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Technological Warfare

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STORY BY JUSTIN KENDALL

TECHNOLOGICAL WARFARE

Online note services pit professors against the Internet



The Internet simplifies everything. Online shopping makes it easy to get the latest Lenny Kravitz CD from *Amazon.com* without having to trek to the mall, e-mail renders snail mail almost extinct, and online sites offer an array of papers to the dismay of many professors. Also irking professors is the proliferation of online note services, which they believe are infringing on their relationships with students and their intellectual property rights.

Thousands of papers can be downloaded from hundreds of websites such as the Evil House of Cheat and *Schoolsucks.com*. These sites offer searchable databases to locate papers on everything from censorship to capital punishment.

Also serving up term papers are sites like *Papermasters.com* and *Advantagepapers.com* that charge by the page and offer delivery within days.

So what can Iowa State do about Internet plagiarism? Here's what the university says about plagiarism in its academic dishonesty policy: "Unacknowledged use of the information, ideas, or phrasing of other writers is an offense comparable with theft and fraud, and it is so recognized by the copyright and patent laws."

So what does that mean? Students commit plagiarism when they use the exact words of a source without quotation marks, when they fail to credit an original source when paraphrasing or summarizing their work, or when they fail to cite a source they borrowed from another writer. Then there's the next dimension, "misrepresentation," which is also listed under the academic dishonesty policy. Misrepresentation is buying or taking someone else's paper and claiming it as your own. If you buy or download a paper, then you better give credit where it's due, or you'll face some strict penalties.

So what happens if you get caught? Penalties for plagiarism and misrepresentation depend on the case and its severity, but they range from a disciplinary reprimand (a written slap on the wrist) to suspension or expulsion (getting booted out of the university).

Barbara Mack, associate professor of journalism and mass communication, says sites offering papers for free and for sale are within their legal rights. "These people are not the ones plagiarizing, you are. If you want to pay them seven bucks a page that's fine. If you want to turn it in, you've committed the crime; they haven't," she says. "They are certainly doing something which would be unethical in almost anyone's light, but it's certainly not illegal in any way, shape, or form."

Neil Harl, distinguished professor of economics, believes the web pro-

vides students with a false sense of security and anonymity. "The Internet probably makes it possible for students to believe that they're anonymous and that there's such a huge volume of material that surely nobody would ever detect that they've picked something up off of the Internet. Don't be so sure of that, because it is not that difficult to detect student work versus other work," he says.

Harl has dealt with cases of plagiarism in the past, even experiencing a case involving his own work. In his agricultural law course, a student plagiarized work from a regional bulletin Harl had worked on a year before. "I pulled it off the shelf and compared it word for word," he says. "The next morning in class, I announced to the group that I had detected a case of plagiarism and that I would go easier on the student if the student would come to see me. I set a deadline of before the next class date. Five students came to see me."

Kenny Sahr founded *Schoolsucks.com* in July 1996. The site claims to offer "the largest collection of free, but awful homework." Sahr wanted to do something with teens and students, but he also wanted to raise questions about the quality of education being provided in universities across the nation. "The school system needs to be reformed; that's what *Schoolsucks* is all about," he says.

Schoolsucks.com doesn't promote plagiarism because it doesn't charge people for the papers on the site and it does not rank them, Sahr says. He believes that if these papers are what our education system is producing, then the system is in need of reevaluation. "We claim that a lot of the papers are garbage," Sahr says. "The education system is so full of mediocrity, they're only beginning to discuss the real issue now."

Offering free term papers and homework online isn't an ethical issue to Sahr. "I think offering free homework is fine. Every university has a collection of locally written theses and doctorate papers in the library. Why is this different? Because they're undergrad and they're digital?" he asks. "I know I'm doing something right. What's wrong with the student reading the work of his peers?"

Kathleen Waggoner, ISU adjunct assistant professor of sociology, believes students can find better ways of learning

how to write, though. "You learn how to write by writing, not by downloading," she says. "These are businesses. These are people for whom money is the bottom line. They don't care about you. They don't care that if you get caught, you're going to be charged with academic dishonesty, that you may get thrown out of school."

Provost Rollin Richmond agrees the Internet may have made plagiarism easier, but it is still stealing. "The university ought to respond to that plagiarism no differently, whether they got that information from the Internet or anywhere else," he says.

The Internet breeds temptation in students and poses challenges to professors in uncovering plagiarism, Richmond adds.



"Ultimately the person that really suffers is you, because you haven't learned that stuff. You just had somebody else learn it for you and you don't know it and sooner or later you're going to pay for that probably," he says.

To sidestep plagiarism, Mack designs writing assignments in her journalism law class based on cases that are still pending, and she requires students to turn in all previous research they've done. Mack believes this ensures papers cannot be duplicated. "I don't think a lot of people cheat in my classes. Plus, the fact that I make it clear that if I find you — if you live — I will send you to the All-University Judiciary."

Harl believes the best defense for professors is to carefully read the work. As for stopping Internet sites offering papers, he says there could be legislation, but he doesn't anticipate that will happen. "We have free speech, and it's a precious right in this country. People thought dimly of Cliff's Notes for a long time, and it made an easier way for students to master something. This is an easier way to meet a course requirement. I think it's dishonest to do it, but the market is there and if someone can produce a product for somebody else to buy, then that's what they're going to do."

Online Notes

Also attempting to simplify students' lives are online note-taking services, offering lecture notes from hundreds of different courses at Iowa State and across the country.

Waggoner's frustration with the online note-taking services comes back with the memory of her course on the American judicial process last spring semester. Although she spent 15 minutes on the first day of class explaining why her students shouldn't post their lecture notes online, her warning fell on deaf ears. A student who was paid by UShock, an online note service, took the slides down verbatim that Waggoner uses for lectures and posted them on the UShock website. However, there were errors in the transcription of the notes, Waggoner says. "There were mistakes, and of course the student was responsible, but I'm held accountable for the accuracy. My reputation is what allows me to survive. If I have no reputation, I have nothing," she says. "I take a great deal of pride in what I do for a living, and I've worked very hard to get here."

Waggoner discovered her notes were posted on the site the Friday of Dead Week. She contacted Director of University Legal Services Paul Tanaka, who helped her contact the webmaster of the site, and they insisted that her work be removed.

The webmaster replied that UShock wanted to work with Waggoner, she recalls, but she had no intention of working with the site and demanded they stop taking notes in her classroom and remove her notes from the site. Her demand was heard on a Monday and her notes were removed the Friday of Finals Week, which she believes was a "deliberate move."

Matt Compton, co-founder of *UShock.com*, says the site decided in Waggoner's case "that the unique circumstances merited the removal of the notes." He adds that they asked Waggoner if she would be willing to provide her class notes on the site, but she rejected the suggestion.

Iowa State adopted a policy on the "Unauthorized Sale of Others' Intellectual Works" four years ago, according to Tanaka. The code reads: "Course-related presentations are owned by the presenter. Students may take written notes or make other recordings for educational purposes, but specific written permission to sell the notes or recordings must be obtained from the presenter." One misconception that arose from ISU's policy was that sites such as *Versity.com*, *UShock.com*, and *Study24-7.com* were outlawed from ISU classrooms. Not so. With written permission comes the right to sell the notes.

Richmond says faculty members could sue the companies. However, that's up to the individual faculty member, and although the university wouldn't discourage it, it probably wouldn't involve itself unless it was an especially flagrant case, he says.

Iowa State hadn't faced many problems with the selling of notes until recently because the policy was adopted at a time when there were no online note sites, he says. "Now that there are and there's much more concern by the faculty, we want to make sure that students are aware that we have a rule like this."

Tanaka adds that faculty members no longer need specific copyright notices to protect their intellectual property, which a lot of people were not aware of.

"The whole concept is to put control back in the hands of the owners of the works," Tanaka says.

Iowa State is the first of the three regent universities to take this type of a stand. The University of Northern Iowa and the University of Iowa both have yet to issue such decrees against the distribution of lecture notes. Individual professors and departments may have developed policies on the issue, but UNI as a whole has yet to take a university-wide stand, says Susan Koch, associate vice president for academic affairs at UNI.

Professors at UNI have voiced concern over the services and the university has developed an Intellectual Property Committee to address the issue of ownership of notes, Koch adds. "I'm certain that if a group of faculty members or if our Faculty Senate were to come forward with collective concerns and want the institution to address this on an institutional level, then we would do so, because it is really a faculty matter and they're in charge of it."

Frederick Antczak, associate dean for academic programs in the College of Liberal Arts at U of I, says Iowa's University Counsel has determined it doesn't violate property rights for students to sell their notes. "Those notes are out there without official resistance from our central administration," he says. "Anybody who belongs in the class can dispose of their



"The whole concept is to put control back into the hands of the owners of the works," says Paul Tanaka, director of University Legal Services.

notes in the ways that they see fit, and anybody that satisfies themselves with those notes rather than the education experience they are really paying for is at risk of basically missing their own education."

"I think many faculty feel as if the online note-taking services are so bad that anybody that would use them would be disadvantaging themselves," Antczak adds.

Many faculty members at U of I already place their notes online as a method of review and to engage the students in the course, Antczak says.

Faculty Senate President David Hopper fully supports ISU's position on selling notes to online companies. In his eyes, students selling their lecture notes to a third party is similar to going to the library, checking out a book, and selling it to someone to place on the web. "It's someone else's creative effort, and just because you can get it and use it from the library does not give you the right to sell that information to a third party and have them publish it," he says.

Students and faculty need to work together on the use of the Internet and electronic resources to improve teaching and resolve the issue, Hopper says. He believes this can only occur through dialogue and discussion on the issues. "We want to protect the intellectual property rights of individuals, but at the same time, we want to make information as readily available to faculty and to students as we can."

As a former professor, Richmond says he can relate to the concerns of his former colleagues, but doesn't feel negatively toward something that may help students learn. "If it is to the advantage of a student to sit in the lecture or the conversation in a classroom and not have to worry about taking notes and be able to get those notes off the web...if that helps the student, fine. I'm not going to object to it," he says.

Better access to information is something Richmond sees as a benefit of the new technology that is being developed. Professors who currently wish to offer students notes in the digital form can receive help to do so from the library,

the Instructional Technology Center or the Center for Teaching Excellence, he adds.

Waggoner believes the online note-taking

services are threatening academic integrity and academic freedom. "If I've created and put together and synthesized information, then that's mine under intellectual property. That is my created contribution, and they have no right to come along and take something like that without my permission and, God forbid, without my knowledge," she says. "My lectures are given for a limited audience. The students at Iowa State University who are paying tuition, that's my audience."

"If the student is doing nothing but

interpreting the lectures, then okay, I'll say that belongs to the student. But if those notes are going to be of any use at all to the other students in that class, they're going to have to, as closely as possible, reflect what went on in the classroom," Waggoner adds.

Compton agrees with Waggoner that if a student has posted their interpretation of the lecture, then it is the student's property and they have a right to post their notes. "The notes, as long as they're interpreted by the student, are owned by the student, and so basically, universities try to restrict the student's right to do what they want with material that the students own," he says.

When UShock receives a complaint such as Waggoner's, it is investigated, Compton says. "If a student is duplicating a professor's notes and a professor requests we take them off, we do that immediately," he says.

Last semester, a couple of professors even submitted their own course notes to the UShock site, Compton says. "I would love to work with professors all the time and get the absolute best material online," he says.

UShock began offering class notes online last February and provided notes for 11 schools, including ISU. "I think if you look at the big picture and get away from individual professor egos who feel like they've taken up a cause, and if they really think about what enables students to learn the most, then notes online are just one tool. There are books in the library, they take notes in class, they have study groups, and there's lots of ways that people learn."

Even with all of the frustration, Waggoner's unpleasant experience hasn't soured her on her students. "Do I still trust [my students]? You bet. Every semester is a new semester, but I'm more cautious," Waggoner says. The second day of class this semester, she gave a 35-minute lecture on copyright infringement and passed out a 15-page syllabus.

This spring, her syllabus will practically be a book at 40 pages, since she will require a term paper. She is also requiring students to sign contracts stating that they've read her syllabus, understand it, and agree to abide by its rules. Plus, for

the first time, she is using a nondisclosure agreement stating that students agree not to sell her work.

Also disputing the online note services is Mathieu Deflem, assistant professor of sociology at Purdue University. Deflem started a website, Free Education Now!, to bring awareness to both students and professors across the nation about the online note companies entrance into the classroom. "It constitutes some kind of an intrusion into our education, and I have no problem with students distribut-

want just anybody else to come into that, to butt in," he says.

The state of California currently has a bill that has passed the legislature and is awaiting the governor's signature. AB1773 would give copyright ownership over lectures to the professor and would make it illegal to distribute lecture notes without consent. "If this is going to be passed, it's an important precedent," Deflem says.

Not everyone within the academic community is against the note companies in their classrooms. Mack has had student note takers in her courses before and hasn't experienced the problems Waggoner has. "Both of the

"My reputation is what allows me to survive. If I have no reputation, I have nothing," says Kathleen Waggoner, adjunct assistant professor of sociology



ing their notes, that's not what it's about, but I have a problem if there's some company trying to market this. That's what I'm really up against," he says.

Deflem's campaign began in September when he started his website. He has been joined in his crusade by not only professors, but also his students. Deflem disputes the claim that this issue divides students and professors. "Students are just as much opposed to it usually, as professors are. The majority of students are opposed to it and the majority of professors are opposed to it, but not everybody," he says.

Deflem doesn't see the issue of online note services as a copyright issue so much as an educational issue. "It has to do with, not so much my right over copyright, but my right to have a sensible relationship with my students. I don't

times that I have had Versity note takers in my classes, they have been brilliant students that worked really hard to do a good job of note taking. I did not see class attendance suffer at all," she says. "They actually would bring me their notes, and I would see their notes before they were posted on Versity."

Mack, however, says it is a breach of copyright for students to take a professor's work and sell it to the online companies, but she doesn't oppose it. "I just don't really get excited about it. It doesn't bother me," she says. "I would give my permission to a note taker."

Harl doesn't believe professors can control what happens to their lectures once they are presented to the public. "I tend to think once an instructor places the intelligence in the public domain by speaking it or writing it other than under copyright, it's in the public domain. It's gone," Harl says.

"Some think you can copyright your notes. I have difficulty with that, because what you are doing is introducing it in the public domain and I'm not sure that you can retain meaningful control. That's yet to be seen."

While he respects other professors who believe that everyone should be copyrighting their material, Harl says he is willing to take his chances. "I'm just not worried enough right now to believe that's what I should do," he says.

Justin Kendall is a junior in journalism and is celebrating his one year anniversary with Ethos.