ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STATEMENT ON HONESTY

The English Department circulates the following statement on academic honesty because we want to affirm partnership with our students and belief in the importance of intellectual honesty. Exeter students are generally hard-working and committed to achieving success through honest effort. However, since some aspects of our writing program may be ambiguous, and since students may sometimes be tempted to make unacceptable use of the work of others or of their own previous work, we offer the following remarks and clarifications. Our interest is in fostering communication and collaboration between our students and ourselves, and in this spirit we ask our students to read and reflect upon the following analysis of the practicalities of academic honesty at Exeter.

Everyone knows that "plagiarism" refers to dishonesty in written work, and most of us are familiar with the dictionary definition: to plagiarize - to steal and pass off as one's own the ideas, words, writings, etc. of another. Everyone understands that the blatant copying of another student's theme or of long passages from published stories or critical writings is a serious offense and may be punishable by dismissal. There is, however, a gray area where students are sometimes confused as to what is permissible and where distinction as to the propriety or morality of "borrowing" may be blurred. This statement is intended to clarify procedures and to focus upon the basic principle of honesty.

Written exercises encourage students to be creative in their thinking and to find their own ways of organizing and expressing their ideas. One who depends upon another mind for the major idea of one's paper, for the order of ideas or events, or for phraseology does not receive the proper training in developing one's own abilities. Furthermore, such dependence entails asking for an evaluation by the teacher of something that belongs to somebody else. The student in this position is circumventing a central purpose of the educational process and claiming credit for a performance that is not rightfully the student's own. Obviously, therefore, students should not retell stories they have read elsewhere, and in writing analytical papers they should handle source material with discretion. The paraphrase of another person's story or the repetition of critical judgments without credit are forms of dishonesty. Students in any doubt about the responsible use of sources should raise this question explicitly with their instructors.

The use of the student's own previous work can also constitute academic dishonesty unless there is full communication with the current instructor. Although in this case the issue of intellectual theft does not arise, the unacknowledged re-use of work done previously undermines the educational process: because the teacher assumes that the work submitted in the current course is current work, such use is inherently deceptive. On the other hand, it is often a valuable experience for students to return to old papers with new eyes and new skills, and teachers will often be receptive to the reworking of something written months or even years before. However, such use should be arrived at with full consultation between student and teacher.

Once students understand the proper procedures in using the words or ideas of others, or their own previous work, they are on their own. Ignorance, haste, carelessness, or pressure of other work cannot be acceptable excuses.

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