

Educators and employers remain steadfast as they wage the war against plagiarism. Despite efforts to curb the trend of taking one's work and writing it off as another's, plagiarism is still an issue in both the professional and educational field.

Michigan State University is just one of few colleges who are working to send a message to students that plagiarism will not be tolerated. MSU held a brief seminar last Monday where aspiring young journalists shared their experiences and thoughts on plagiarism. Students told of situations when they had to deal with a plagiarist, and others had questions of what punishment was appropriate on certain levels.

While each plagiarism instance might be a little different, some administrators feel they've seen it all. Sam Birdett, <title>, is one of many who are irritated with students, insisting they are not plagiarists when the evidence is right there in front of them.

"It's like *Dr. Phil*," Birdett explained to the seminar attendees. "The first thing you got to do is admit you got a problem." Chuckles echo through the auditorium. She went on to speak about other fruitless efforts to plagiarize.

Experts point out that while plagiarism becomes easier with Internet access so simple, methods of prevention are just a click away as well. Finding the source of a possible plagiarizer's work is no more difficult than punching a sentence into an online browser. Programs such as *turnitin.com* are constantly developing and being upgraded to counter trends in plagiarism.

What teachers and students find frustrating is the difference between catching and punishing a plagiarist. In an educational setting, punishments for plagiarism are inconsistent and typically mild. Most school policies allow teachers nothing more than the ability to give a student no credit for that assignment, and some are questioning if the possibility of successful plagiarism outweighs the risks of being caught.

"This seems to be going on every semester right now," added Birdett, her tone grim. But teachers don't stand around and watch it happen either.

Christine Pelton, a biology teacher at Piper High School in Kansas, was a teacher willing to stand up against the pressures of plagiarists and their parents. When 28 of her students were flunked for plagiarizing a semester project, parents secretly complained to

the school board. In turn, Pelton was urged to change the grades or she would be fired. But before the school board could give her a pink slip, Pelton resigned.

More alarming than the numbers of students pilfering work however, is how far up the professional ladder plagiarism has reached. On almost a monthly basis now, nationally recognized newspapers have apologized for journalists plagiarizing and falsifying their works.

Most recently, *Detroit Free Press* sports writer Mitch Albom published a story that conveyed to readers he was present at a Michigan State University basketball game. He wrote about MSU alumni watching the game when they weren't even there. And while Albom was suspended with pay, his writing will never be trusted like it was.

"You triple-check this person's work because you're not sure if they'll do it again," observed Chelsea LaForge, an editor-in-chief who personally handled plagiarists on her school paper.

Bonnie Buqueroux, Director of Media and Journalism at MSU, adds that it's not simply the reputation of a plagiarist that is tarnished. They shame their paper, staff, and insult their readers. She feels people are losing faith in the journalists. And for the profession to continue, the plagiarism must end.