

Gazette position on plagiarism

Several weeks ago (Oct. 2) the Gazette ran an article on plagiarism and its repercussions. In the same issue we ran an advertisement for a company which sells research papers and the contradictions of this were duly pointed out by our readers. We hope that last week's letters column has straightened out our position on the contradiction but plagiarism as an issue at Dalhousie should perhaps be examined again.

The Gazette feels that the faculty, with the exception of the Political Science Department, has behaved like the proverbial ostrich on the whole issue of plagiarism. They have, both as members of various departments and as members of Senate, avoided examining, defining, or clarifying their positions on plagiarism. Though we are certain that neither the faculty nor the administrators of this university condone plagiarism in any form they have certainly done little or nothing to make their positions clear to the student body.

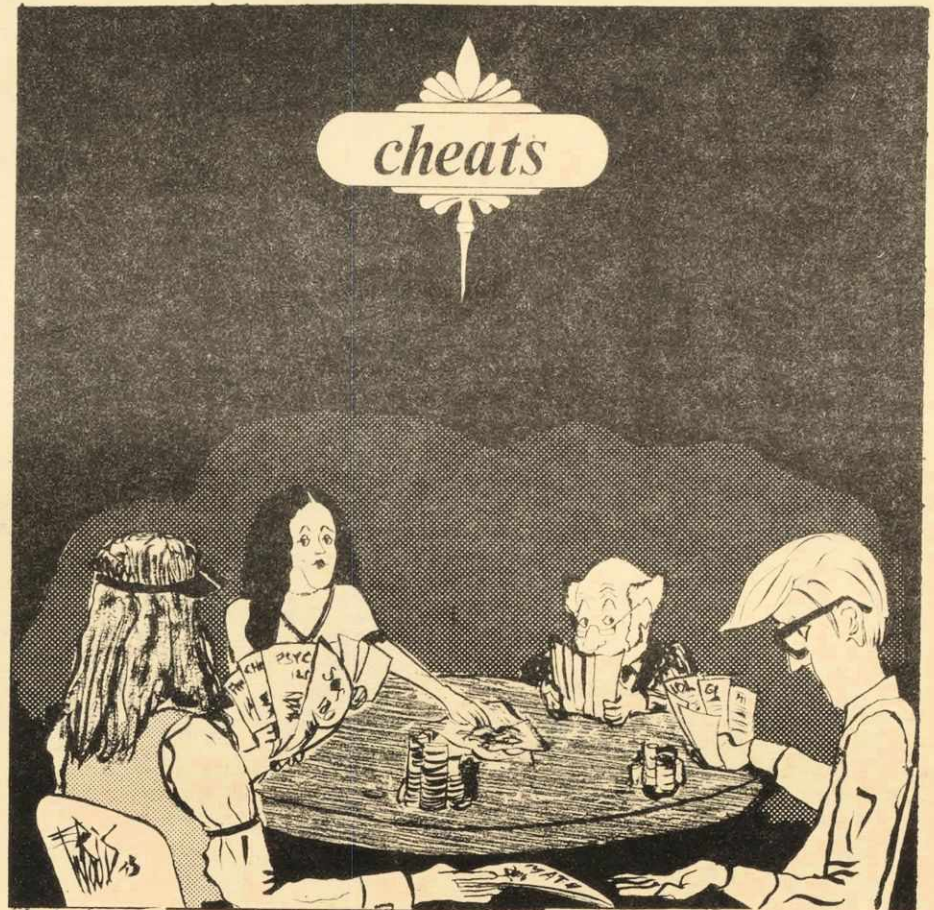
A random sampling of department policies on plagiarism shows only one thing - there is no set policy in any department (again with the exception of Political Science) nor is there a very concise or well known university policy. Many of the departments deal with plagiarism on an ad hoc basis with only very serious plagiarism cases going before the Discipline Committee while other departments send all cases of plagiarism automatically to the Committee. Further within departments there are discrepancies between faculty members on how to treat a case of plagiarism. Some professors might ask a student to either re-write a plagiarized paper or take a lower mark on it while others would immediately fail a student for the full course.

The cases which do make it before the Discipline Committee are also dealt with seemingly on an ad hoc basis. The Discipline Committee is a quasi-judicial body which supposedly follows precedent in determining "punishment" for plagiarism but here again there is little or no consistency. A student can appeal Discipline Committee decisions to the Senate but whether the decision is upheld or overruled seems not to depend on anything more than which senators are present at that particular meeting.

Senate does examine cases previously decided but since these decisions are often totally inconsistent there is no guarantee that a student will be treated fairly.

The Senate, it is true, seems to be doing a little more work lately on the subject of plagiarism but action to formulate and publicize a consistent policy on plagiarism should have been taken years ago. Senate is a notoriously cumbersome and slow moving body so we aren't holding our breath waiting for action on the issue now. Incidentally, the initiative for some kind of sound, regular policy on plagiarism by the Senate has come mainly from the student members of Senate not from the faculty.

Moreover if Senate does come up with a consistent, understandable policy defining plagiarism and its repercussions it must be well publicized. There is little or no point in burying a few paragraphs on the subject somewhere in the university calendar since 1) it is almost as difficult to obtain a Dalhousie calendar as it is to find gold nuggets in the little pool outside the Killam Library and 2) students are unlikely to read that part of the calendar marked "University Regulations" because they tend to assume these regulations apply only to applicants to Dalhousie, or to the number of credits one needs to graduate. By well publicized we mean that all students registered at Dalhousie will



be forced to consciously avoid coming in contact with the set policy not that they will have to search it out in some obscure document in the A & A Building.

In the meantime students are still generally ignorant of exactly what plagiarism consists of, how to properly footnote a paper so as to avoid plagiarizing and what will happen to them if they do plagiarize and are caught. Since it is unlikely that any earth shaking decisions or action will come out of the Senate in the immediate future the various departments could and should follow the example set by the Political Science Department and issue their own policy statements. If they are too lazy to write up their own we are certain the Political Science Department would be willing to issue a copy of their statement to individual departments to copy and provide to students.

Many of the departments contacted mentioned that plagiarism was either rare and unusual in their department or that a case had not come up since the present Chairman had been at Dalhousie. As an excuse this, if you'll pardon the expression, stinks. What do they plan to do when a case does come up?

The Gazette maintains that until the Senate gets off its collective derriere (a polite euphemism for the sitting part of one's anatomy for the non-bilingual) the faculty has a responsibility to educate the student body as to the facts about plagiarism. At the present time they are nicely shirking this responsibility and as they do not condone plagiarism the Gazette does not condone their inaction.

Canada's Oldest College Newspaper

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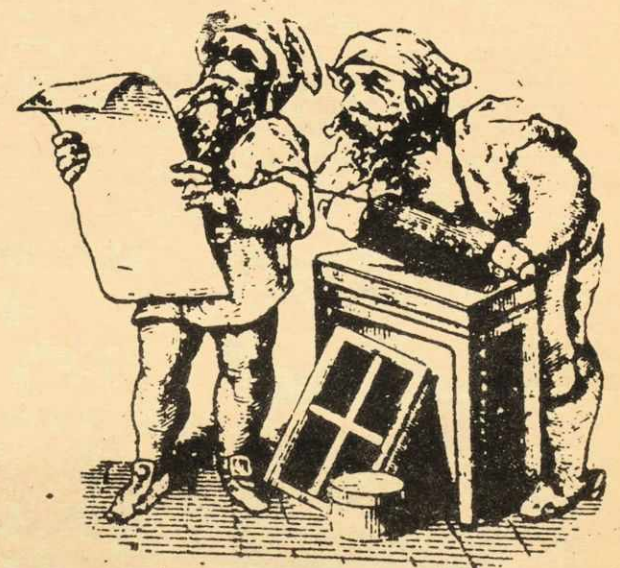
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Letters

Policy misconceptions

To the Gazette's readers:

This letter is published simply to clear up a few misconceptions concerning the views expressed in this paper. The masthead (the blurb usually situated directly beneath the editorial) states: "The views

expressed in the paper are not necessarily those of the Student Union, the university administration, the editor, or the staff." That statement taken as it reads, means that no one is responsible for what is printed in the Gazette, except the author of the piece, and only that author! This paper does not reject any copy unless it has

Cont'd on page 5