

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CARBONDALE**

**Date:** September 15, 2007

**To:** Whom It May Concern

**From:** R. Gerald Nelms, Associate Professor, Composition-Rhetoric

**Re:** Review of Plagiarism Allegations Relating to “The Provisions for Gifted Children Education From 1977 Through 1988 in Twenty-Two Southern Illinois Counties” by Glendal W. Poshard, Submitted to Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 1984

On September 10, 2007, SIUC President Glen Poshard requested that I review his 1984 dissertation and assess the allegations of plagiarism made against that dissertation. He provided me with a copy of his dissertation and the packet of papers identifying passages of the dissertation claimed to be plagiarized.

The dissertation includes 107 pages of discourse, not including the title page, approval page, “Acknowledgment,” “Table of Contents,” “List of Tables,” “List of Figures,” “Bibliography,” “Appendix,” and “Vita.” The citation system used in this dissertation is a footnote system. By my count, a total of forty infractions of the conventions of academic citation within this dissertation have been alleged: four in the Introduction; thirty-two in the Review of the Literature; and two on the second page of the Methodology chapter. The infractions noted here take several different forms:

- Of the forty infractions noted, twenty-five are cases where citations to the allegedly plagiarized material are present but quotation marks around copied material were not included. In some of these cases, the footnote is not immediately contiguous to all of the quoted material it references but is nevertheless within a reasonable length from it.
- In at least five cases, quoted material from one source is interrupted with quoted or paraphrased material from another source and the footnote is appended to the early portion of the quoted material but not to the latter portion or to the latter portion but not to the earlier. (One of the flaws in the footnote system—and a reason for the development of in-text parenthetical citation—is the uncertainty where footnotes should appear for extended use of quoted material from a single source. Do you wait and cite the source at the end of the extended use, or do you repeat the same footnote? And if the latter, then how often? When does such repetition begin to interrupt the flow of the reading?)
- At least two of the cases appear to have occurred because of the author’s belief that certain terms were “common knowledge” among the community of educators to whom he was writing. These cases occur on pages 10 and 19.

- Some of the cases involve only a few words or a phrase, such that they are not substantive enough, in my opinion, to rise to any level of concern (pp. 23, 27, 28, and 41). Rebecca Moore Howard has shown that such traces of source material can be found even in the published material of many professional scholars.<sup>1</sup>
- Three of the allegations of plagiarism simply involve incorrect page numbers given for the source. Such infractions are not examples of plagiarism. Not all citation infractions are plagiaristic.
- Some of the mis-citations may be the result of a misunderstanding of citation conventions and/or careless note taking and paraphrasing—both of which, again, are common within dissertations and master’s theses. Some of the infractions here suggest the possibility of the well-documented phenomenon of cryptomnesia, where writers so internalize certain ideas and even exact ways of expressing those ideas that they simply forget that the material has come from another source. Siri Carpenter of the *Monitor on Psychology* staff notes that research has shown cryptomnesia to be “a rather common memory glitch that pervades everyday cognitive functioning”<sup>2</sup>

These findings have led me to conclude that most of the passages alleged to be plagiarized were not technically plagiarized and that all of the infractions amount only to minor failures to conform to academic citation conventions in place at the present time. They all appear to be the kinds of minor citation errors that graduate students often make during the process of writing dissertations and theses and that are typically corrected during the process of revising these documents, with the help of dissertation and thesis directors and committees.

We should note here that citations can take different forms, some considered academically incomplete or incorrect, but still remain citations. Newspaper and magazine articles, for example, may include only in-text citations to a work, including only the title and author. One partial measure of the seriousness of any citation infraction or set of such infractions is how easily correctable they are. All of the citation infractions in this dissertation appear to be easily correctable and thus, I do not take them to be serious.

It is important to remind ourselves, too, that the purpose of this dissertation transcends its synthesis of source material, which is primarily located in Chapter Two, “Review of Related Literature,” where almost all of the alleged plagiarism is focused. The main purpose of the dissertation is to report on the methods and findings of a survey study, assessing the “status” of gifted programs in twenty-two southern counties in Illinois. The language and ideas of the rest of the dissertation are not in question. Also, even within Chapter Two itself, there are twenty-eight paragraphs with no questioned words or sentences and many of those paragraphs with questioned material also include sentences that are original.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarism, Authors, Collaboration*, Stamford, CT: Ablex, 1999, pp. 4-14ff.

<sup>2</sup> In “Plagiarism or Memory Glitch?” (*Monitor on Psychology* 33.2 [Feb. 2002], [www.apa.org/monitor/feb02/glitch.html](http://www.apa.org/monitor/feb02/glitch.html)).

The extended quoting on pages 43-49 and pages 50-53 represent, perhaps, the most obvious examples of incomplete understanding academic citation conventions, and because of their length, probably require special attention. The key word in describing them is “incomplete,” for these quoted passages, in fact, are introduced—and thus, cited, by definition—as work from another source. Technically, these passages, because of their length, should be block quoted—that is, indented from the left margin of each page; yet, they are not, thus, possibly causing confusion to those skimming the text. In short, then, these extended passages fall under the same category of infraction as those shorter passages mentioned above, where quoted material is cited but not enclosed in the appropriate punctuation: quotation marks. These passages, then, despite their length, do not represent serious citation infractions. They could easily have been corrected by simply requiring the dissertation writer to indent them.

Based on these findings, then, I conclude that the author of this dissertation does **NOT** warrant the label of “plagiarist,” which, I think most academics would agree, should be reserved for those individuals found to have adopted textual material from other sources with the *intent* of cheating. I have found **no** evidence of any intentional effort to cheat in this dissertation. On the contrary, I see plenty of evidence of the author’s effort to adapt and synthesize the knowledge he draws from his sources in ways that are professional and acceptable academically. In other words, the citation infractions I note here are superficial, not substantive. They could have been easily corrected to conform to current academic expectations.

Below, I will discuss the criteria I use to determine how serious such citation infractions really are and provide further details of my analysis of this dissertation.

- **Definition.** Does the suspect text meet the definition of plagiarism?

There is no firm consensus on the defining features of plagiarism. Early definitions of plagiarism tended to rely entirely on formal criteria: plagiarism as any failure to put quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material in the academically sanctioned format. Scholarship on plagiarism over the last thirty or so years, however, has shown that reliance on form to be inadequate. We now know that students—and many faculty members in various contexts—can inadvertently produce passages of discourse that appear plagiarized.<sup>3</sup> By far, most scholars defining plagiarism emphasize the importance of a conscious intention to cheat, and I see nothing in the forms of the infractions in this dissertation that make me think that its author was intending to cheat.

- **Intent.** Does the text suggest that the writer has made an effort to *adapt* the ideas and/or expression of the source material, rather than simply *adopt* those ideas and/or expression?

While there is no exact formula for measuring intent, evidence of adapting behavior suggests an intellectual engagement with the material that typically does **not** characterize intentional

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<sup>3</sup> The research of Miguel Roig has been particularly useful in revealing the problems writers face in their efforts to paraphrase source material. See, especially, Roig, “Can Undergraduate Students Determine Whether Text Has Been Plagiarized?” *Psychological Record* 47.1 (Winter 1997): 113-22; and “Plagiarism and Paraphrasing Criteria of College and University Professors.” *Ethics and Behavior* 11.3 (July 2001): 307-23.

plagiarism. Intentional plagiarism is more evident in cases where the writer mindlessly adopts source material in ways that do not suggest an intellectual engagement with that material.

In the case of the Poshard dissertation, the writing suggests to me a genuine engagement with the ideas and forms of expression of the community of scholars studying and writing about giftedness in students. The inclusion of footnoted citations of quoted material, despite the absence of quotation marks, convinces me that the writer did not intend to pass off this material as his own. In fact, it strongly suggests just the opposite—that he was immersed in the issues and concerns of this community of educators. Such immersion also suggests that other kinds of infractions, involving the use of short phrases and individual terms without citation, may represent a typical problem that novice and student writers encounter, a problem that is related to their development as writers (see below, under Development).

We also should note that most of those citation infractions that have been identified in this dissertation are surrounded by writing that is original to the dissertation's author. Writers attempting to intentionally cheat typically adopt more source material than one finds here or may create more of a patchwork of plagiarized material with less of their own language included.

Other causes of citation infractions may be at work here, too—each, once again, not unusual for graduate student writing and easily correctable. Careless note taking is, by far, one of the most common problems that writers have, even professional writers. Cases of alleged plagiarism by a number of well-respected writers appear to have been caused by such carelessness. The case of historian Doris Kearns Goodwin sounds strikingly like that presented by the Poshard dissertation. In her January 27, 2002, *Time.com* article, “How I Caused That Story” ([www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,197614,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,197614,00.html)), Goodwin writes:

Fourteen years ago, not long after the publication of my book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, I received a communication from author Lynne McTaggart pointing out that material from her book on Kathleen Kennedy had not been properly attributed. I realized that she was right. Though my footnotes repeatedly cited Ms. McTaggart's work, *I failed to provide quotation marks for phrases that I had taken verbatim, having assumed that these phrases, drawn from my notes, were my words, not hers.* I made the corrections she requested, and the matter was completely laid to rest—until last week, when the *Weekly Standard* published an article reviving the issue. The larger question for those of us who write history is to understand how citation mistakes can happen. (¶ 3, emphasis mine)

I cannot say with any certainty that careless note taking caused any of the citation infractions here, but certainly, they have for others who have found themselves accused of plagiarism. We should all agree with Doris Kearns Goodwin that the real question for us should be “how citation mistakes can happen.”

- **Context.** Are there contextual factors that help explain the citation infractions found in the text?

In *Crisis on Campus: Confronting Academic Misconduct* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), Wilfried Decco argues that context should be an important criterion in judging plagiarism.

He notes that the same amount of copied material can be serious in one context but not serious in another context (129). The most serious unintentional citation infractions that students make can be the result of confusion over context: a belief, for example, that the context is what Brian Martin calls “institutionalized” and thus, accepting and even encouraging of plagiarism. Institutionalized contexts are common in business and advertising settings and in situations calling simply for a kind of instrumental discourse, getting business done, where authorship credit is not considered a significant factor in one’s advancement within the community where the discourse is at work. There is nothing in the Poshard dissertation to indicate any such confusion, but other contextual factors are relevant.

As one of my committee members at Ohio State University, Victorian literature and Bible scholar John Gabel, told me when I first began my own dissertation, “A dissertation is the last work you’ll do as a student, *not* the first work you do as a professional scholar.” His point was this: Dissertations are not meant to be publishable works. They are intended as products of a final learning process that will further help graduate students become scholarly professionals. It is important, then, that anyone reading the Poshard dissertation remember that this is the writing of graduate student Glen Poshard, *not* University President Glen Poshard. Human beings learn from their errors, and dissertation writing is meant to be a final safe environment for such learning.

Citation errors are not uncommon in dissertation writing. After all, formal citation styles are artificial and complex. As Decco asks, “[A]t what point does a rephrased sentence become ‘sufficiently different’ to be allowed? One can easily understand why students can get confused. On the one hand, the message says ‘read the passage and then express it in your own words;’ on the other hand, ‘paraphrasing [can be] plagiarism’” (*Crisis on Campus: Confronting Academic Misconduct*, p.121).

We should also add some knowledge about the formal citation situation of the late 1970s and early 1980s to our reading of the Poshard dissertation. Citation rules were not formulated until the Renaissance in Europe, and as rhetoric historian Robert Connors<sup>4</sup> notes, “Early disciplinary journals [developing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century] show a riot of different notational systems at work . . . . There were no formal rules” (p. 43). Connors goes on to explain<sup>5</sup> that the move from footnoting to other forms of citation and documentation went on throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. By 1960, many scientific journals had moved to other notational systems, but the APA and the MLA continued to offer footnotes one alternative form of citation throughout the 1970s and into the middle of the 1980s. At the time of the writing of this dissertation, then, there may have been some confusion over the kind of citation system that students in Higher Education were expected to use. And, of course, there remain a confusing array of different systems from footnoting to numbering to endnoting, to parenthetical citation. Some disciplines sanction a particular citation system, but others allow for a variety, and this variety can confuse students. I sense in this dissertation possibly some such confusion.

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<sup>4</sup> In “The Rhetoric of Citation Systems, Part I: The Development of Annotation Structures from the Renaissance to 1900,” *Rhetoric Review* 17.1 (Autumn 1998): 6-48.

<sup>5</sup> In “The Rhetoric of Citation Systems, Part II: Competing Epistemic Values in Citation,” *Rhetoric Review* 17.2 (Spring 1999): 219-245.

- **Development.** Do the patterns of the infractions suggest a lack of familiarity with the citation conventions of the community that the writer is addressing, and do they suggest an effort, albeit not entirely successful, to imitate the language and discourse of that community?

In *Professional Academic Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (SIU Press, 1994), Susan Peck MacDonald posits at least four stages along a continuum that novice writers move through on their way to becoming accomplished at producing expert, insider discourse:

1. *Nonacademic writing*: a generalized prose that has little connection to any particular disciplinary ways of communicating;
2. *Generalized academic writing* concerning with stating claims, offering evidence, respecting other's opinions, and learning how to write with authority;
3. *Novice approximations* of particular disciplinary ways of making knowledge; and
4. *Expert, insider discourse*.

In my experience, many graduate students seem to come to graduate school with only rough “approximations of particular disciplinary ways of making knowledge.” Few fully attain the level of producing expert, insider discourse until the writing of the dissertation, and sometimes, not entirely even then. That process of composing the dissertation still requires feedback and instruction from knowledgeable faculty advisors. The process of moving from outsider to insider is not quick and easy. As Ramage, Bean, and Johnson write in *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing, Brief Edition*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (NY: Pearson, Longman, 2006):

When you study a new discipline, you must learn not only the knowledge that scholars in that discipline have acquired over the years, but also the processes they used to discover that knowledge. It is useful to think of each academic discipline as a network of conversations in which participants exchange information, respond to each other's questions, and express agreements and disagreements . . . . (p. 30)

I see evidence in the Poshard dissertation of a determined graduate student effort to move from outsider to insider—that is, to embrace the ideas and language of academic community he is addressing. The cases where terms are used as if it were commonly used terminology within that community (common knowledge) are evidence of that effort, and in fact, I want to be careful here not to insist that these cases actually represent infractions. I would need to know more about the use of these terms and phrases before I made any claim that they were not at the time actually employed as common knowledge in the literature of the discourse community on giftedness.

The extended passages on pages 44-49 and then, 50-53, again, reveal the writer's effort to conform to academic citation expectations but without an adequate familiarity with those conventions. We may ask why the writer would not block quote these cited passages when he did block quote other, shorter cited passages (e.g., pages 21-22). The answer probably has to do with the writer's having internalized two conflicting “rules” of writing. This phenomenon is not only not unusual; it is typical. Mike Rose in his early work on writer's block uncovered for us how writers may be taught rules of writing that, on the surface, seem to make sense but in

practice, can cause problems.<sup>6</sup> In the cases of these two longer passages, I see the possibility of two conflicting rules directing the writer to an inadequate solution. On the one hand, we are taught we must cite quoted material, which the writer does by way of introducing the passages, telling the reader that the following material is from “the Executive Summary of Volume I of the national survey” (footnoted) (p. 42) and then from “the Executive Summary of Volume II” of that same survey (also footnoted) (p. 49). On the other hand, we often are also discouraged from including significant portions of quoted material, such as material that goes on for pages, because, we often are told, it disrupts the “flow” of the text. But what if the writer determines that quoting long portions of a source is important? The kind of decision made for this dissertation makes sense, even though it means committing a citation infraction. The writer could easily determine that introducing and footnoting the material at the point of that introduction was necessary but that block quoting the material would seriously disrupt the flow of the text. Again, this is a decision that we would hope would be questioned and corrected in the process of composing through feedback from the dissertation writer’s advisor and committee. Once again, however, the solution does *not* represent a significant breach of ethics. It does represent a graduate student’s effort to resolve an internalized conflict in understanding the academic discourse conventions he has internalized.

*Patchwriting* is another common problem attributable to an effort to move from being outsider to insider. In cases of patchwriting, writers become so absorbed in the effort to imitate the language and knowledge of the communities they are attempting to enter that paraphrasing infractions become common. Patchwritten paraphrasing tends to follow the sentence structures and sentence arrangements of the source materials and tends to share a more than acceptable amount of terminology with the source materials. The infraction on page 17 of the Poshard dissertation, among others, may be an example of patchwriting. The wording is very similar to that of its source, which, by the way, is footnoted. However, some individual wording and a phrase are changed. The changes to the quoted material are not enough to hide the obvious traces of the source material and therefore, do not indicate an effort at concealing the use of the material. On the contrary, these changes suggest an effort to engage with the source material in ways that suggest patchwriting, *not* intentional plagiarism. Howard and others have suggested that patchwriting may well be a stage in writerly development that many students, graduate as well as undergraduate, pass through.<sup>7</sup>

- **Significance.** Does the amount or significance of the citation infractions, taken together, rise to the level where further investigation is warranted?

Wilfried Decco<sup>8</sup> suggests that the quantity and quality of citation infractions ought to be two other factors by which we judge plagiarism (129). Together, they can help us determine the significance of citation infractions. As I have indicated, I do not believe that the citation infractions found in the Poshard dissertation warrant the scrutiny and accusations of plagiarism

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<sup>6</sup> See Rose’s “Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer’s Block,” *College Composition and Communication* 32 (1980): 389-401.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Moore Howard, *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarism, Authors, Collaboration*, Stamford, CT: Ablex, 1999, pp. 7-8; Howard, “A Plagiarism *Pentimento*,” *Journal of Teaching Writing* 11 (1993): 233-246; Glenda Hull and Mike Rose, “Rethinking Remediation: Toward a Social-Cognitive Understanding of Problematic Reading and Writing,” *Written Communication* 6.2 (1989): 139-54.

<sup>8</sup> *Crisis on Campus: Confronting Academic Misconduct*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002.

they have received. Most of these infractions constitute a simple pattern of *incomplete* citation (an absence of quotation marks in these cases). Because these sites of infraction include footnotes—that is, actual citations, albeit incompletely delivered—they do not actually constitute plagiarism. As I have argued above, the patterns of other citation infractions seem equally inconsequential.

### **Final Note:**

While we must continue to uphold high standards when it comes to the synthesis and integration of source material into our graduate students' discourse, we must not become so rule-bound that we forget what is really important in that discourse, what we want our students to become proficient at: to quote Glenda Hull and Mike Rose<sup>9</sup>, "Interact with the text, relate it to your own experiences, [and] derive your own meaning from it" (150). We face significant dangers if we allow such an overzealous prosecution of citation infractions to outweigh our students' genuine engagement with the learning. Wilfried Decco warns us of the dangers of "the intense attention paid to plagiarism in the past few decades" (131). He writes that our "[h]eighted sensitivity about the smallest incorrect attribution has had unexpected consequences" (131), and he cites the case of Boston University's chair of Mass Communications, John J. Schulz, who "resigned from that post because he had failed to attribute one sentence at the end of a lecture that he was quickly wrapping up because of time constraints" (131). Decco says this "incident . . . illustrates the danger of overreaction by immature critics" (131-132). Such overreaction multiplied could have a chilling effect on scholarship generally. The most important lesson that I draw from the scholarship on citation and plagiarism is this: We must always balance our high standards for research and scholarly publication with our need to not impede the free exchange of ideas. The world can withstand a few unprosecuted citation infractions.

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<sup>9</sup> "Rethinking Remediation: Toward a Social-Cognitive Understanding of Problematic Reading and Writing," *Written Communication* 6 (1989): 139-154.