

# Recent UMKC plagiarism scandal highlights issue of academic dishonesty

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UM-Kansas City Dean of Arts and Sciences Bryan LeBeau was suspended for allegedly plagiarizing portions of a commencement speech he gave in December 2003.

LeBeau was accused of copying certain portions of his speech from one that Cornell West, professor at Princeton and leading African-American academic, gave at a Wesleyan University commencement in 1993.

LeBeau's speech had large portions copied from West's speech almost word for word.

"A tragic sense of history will give you a view of the world in which no culture and no civilization and no society has a monopoly on wisdom and virtue. It would allow you to see ambiguous legacies in the past, to accent hybrid culture, because every culture that we know is based in part on fragments of antecedent cultures," West said in 1993, according to a transcript of the speech.

"A realistic sense of history will give you a view of the world in which no culture and no civilization and no society has ever had a monopoly on wisdom and virtue. It will allow you to see ambiguous legacies in the past, to accent hybrid cultures, because every culture that we know - including our own - is base in part on fragments of antecedent cultures," LeBeau said, according to the speech as it was published in the Dean's Newsletter No. 7 of UM-Kansas City.

Different portions of the speech were similar, and at one point, LeBeau uses the same quotes from the same authors in the same order as West.

The incident of plagiarism would have gone unnoticed except for Sally Greene, professor at North Carolina-Chapel Hill, who Googled a Hegel quote that both West and LeBeau used. She found the comparisons between both speeches.

Raleigh Muns, UM-St. Louis reference librarian and author of an Internet page examining plagiarism said the Internet has become a great tool in detecting plagiarized material.

"You can look in databases. Do some phrase searching. You can look on the Internet as a whole. The backside of being able to plagiarize from the Internet is being able to catch it so much easier with the Internet," Muns said.

The three ways faculty search for plagiarized material are proprietary sites owned by the university, search engines and commercial sites, Muns said.

The most popular commercial site on the web is Turnitin.com, a subscription based site that certain colleges use, including St. Louis Community College. With Turnitin.com teachers submit students' papers to the site, creating a huge database of papers and ensuring students' papers do not get passed around.

"There's a large bunch of commercial software for plagiarism," Muns said.

The UM-St. Louis Student Conduct Code has a three-part definition of plagiarism, including use of quotes without crediting the source, unacknowledged buying of material produced by others and unacknowledged collaboration.

When plagiarism is discovered by teachers, they are obliged to report the incident to Academic Affairs within 14 days, the Academic Dishonesty Guidelines states. Students accused of plagiarism are then supposed to attend an informal disciplinary hearing.

"The University has a person who does investigate and make recommendations on outcomes of cases. Every case has different outcomes and sanctions. It depends on the case," Lori Morgan, executive assistant in the office of the vice chancellor for academic affairs, said.

Tanisha Smith, assistant to the dean of the graduate school, is that person. Smith investigates every case of plagiarism on campus and takes part in the disciplinary hearings. She said it is possible to see 10 to 15 cases of plagiarism per semester and that it is a problem on all of the UM campuses.

"Disciplinary action ranges from a warning for the first offense to expulsion for extreme cases," Smith said, adding that "most expulsions are repeat offenders."

UM-St. Louis also uses Discretionary Sanctions, which usually involve volunteer work for the offending student.

The vice chancellor for Academic Affairs makes the final verdict in all plagiarism cases. "[The UM-St. Louis plagiarism policy] is pretty standard. Basically, don't do it, and if you do, we are going to hit you real hard," Muns said.

Students can appeal decisions to the Student Conduct Committee Review and to the chancellor as a last resort.

"In a sense, good plagiarism takes as much effort as thinking and writing on your own, anyway. [For] bad plagiarism, you're going to get caught and busted," Muns said.