STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

PLAGIARISM

The Honor Code to which students subscribe upon entering Wesleyan is merely a special application of the unwritten code that governs all academic and scholarly affairs. Scholars on whatever level must represent their findings truthfully. This means, first, that they will not tamper with the truth as they see it. It means, second, that they will not offer as theirs what others discovered or wrote—will not be guilty of plagiarism. These responsibilities apply equally to professor, researcher, and student. Nearly all Wesleyan students mean to be honest, but some do not appreciate the extent to which plagiarism is dishonest. It is important to recognize that plagiarism is theft, not of ideas, which are in a sense the property of everyone, but of the credit for originating ideas. Plagiarism is also fraud—intentional deception in order to obtain what does not rightfully belong to one—for a student who plagiarizes attempts to get from the instructor an unearned grade and from the University an unearned degree. And, of course, he plagiarist also affronts the rest of the student body. Plagiarism, finally, is impersonation, since every piece of written work presents an image of its author.

For this last reason, plagiarism is particularly damaging to the plagiarist. Just as an impersonator may get lost among assumed roles, a plagiarist will almost certainly have a false understanding of himself/herself, and of the education he/she is getting. "Theft," "fraud," and "impersonation" are harsh words, but they accurately represent the moral status of plagiarism and the severe prevailing attitude toward it. Students who use another's ideas or language without giving credit violate the most basic agreement between students and the University; they attack the academic enterprise at its heart. If students realize this, they will hardly plagiarize intentionally, unless they are very cynical indeed. Unfortunately, the proper use of other people's work is a delicate business, and students do sometimes plagiarize without intending to do so. Moreover, education consists almost entirely in the proper use of other people's ideas, so that what the University asks you to do bears a certain resemblance to what it asks you not to do. Inevitably, and rightly, a large part of what any student can produce comes from books, from instructors, and from other students. Nearly as bad as plagiarism would be a total refusal to be influenced by what other people have written or said, i.e., to participate in the educational interchange. Thus it is necessary that all students familiarize themselves at the outset (if they are not already familiar) with the difference between legitimate and illegitimate borrowings. Those who are uncertain should find the following essay helpful.
Plagiarism

For a more complete definition and examples of plagiarism, please see the Student Handbook at:
http://www.wesleyan.edu/studenthandbook/plagiarism.html.