Tampering/Bribery." Recycling involves no lies, tampering, or bribes. This brings up an important issue. It is truly ironic that immoral tactics are used to justify the recycling ban. Associating words that evoke emotion like "academic honesty," "lying," and "tampering," to justify something totally unrelated is wrong. There is another word for using well-accepted terms and ideas to justify something unrelated--propaganda. In essence universities taint their moral code when they use the time-honored principle of honesty to justify their unfair ban of recycling. If they want to put the recycling ban under the "Disallowing of original material clause" then that can be an argument for another day, but don't be deceived by the use of respected, almost legendary terms to substantiate something that is no more than a completely unrelated and unfair policy. Any "honesty clause" that uses such tactics violates itself, in that it deceives students as a part of its attempt to root out deception itself.

Recycling for the purpose of demonstrating knowledge is legitimate and should be permitted. If a teacher wants a certain method applied in learning and demonstrating knowledge then he or she may request that, but it is unfair to have an all-encompassing rule that governs assignments where the purpose is to show command of material. If a teacher wants to give busy work, then that point can be argued as well, but don't mislead students with terms like "honesty" and "cheating" to try to get them to perform extra unnecessary labor. Never, whether it be in academics, politics, or elsewhere, let someone justify something unfair by associating it with things that are universally considered as noble.

Works Cited

OVPI / Academic Honesty Policy (A Culture of Honesty): Section 5. Office of the Vice President for Instruction, University of Georgia. 3 October 2002
<http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/academic_honesty/sect05.htm>.

