Religion Department
Statement on Academic Honesty

All student scholars need to learn how to cite properly materials drawn from sources other than their own minds, and how to footnote materials correctly when drawn from elsewhere. This is a skill anyone needs to master over time, with the central issue being that words, phrases, and ideas taken from others must be clearly and unequivocally attributed to them and not passed off as one’s own. No scholar works in isolation, nor is expected to, and when one uses the ideas of others it must be clear that those ideas are not the product of the author writing but are sourced from some other location. The chief issue or problem with plagiarism, in other words, is the attempt to pass off the ideas of others as one’s own. Plagiarism is, in short, an effort to deceive, to pretend that material taken from someone else is really your own work. Even when plagiarism is unintended, as a result of careless work, the student is still accountable for using someone else’s work without attribution.

Some teachers (or some assignments) specifically tell the student “not to use any outside sources,” and there are many reasons, all legitimate, for such a prohibition, the chief being that the student is here to use his or her own mind, and checking with, reading about, and researching materials elsewhere can deprive the student of the benefit of thinking of the subject on his/her own and coming up with his/her own ideas and interpretations. In such cases, even a quick review of secondary sources can deprive the student of the creative and imaginative process of thinking on one’s own about a given book, poem, play, or any other piece of writing. Although it is a truism to say this, the person you are shortchanging when you check other sources and/or plagiarize is really yourself, for one is not really learning how to think for one’s self but to copy and parrot the ideas of others. The goal of an Exeter education is to assist one to become an independent, creative thinker, not a skillful copy artist passing others’ ideas off as one’s own.

Depending on the nature of the assignment, the Religion department may also refer students to applicable passages in the English or History department statements on academic honesty.