

## **II-Problem-Solving.** Peer-Mentoring Authorship: Case Study *How do you handle plagiarism in group writing?*



In this remix, mashup, download, file-sharing century,

*What kind of scholarship do we want?  
Who will construct it?  
Why will we/they be motivated to do so?*

Consider this case study, based on a real situation, at UAB in the summer of 2011.

Three graduate students at a public, research-intensive university in the South were working on a collaborative research paper in an online course. They had never met each other prior to the course, but they were required to complete the paper together to receive a final grade for the course. One student, Lee, who had experience writing research articles for publication, offered to be the “lead” person on putting the paper together.

### **Feeling uncomfortable**

While reading the text that another student, Mick, emailed him, Lee, saw something that made him uncomfortable. He paused. The writing didn’t sound like the work of his classmate, whose writing he had read in the online discussion forum. On the discussion board, Mick was brief and casual, showing minimal engagement with the course readings. This particular text, which Mick had submitted for the team’s paper, was sophisticated, smoothly worded, and packed with information. He felt bad about thinking what he was thinking, but his name would be on the paper, too.

### **Acting on a hunch**

On a hunch, Lee “Googled” the text and instantly found it, plus the source, on a website. Several exact paragraphs in Mick’s text appeared to have been lifted from the site and pasted into his document. Lee saw a source citation at the end of the paragraph, but could not find any quotation marks around the original source material. As a result, it was impossible to see where Mick’s writing ended, and the website text began.

### **What next? Turn & discuss**

1. Should Lee be concerned?
2. If so, why? How concerned?
3. If not, why not?

### **What should Lee do? Discuss & vote**

1. Email the third team member, Sara, to get her opinion
2. Study the UAB Graduate School plagiarism policy\* to make sure that he is correct about his assumption
3. Email Mick, assume he is innocent, educate him about plagiarism, and ask him to repeat the assignment
4. Email Mick, assume he is guilty of copying, and demand that he repeat the assignment, or be reported
5. Email or call the instructor, explain what Mick did, and ask for direction on how to proceed
6. Call the UAB Ethics Hotline at 1-866-362-8476 and file a formal complaint to protect yourself
7. Avoid the real issue, get Sara to help re-write Mick's text to make it an ethical paraphrase or summary
8. Other?

### **Consider each player's interests/values**

What does each member of the situation expect from the other in terms of ethical behavior? List 3 expectations.

1. Lee – lead writer
2. Mick – possible plagiarist
3. Sara – team member
4. The instructor – course leader
5. UAB academic integrity officer – enforcer of policy and standards

### **Additional complexity**

Some research shows that “accidental plagiarism” is a chief concern among faculty regarding graduate student scholarship. How would you proceed differently if this case was less clear-cut? For example, what would you do if Mick's text was not an exact copy, but highly similar, cited in his reference section, but not in the text? Is it possible to accidentally plagiarize?

### **Do You Know what Your School Policy says? \*UAB Graduate School Policy Definition**

“PLAGIARISM: Claiming as your own the ideas, words, data, computer programs, creative composition, artwork, etc., done by someone else. Examples include improper citation of referenced works, use of commercially available scholarly papers, failure to cite sources, and copying others' ideas.”