

**"STATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS" AND  
"STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM" OF THE  
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS**

**STATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS**

**INTRODUCTION**

The statement, which follows, a revision of a statement originally adopted in 1966, was approved by Committee B on Professional Ethics, adopted by the Council, and endorsed by the Seventy-third Annual Meeting in June 1987.

From its inception, the American Association recognized that membership in the academic profession carries with it special responsibilities. The Association has consistently affirmed these responsibilities in major policy statements, providing guidance to professors in such matters as their utterances as citizens, the exercise of their responsibilities to students and colleagues, and their conduct when resigning from an institution or when undertaking sponsored research. The Statement on Professional Ethics that follows sets forth those general standards that serve as a reminder of the variety of responsibilities assumed by all members of the profession.

In the enforcement of ethical standards, the academic profession differs from those of law and medicine, whose associations act to ensure the integrity of members engaged in private practice. In the academic profession the individual institution of higher learning provides this assurance and so should normally handle questions concerning propriety of conduct within its own framework by reference to a faculty group. The Association supports such local action and stands ready, through the general secretary and Committee B. to counsel with members of the academic community concerning questions of professional ethics and to inquire into complaints when local consideration is impossible or inappropriate. If the alleged offense is deemed sufficiently serious to raise the possibility of adverse action, the procedures should be in accordance with the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, the 1958 Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings, or the applicable provisions of the Association's Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

**The Statement**

- I. Professors, guided by a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge, recognize the special responsibilities placed upon them. Their primary responsibility to their subject is to seek and to state the truth as they see it. To this end professors devote their energies to developing and improving their scholarly competence. They accept the obligation to exercise critical self-discipline and judgment in using, extending, and transmitting knowledge. They practice intellectual honesty. Although professors may follow subsidiary interest, these interests must never seriously hamper or compromise their freedom of inquiry.
- II. As teachers, professors encourage the free pursuit of learning in their students. They hold before them the best scholarly and ethical standards of their discipline. Professors demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors.

Professors make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct and to ensure

that their evaluations of students reflect each student's true merit. They respect the confidential nature of the relationship between professor and student. They avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students. They acknowledge significant academic or scholarly assistance from them. They protect their academic freedom.

- III. As colleagues, professors have obligations that derive from common membership in the community of scholars. Professors do not discriminate against or harass colleagues. They respect and defend the free inquiry of associates. In the exchange of criticism and ideas professors show due respect for the opinions of others. Professors acknowledge academic debt and strive to be objective in their professional judgment of colleagues. Professors accept their share of faculty responsibilities for the governance of their institution.
- IV. As members of an academic institution, professors seek above all to be effective teachers and scholars. Although professors observe the stated regulations of the institution, provided the regulations do not contravene academic freedom, they maintain their right to criticize and seek revision. Professors give due regard to their paramount responsibilities within their institution in determining the amount and character of work done outside it. When considering the interruption or termination of their service, professors recognize the effect of their decision upon the program of the institution and give due notice of their intentions.
- V. As members of their community, professors have the rights and obligations of other citizens. Professors measure the urgency of these obligations in the light of their responsibilities to their subject, to their students, to their profession, and to their institution. When they speak or act as private persons they avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for their University or College. As citizens engaged in a profession that depends upon freedom for its health and integrity, professors have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom.

### **STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM**

The statement which follows was approved for publication by the Association's Committee B on Professional Ethics, adopted by the Council in June 1990, and endorsed by the Seventy-sixth Annual Meeting.

The main practical activity of the American Association of University Professors, since its founding, has concerned restraints upon the right of faculty members to inquire, to teach, to speak, and to publish professionally. Yet throughout its existence, the Association has emphasized the responsibilities of faculty members no less than their rights. Both rights and responsibilities support the common good served by institutions of higher education which in the words of the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, "depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition."

In its Statement on Professional Ethics, the Association has stressed the obligation of professors to their subject and to the truth as they see it, as well as the need for them to "exercise critical self-discipline and judgment in using, extending, and transmitting knowledge." Defending free inquiry by their associates and respecting the opinion of others, in the exchange of criticism and ideas, professors must also be rigorously honest in acknowledging their academic debts.

In the light of recent concerns within and outside of the academic profession, it has seemed salutary to restate these general obligations with respect to the offense of plagiarism.

## DEFINITION

The offense of plagiarism may seem less self-evident in some circles now than it did formerly. Politicians, business executives, and even university Presidents depend on the ideas and literary skills of committees, aides, and speechwriters in the many communications they are called on to make inside and outside their organizations. When ideas are rapidly popularized and spread abroad through the media, when fashion and the quest for publicity are all around us, a concern with protecting the claims of originality may seem to some a quaint survival from the past or even a perverse effort to deter the spread of knowledge.

Nevertheless, with the academic world, where advancing knowledge remains the highest calling, scholars must give full and fair recognition to the contributors to that enterprise, both for the substance and for the formulation of their findings and interpretations. Even within the academic community, however, there are complexities and shades of difference. A writer of textbooks rests on the labors of hundreds of authors of monographs who cannot all be acknowledged; the derivative nature of such work is understood and even, when it is well and skillfully done, applauded. A poet, composer, or painter may "quote" the creation of another artist, deliberately without explanation as a means of deeper exploration of meaning and in the expectation that knowledgeable readers, listeners, or viewers will appreciate the allusion and delight in it. There are even lapses--regrettable but not always avoidable--in which a long-buried memory of something read surfaces as a seemingly new thought.

But none of these situations diminishes the central certainty: taking over the ideas, methods, or written words of another, without acknowledgment and with the intention that they be taken as the work of the deceiver, is plagiarism. It is theft of a special kind, for the true author still retains the original ideas and words, yet they are diminished as that author's property and a fraud is committed upon the audience that believes those ideas and words originated with the deceiver. Plagiarism is not limited to the academic community but has perhaps its most pernicious effect in that setting. It is the antithesis of the honest labor that characterizes true scholarship and without which mutual trust and respect among scholars is impossible.

## PRECEPTS

Every professor should be guided by the following:

1. In his or her own work, the professor must scrupulously acknowledge every intellectual debt--for his ideas, methods, and expressions--by means appropriate to the form of communication.
2. Any discovery of suspected plagiarism should be brought at once to the attention of the affected parties and, as appropriate, to the profession at large through proper and effective channels--typically through reviews in or communications to relevant scholarly journals. Committee B of the Association stands ready to provide its good offices in resolving questions of plagiarism, either independently or in collaboration with other professional societies.
3. Professors should work to ensure that their universities and professional societies adopt clear guidelines respecting plagiarism, appropriate to the disciplines involved, and should insist that regular procedures be in place to deal with violations of those guidelines. The gravity of a charge of plagiarism, by whomever it is made, must not diminish the diligence exercised in determining whether the accusation is valid. In all cases the most scrupulous procedural fairness must be observed, and penalties must be appropriate to the degree of offense.

4. Scholars must make clear the respective contributions of colleagues on a collaborative project, and professors who have the guidance of students as their responsibility must exercise the greatest care not to appropriate a student's ideas, research, or presentation to the professor's benefit; to do so is to abuse power and trust.
5. In dealing with graduate students, professors must demonstrate by precept and example the necessity of rigorous honesty in the use of sources and of utter respect for the work of others. The same expectations apply to the guidance of undergraduate students, with a special obligation to acquaint students new to the world of higher education with its standards and the means of ensuring intellectual honesty.

## **CONCLUSION**

Any intellectual enterprise--by an individual, a group of collaborators, or a profession--is a mosaic, the pieces of which are put in place by many hands. Viewed from a distance, it should appear a meaningful whole, but the long process of its assemblage must not be discounted or misrepresented. Anyone who is guilty of plagiarism not only harms those most directly affected but also diminishes the authority and credibility of all scholarship and all creative arts, and therefore ultimately harms the interests of the broader society. The danger of plagiarism for teaching, learning, and scholarship is manifest, the need vigorously to maintain standards of professional integrity compelling.