

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Protecting Academic Integrity

Although there have never been as many alternatives for publishing in the humanities and social sciences as there are today, the pressures to publish have never been more intense. Even though the common refrain “publish or perish” has become almost a cliché, the fact is that one’s success in academia increasingly depends on a stronger publication record than was the case in the not-so-distant past. Whether it be to build a strong CV to get a tenure-track position in the first place, to keep one’s position at the time of renewal, or ultimately to earn tenure, the pressures to publish start early in graduate school and continue to grow in parallel with the stakes involved until one, finally, has the privilege of job security. And with increasing numbers of people looking for academic positions, the competition can be quite intense. Life after tenure also includes its own anxieties regarding the need to publish, as future promotions and merit increases keep the pressure on, albeit at a lower level. For many, there is also the undeniable pride of academic purpose in making the grade by having one’s work pass the peer-review process and, presumably, by adding to the accumulation of knowledge.

Under such circumstances, the temptation to cut corners or, even worse, commit the scholarly equivalent of grand larceny by taking the work and ideas of others and presenting them as one’s own is likely to be difficult for some to resist. It is important to emphasize that not only the direct victims of plagiarism suffer when this happens; the professional integrity of all of us and of journals such as *Latin American Research Review* that publish our work also are undermined. The widely publicized examples of plagiarism, while still relatively few in number, should be of concern to all serious academics. For this reason, it seems only a matter of prudence for any respected academic journal like *LARR* to establish an official policy regarding the handling of allegations of plagiarism to ensure that they are dealt with in an appropriate and fair manner, almost as a kind of insurance policy—just in case such allegations are ever lodged. To be most effective, that policy also needs to be made public.

For this reason, as of August 2008, the *LARR* Editorial Committee has adopted the following plagiarism policy (<http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/LARR/index.asp>):

1. Allegations of plagiarism involving manuscripts submitted to and/or published in *LARR* should be submitted to the editor in chief and must be accompanied by documentation indicating specific examples of the unattributed use of another scholar’s written work, ideas, or arguments.
2. Following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, plagiarism is defined as “the action or practice of taking someone else’s work, idea, etc., and pass-

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ing it off as one's own; literary theft" (http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50180576?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=plagiarism&first=1&max_to_show=10).

3. Upon the receipt of an allegation of plagiarism, the editor in chief will ask for a written response from the author of the manuscript. The editor in chief or designate from the Editorial Committee, along with an independent academic with recognized expertise in the subject area of the disputed submission who shall remain anonymous, will independently evaluate both the allegation and the author's response. If they do not reach an agreement on the merits of the allegation, a second independent academic will be selected after consultation with the *LARR* Editorial Committee.

4. Upon demonstration that the author has submitted another person's work as his or her own, the *LARR* Editorial Committee will determine the appropriate remedial action to be taken. This will include a public statement confirming the nature of the plagiarism that has been substantiated.

When one thinks of plagiarism, the first thing that comes to mind is the deliberate cutting and pasting of material off the Web or otherwise copying word for word the work of others without appropriate attribution. If only things were always so straightforward! In many cases, allegations of plagiarism reflect someone presenting someone else's "ideas" as his or her own. But what are ideas, and how is their intellectual progeny determined? Common practice (not to mention common sense) suggests at least two criteria that should be applied. First, the ideas need to be original in the sense that they are uniquely attributable to a specific author. Second, the structure of the argument needs to parallel that of the original material. The first point is often the most difficult to establish. Most abstract discussions of plagiarism often neglect to note that there is a presumptive bar below which ideas are essentially part of the public domain and do not require that references to them be documented. If the bar is set too low, the danger is that authors would be overwhelmed with the need to provide lengthy bibliographies, thereby increasing the risk that anyone who previously made a similar point and who was not cited could claim to have been plagiarized. This serves to underscore how difficult it can be to resolve actual allegations of plagiarism. Except in the most blatant of cases, the determination of whether plagiarism has been committed is an inexact science at best. For this reason, we have designed a policy that we feel is transparent, balanced, and, most importantly, fair to all concerned. It underscores the *LARR* Editorial Committee's determination to take any allegations of plagiarism seriously, as well as its unequivocal repudiation of this fundamental threat to academic integrity.

Philip Oxhorn
Editor in Chief