

5

HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION OWNERSHIP, COLLABORATION, AND PUBLICATION

Connecting or Separating the Writing of Administrators, Faculty, and Students?

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At regular intervals, scandals involving commencement addresses, speeches, and presentations by college presidents and other administrators are revealed to contain material “lifted” from other sources without attribution. Recently, there were the cases of Scott D. Miller, the president of Wesley College, (<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i41/41a02902.htm>); Walter Wendler, the chancellor of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; and Vaughn Vandegrift, the chancellor of Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville. Academics have little sympathy for administrators who “plagiarize” speeches or presentations, and the latter case aroused not only the ire of faculty at that university but also considerable outrage on the Writing Program Administrators discussion list in July of 2006 (<http://lists.asu.edu/archives/wpa-l.html>). Moreover, for the past few years rhetoric and composition faculty have posted comments about student and administrative “plagiarism” on the WPA-L that reflect a very low tolerance for anything that might be called “plagiarism” when committed by administrators, even though posts to the same list exhibit considerable tolerance for citation mistakes by students. Composition faculty seem to have a higher tolerance for students’ citation mistakes than

for accusations against administrators,¹ probably because they think that deans and presidents and chancellors really should know better and should serve as models for students. However, as this book argues throughout, “plagiarism” is a problematic, catchall term that fails to take into consideration the different practices of research, writing, and attribution in different fields. This is why I have so far put the term in quotation marks; moreover, “plagiarism” is a term that indicates malfeasance, even though it is often used to label cases of mistakes and ignorance. This is not to say that there is no overlap among conceptions of plagiarism, nor is it intended to justify administrators’ unethical appropriation of material written by others; but it is intended to extend the examination of different meanings for the term to the documents produced by administrators.

Based on the interviews described in this chapter, I will argue that administrators—particularly those committed to administration for long parts of their careers—operate in a different discourse community within the university than do students and faculty, and that this community has substantially different conceptions of how its documents are produced and owned. My interviews with administrators about their intellectual property beliefs and practices suggest that administrators, no matter what discipline they come from, operate under different conceptions of intellectual property than they held when they were primarily teachers and researchers in their disciplines, and thus they work with different expectations about the creation and communication of knowledge than faculty in academic fields. However, because working administrators embrace, at least to some extent, the same ideas about intellectual property as do faculty, administrators tend to experience considerable ambivalence about how citation and attribution work and should work in institutional discourse. Moreover, since administrators often work closely with faculty who use a more typically academic set of assumptions, they are liable to

1. See the discussions (indexed under “plagiarism”) on the WPA-L archives at <http://lists.asu.edu/archives/wpa-l.html> to compare the difference.

be accused of plagiarism when they engage in commonplace administrative practices.²

In discussing issues of intellectual property in administrative discourse, it is important to reiterate the difference between plagiarism and copyright violation. Copyright is a *legal* issue, in contrast to the primarily *ethical* issue of plagiarism. Copyright laws ensure that writers and other creators of various kinds of texts (including music, pictures, films, software, etc.) maintain ownership of their work for a limited period of time. Copyright laws give the person or organization that owns the copyright *legal ownership* of the work—including the right to reproduce it, to modify it, and to grant permission for its use or modification by others. Copyright is justified on the grounds that it creates an incentive for writers and artists to produce new material; they can sell their work or the right to reproduce it to others and thus receive compensation for the time and effort they put into creating the text.

Copyright violations may seem similar to plagiarism violations because both involve violations of appropriate attribution and compensation for intellectual work. However, plagiarism is a question of attribution (who claims to have written what), and copyright is a question of who has permission to use what text (or other copyrightable material) for what purposes. Thus, it is possible to plagiarize a piece without violating copyright. For example, even if a person has the writer's permission to pass along a piece of writing as his or her own, this can constitute plagiarism, even though it does not violate copyright. Moreover, a writer can violate copyright, even though leaving the author or artist's name on a piece and acknowledging its source, if the owner of the copyright does not give permission for its use. Since most university intellectual property codes consider communications written by administrators for the institution to belong to the institution, the copyright for institutional documents clearly rests with the institution. The issue of plagiarism,

2. Randall 1999 suggests that the accusation of plagiarism can be a particularly powerful political tool.

however, involves a different conception of ownership, and so it can become a site for conflict between ethical communities, particularly between university administrators and faculty, because faculty members (in spite of the disciplinary differences noted throughout this book) expect that texts be attributed to the person or persons who actually produced them, within each disciplinary community's understanding of those terms.

As the other chapters in this book demonstrate, there are considerable differences among faculty about what intellectual property is, in what cases it can or cannot be owned, and who owns it. For example, Joan Mullin's interviews with visual artists and designers demonstrate the problem of distinguishing between being influenced by and copying visual tropes and describe cases in which copying is accepted practice. A crucial difference between faculty and administrators, however, is that administrators seldom speak to their own intellectual work but instead speak "for the institution," conveying and often taking responsibility for the decisions, practices, and plans shaped by a larger group of administrators (and sometimes faculty and students), even when they may *seem* to be making personal statements or academic arguments. Moreover, administrators often attribute the work of other individuals involved in producing documents only to the position where it will carry the most institutional weight, and thus the designated "author" is not necessarily (and often not usually) the person who actually wrote down the ideas or words in a particular piece of writing.

It is easy for faculty to perceive institutional communications as plagiarism—especially for faculty in the humanities—because they tend to work alone and demand strict documentation of their sources. Brian Martin (1994) and Thomas Mallon (1989) both take this point of view, using "plagiarism" as a pejorative catchall term to describe all cases of appropriation, misattribution, and non-attribution of initial authors. Moreover, many faculty in the humanities tend to mistake much of their own "work for hire" (for university committees or for publishers) as their own intellectual property, even though they do not

hold the copyright to it. Administrators, in contrast, are *expected* to appropriate the ideas of others in order to give more authority to those ideas and the propositions and decisions that result from them. In the production of administrative text (even more than in writing produced in large science laboratories), the designated author, usually the highest administrator involved in a project, both provides the authority for and takes credit for the document—and also assumes the blame, when necessary. Higher administrators seldom write alone: they have speechwriters or other aides who research issues, draft documents, and create presentation materials. This kind of help is seen as a necessary aspect of higher administrative positions, even though the extent to which it is expected and used would be unusual in the research and writing of many faculty members, again, particularly in the humanities.

My interviews with academic administrators suggest that the intellectual property conventions and practices of administrators differ considerably from those they practiced when they were members of the faculty because the “ownership” of administrative ideas and documents tends to be located in the institution or the position, not in the individual. The higher the level of the administrator, the less likely she is to write her own speeches, presentations, and even most publications. Furthermore, strategic silence plays a larger role in administrative discourse than in faculty research and publication. Thus, administrators, who were trained as graduate students and faculty members to publish as widely as possible and to acknowledge sources and collaborators carefully, soon learn the skill of silence and its role in maintaining ownership (in a different sense) of information. The administrators I interviewed were aware of these differences between their own citation practices and those they expected of faculty and students; most of them perceived and sometimes puzzled over the dissonance between their performance as administrators, their practices as faculty, and their expectations for students. Although they acknowledged that they expected to rely on others to write for them, all

the administrators interviewed also expected at the very least to review and, if necessary, revise documents that go out under their names, and most of them expressed regret that they could not do all of “their writing” for themselves. The idea embedded in faculty values and practices, that the individual author or principal investigator owns the text, never seems to be quite eradicated, even after years in administration. Having come from the faculty and learned as graduate students the expectations for documentation and attribution in their fields, most of the administrators I interviewed still expected to be held responsible for their own writing, even though the demands of administration did not allow them to produce it all themselves. Clearly, academic administrators work in an intellectual space in which property values are only sometimes the same as those that dominate the work of the faculty, and it is seldom a particularly comfortable space for those whose careers started in the faculty. Hence, their ambivalence about their practices.

METHODOLOGY

Over a period of a year and a half, I interviewed twelve administrators from eight different American universities, all with undergraduate populations of over 10,000 students. The participants included department heads, deans and associate deans, and university provosts and associate provosts. Many of them had held more than one administrative position, at the same or different universities. Because I guaranteed participants as complete anonymity as possible, my discussion of their practices, their experiences, and their understanding of them is limited by my not being able to clearly describe individuals as administrators at particular ranks, at particular universities, and coming from particular disciplines. Revealing that information would make it too easy for readers to figure out who I interviewed, and thus would jeopardize that anonymity. However, the promise of anonymity encouraged what I perceived to be considerable candor among the participants, and all the participants remarked that they enjoyed the opportunity to actively think about how

intellectual property issues are related to administrative writing. I promised to provide copies of this chapter to all the participants, although I did not promise them the opportunity to revise my notes or contest my conclusions.

I started the project by interviewing people I had met or heard of, and then I asked them to refer me to other administrators to interview. I conducted the interviews both face to face and on the phone. Three invited administrators did not respond to my email inquiries. Copies of the e-mailed invitation with an explanation of the project and the list of questions participants answered are printed in the appendix to this chapter. My project plan and documents were approved by the Purdue Institutional Review Board.

My questions are based on the questions used in the other studies reported in this book, but after the first two interviews (with an associate dean and a department chair), in which the focus on teaching and research were leading the participants to discuss the intellectual property issues of the disciplines from which they came rather than issues in their work as administrators, I adapted the questions to address more directly their thinking about the relationships among ideas about *administrative writing* in the university to ideas about intellectual property prevalent among faculty. The emphasis of our discussions varied from administrator to administrator, depending on their degree of interest in particular questions. I took detailed handwritten notes on the participants' responses, which were later transcribed into an electronic version for easier analysis.

The study also includes consideration of posts to the WPA-L concerning administrative plagiarism and two examples from my personal experience. The public and archived discussions on the WPA list over the time of the study repeatedly raised issues and passed judgments on many of the claims and concepts raised here, so I have used it as a source of general information about how rhetoric and composition faculty view intellectual property. The Statement on Plagiarism by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (<http://www.wpacouncil.org/>

positions/plagiarism.html) has served as my source for best practices for understanding and dealing with plagiarism in the classroom, although that issue is not central to this particular study.

CONCEPTS OF COLLABORATION

Administrators follow a process that I call “teamwork,” in which different people do jobs that draw on specific expertise, (Bergmann 2000), and they consider collaboration to be what Ede and Lunsford (1990) defined as “hierarchical collaboration” rather than the “dialogical collaboration” often preferred by composition faculty. I am retaining the simple term “collaboration” in this chapter because it is a term the people I interviewed used to describe their working relationships, most of which they considered highly collaborative. Although they expressed considerable awareness of power differences in these collaborations, they described ways these interchanges are not completely top-down or directive, and they agreed that collaboration provides necessary information, without which good decisions cannot be made or workable policies enacted. The work of committees and task forces is important to administrators as a means of learning from faculty, university staff, and students about, for example, the potential impacts and side effects of a decision. While it is tempting to conceive of these administrators’ sense of collaboration as a self-serving means of hiding and maintaining their authoritative role in the university hierarchy—or as evidence of their failure to comprehend it—almost every administrator I interviewed observed that the connected issues of hierarchy, collaboration, and attribution are not straightforward processes but are complicated and ambiguous aspects of administrative decision making.

These administrators acknowledged that expectations about writing and citation practices that are typical for administrators differ from those under which faculty and students usually work, particularly the questions of who writes what for whom and who takes credit for a particular document. Administrators described becoming aware of these new expectations as they learned

administrative practices and expectations; this learning is part of the mentoring of new administrators, an important duty of associate deans and their administrative assistants. However, the administrators I interviewed expressed considerable uncertainty about the implications of the way discourse functioned in their roles. They all thought seriously about, as one participant put it, “sharing credit, sharing responsibility, and sharing blame,” particularly in regards to decisions about when giving collaborators credit may or not be in the best interest of members of a committee responsible for making a difficult decision or for the actual writer of a document. Most of the administrators mentioned the need to shield lower-level collaborators from blame or retribution. At the level of dean and above, university lawyers also shaped the final decisions about many collaborative projects, adding yet another layer of authorship or authority to the process of writing. A humorous but no less cogent example of how this practice can work was described by Ed White on the WPA List (reprinted here with his permission):

From: Writing Program Administration on behalf of Edward White

Sent: Mon 5/1/2006 2:17 PM To: WPA-L@asu.edu

Subject: Re: Revision as Best Teaching Practice

. . . Your post reminded me of my own reverse revision experience when I was working as an administrator in the Chancellor’s Office of the Cal State system. Occasionally, the chancellor would ask me (as the only professional writer around) to produce a memo for him, as, for instance, a welcome note to incoming first-year students. I’d produce a draft for him, which he would send to the attorneys for review. The attorneys would change my active verbs to passives, concrete language to abstract, and so on. So I’d revise, sometimes several times, until the writing was sufficiently bad for the Chancellor to send it out. Whenever I hear someone talk about the writing process, I smile, thinking about that process for worsening writing for a particular bureaucratic purpose.—Ed White

This writing process is very different from what is normal in the teaching and research processes of academic scholarship.

For faculty and students engaged in research, intellectual property is a matter of reporting work done, research completed, discoveries made, theories considered, and further projects that arise from previous research. Their writing describes and perhaps theorizes the work they have done, for which credit must be fairly given to previous studies and to the current researchers collaborating on a project; a particular study is added to a body of knowledge, which will in turn be used and acknowledged by the future researchers who will use it to pursue further research. This chain of professional acknowledgment provides a crucial “research trail” for future researchers to follow—or reject. Plagiarism, as faculty commonly think of it, is a failure (intended or inadvertent) to ascribe credit (as is appropriate in a particular discipline). For administrators, however, once work becomes part of a body of institutional or managerial knowledge, most of its creators are anonymous, and often the initiating administrator’s name, too, will eventually fade from such documents. This gives rise to questions about who “owns” a strategic plan or a policy statement and when that ownership begins and ends.

ADMINISTRATIVE WRITING AS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

My study suggests that because of the very significant differences between the writing of faculty and students and the writing of administrators, administrative writing may not count as intellectual property at all; if anything, the “property” seems communal (within universities and across the field of higher education administration). This is not, in my opinion, the shameful tradition of appropriation suggested by Martin (1994) and Mallon (1989) but is part of the normal process of making and instituting policies within university administrations, as described by Robert Birnbaum (1988) in *How Colleges Work*. Moreover, the very concept of intellectual property applies only tangentially to administrative discourse, if at all, both because this writing consists primarily of work for hire, and also, I would suggest, because it is more closely connected to actions taken than

to real property (land) held—the conventional source of the concept of intellectual property (Delong 2002). Administrators describe working with initiatives more than ideas, initiatives that often start with a perceived institutional problem. The research done by and made available to administrators involves investigating action and applications, as well as proposing and defending changes. Much of the research consists of looking at what their university and its peer institutions are doing (notice my focus on action rather than library or experimental research), and somebody whose time is less expensive than a dean's or provost's usually manages a research project. Administrators generally apply research rather than pursue it; they use it to solve immediate problems or to create initiatives similar to ones that peer institutions have considered or implemented. Their audience (often other administrators) tends to be less interested in how the research trail is documented than in deciding what actions can or should be taken and how results can be measured. This is, as many administrators admit privately, “not what we learned in graduate school.” It is work of a different kind and purpose than the research most common to faculty and students, and it seldom receives the full documentation that faculty research demands.

Moreover, much administrative discourse is deliberative and epideictic; it is used for setting policy, imagining a future, and celebrating achievements. Administrators' concept of “deliberative discourse” often includes a focus on confidentiality (the element of silence will be discussed later). Faculty, staff, and student input may be solicited for advice, and decisions may be communicated back to them, but only seldom do these background discussions have a direct role in the deliberations that result in decisions or a clear voice in the documents that relay them. For example, deans may take into account the evaluations of the faculty and the report of a search committee about a prospective department chair, but usually the decision belongs to the dean. Written reports and evaluations come to the decision-maker, who usually produces (or signs) a neutral report about

even the most controversial decision. All of the administrators I interviewed mentioned these “decision-reporting” memos, letters, and e-mails as part of the writing they were responsible for. While there might have been considerable collaborative and contentious discussion surrounding the decision making, the decision is communicated in a deadpan announcement. For example, most faculty have received memos that say something like the following: “X has requested to resign from this administrative position in order to return to research, and everyone in the College wants to congratulate him/her for his/her lasting achievements while holding this position.” Of course, no one believes this account of the decision-making process, but it may take some time for the actual reasons behind the decision to become (unofficially) public, and only seldom do they become the subject of serious or effective re-deliberation after they are announced.

When administrators are raising money, stating policy, and celebrating achievements, much of their discourse is epideictic—highly formal and formulaic announcements, expressions of gratitude, and congratulations. Administrators often are asked to make remarks at a large number of functions, such as ground breaking for new buildings, announcing and presenting honors and awards, publicly thanking donors for gifts, speaking at graduation exercises, and welcoming participants to conferences. Only occasionally do such remarks enter any new or unexpected territory, and when they do, they are open to criticism because they may violate the expectation of these audiences. Such occasions demand ceremony and conventional sentiments, not originality, and so administrators (and at the higher levels of administration their speech writers) adapt standard remarks to specific situations—remarks that the speakers may not have written for themselves and which their writers may or may not have written for their own uses. For example, the president of a university I once worked in presided at a celebration of the opening of a second-floor women’s restroom in an engineering building. Should anyone have expected that

his remarks would be new or original? They were intended to underscore the school's determination to attract more female students and faculty to science and engineering—a good intention, but one that does not signify much original thought these days. This occasion could have been celebrated by humorous remarks (as it was in private by those who attended), but such an approach in public by an administrator would have diminished the intended—and actual—significance of the event. What I am suggesting here is that, given that administrators tend to use and reuse speeches, PowerPoints, and other documents produced for them, it may be easy for administrators to cross the line that leads them to purvey *unauthorized* discourse as their own. “Authorized” and “unauthorized” reuse of discourse can become slippery concepts in situations where highly conventional discourse is expected and rewarded, and where authorship and authority can play substantially different roles than they do in academic writing by students and faculty.

OWNERSHIP AND ATTRIBUTION

For administrators, ownership of most ideas is located in the institution, not in the individual researcher or research group. The administrators I interviewed distinguished clearly between their “own work” as scholars and researchers and the institutional communications they sent out as administrators. For many, the concept of owning intellectual property depended on where it was published. Their “own work” was primarily published in peer-reviewed professional journals, often in their original discipline, under their own names; their most important work as administrators might be disseminated through memos, letters, or reports, which may or may not be widely distributed, and which may or may not bear their names if and when they reach public distribution. However, the distinction between academic discourse and administrative communication can be ambiguous. For example, when an administrator describes and theorizes policies and decisions in meetings with other administrators, at administrators' conferences, and in printed publications, at

what point do those ideas become the administrator/author's "own," and thus comparable to the theorizing of academic scholars and researchers?

Most of the administrators I interviewed were aware of the extent to which they appropriate the ideas and language of others. They described letting other people's work go out under their own names in at least two kinds of situations: to enhance the value of the document and to protect their subordinates.

First, administrators take credit for documents they have not written themselves when they think that the documents would receive more attention or credibility (I would call this "authority") going out under the highest-ranking name. For example, a provost described producing multi-institutional grants, for which the provosts at various participating universities were—and were expected to be—the principal investigators, and thus the persons in whose names proposals would be made and reports given, no matter who actually wrote these materials. At least two provosts noted that it was important to be involved in the grant-planning process sufficiently to understand the ideas in a proposal well enough to defend them, but this involvement is balanced with the other demands on their time. They considered their involvement to be necessary, even if they did not write the documents themselves, for both ethical and practical reasons. Most of the administrators I interviewed said that they acknowledged sources "whenever possible," but that solution leaves the decision to the administrator and his or her interpretation of the often unwritten expectations for institutional (as compared to academic) research.

In response to my direct query, one that I have been making for some time in various other venues, higher administrators agreed that having other people write—or at least draft—for them became necessary at the rank of dean and above, and sometimes earlier. Several administrators at all ranks said that as often as they "could" (another problematic and potentially ambiguous decision), they acknowledged the contributors to their institutional documents in public oral or written acknowledgments

of thanks or in private expressions of gratitude to the people composing for them. However, clearly the administrators are in charge of deciding when and how to acknowledge those who have provided information and written documents for them (limited sometimes by precedents and conventions at their particular institution). Many of the administrators I interviewed (particularly those who came from English departments) said they tried to accommodate the conventions of their administrative position with their own preference for more typical scholarly attribution practices; however, they too were aware of a different set of expectations for administrative documents, even if they were not particularly comfortable with them.

Administrators drawn from English departments tended to be more possessive about writing that went out under their names than administrators from departments in which hierarchical collaboration is more common, and they worried more about when and how to acknowledge staff members and colleagues who write for them. This deeper attachment to “authorship” may stem from differences among disciplines noted elsewhere in this book, for publications authored by multiple researchers and writers are more common in the sciences and social sciences than in the humanities. Moreover, most of the administrators or former administrators that I interviewed who had come from English departments talked about remaining in or returning to their academic discipline. This sense of being temporary administrators may have inclined them to reflect more on the disparity between academic discourse and administrative communication or to maintain a greater commitment to the discourse practices of faculty. Several administrators drawn from English departments described not only reviewing documents produced for them but also recasting them to reflect their own voice; some described openly introducing documents as being produced not by themselves but by a committee. All of them admitted some uneasiness about the looseness of the concept of “authorship” in administrative discourse practices. However, although administrators coming from every discipline I interviewed

reported that they at least skimmed documents that went out under their names, none above the rank of department chair claimed to do all their own writing as administrators.

All the administrators I interviewed were also aware of the large quantities of “boilerplate” signed and used by the person currently holding a rank, and passed down from person to person filling that position. Examples include general statements about a program or department on Web sites and in catalogs, memos that go out to faculty annually to remind them of various standing policies, letters of acceptance and rejection for various proposals and requests, and material produced by public relations and promotional staffs. When new administrators change these documents, they become not “their own,” but the newest version of boilerplate. Boilerplate was considered available for general use, particularly in repetitive and/or low-stakes situations. For example, a statement defining policies for long-distance phone calls by faculty and staff does not need to be rewritten whenever the person in the administrative position changes, unless there is a change in policy or emphasis. Although this is an instance of a document distributed in the name of the highest current administrator in charge of the policy, it clearly seems to be the property of the department, division, or institution, not of the individual holding that position. The case of administrators’ greetings on Web pages and similar documents is more ambiguous: readers generally expect them to reflect the views of the individual administrator and to be expressed in his or her own words. However, these documents are generally very formulaic, intended to indicate directions not raise controversies. Thus, they may be perceived as boilerplate by administrators but understood as direct, personal messages by the public who reads them. I would suggest that some of the highly publicized instances of administrative “plagiarism,” such as the cases mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and the case of the plagiarized statement on plagiarism (Mallon 1989, 100), result from writers at one institution adopting the boilerplate of another institution as if it were its own boilerplate.

Because administrators work in an environment in which boilerplate is common and in which the message (and perhaps the messenger) is more important than who has actually done the writing, it may become too easy to conflate institutional discourse with individual intellectual property or the institutional discourse of one university with that of another, thereby crossing an important ethical line.

Moreover, although many administrators come from the faculty, many of their assistants, aides, and secretaries do not, and they may not be particularly knowledgeable about or committed to the standards of “academic honesty” that apply to faculty and students. For example (this was not part of the interviewing process), at a meeting in the fall of 2006, I complimented a non-faculty administrator on a piece she had recently contributed to the town newspaper—published under her name with her picture. She showed no hesitation in telling me that she had not written it and had no idea what it said. It seemed to her a mark of prestige that she had people writing high-quality publications for her. Administrators who come out of the faculty tend to worry about who owns—and takes credit for—this kind of publication. But apparently other administrators in pivotal positions in the university may not know that what they consider to be purely institutional communications may be seen by others in the university and by members of the public as intellectual property that belongs to (and should have been produced by) the specific individual in whose name it is disseminated.

The second kind of situation in which administrators designedly take credit for documents they have not written occurs when they believe that using their own names could protect or help its actual writers. Several administrators talked about the need to protect faculty and staff from retribution, particularly when decisions could have a negative impact on some people or programs in the university. When sharing credit could result in sharing blame, the administrators I interviewed said that they were particularly careful about attribution, weighing the impact of attributing a recommendation or decision to a committee or to themselves, not only

in terms of power, but also in terms of protection. Again, there is a hierarchical and paternalistic aspect to this kind of protecting, in which decisions rest primarily in the hands of the administrator, and in which the producers of the communication need to rely on the administrator's goodwill and accurate perceptions of the situation. Because everyone I interviewed called attention to this kind of decision making, it seems as though making good decisions about the effects of attribution is considered as at least as important an element of the professional ethics of university administration as the accuracy of attribution.

One quite unexpected turn in an interview suggested that if an administrator changes the conventional practices of attribution in a particular office, he or she may be seen as criticizing the quality of the work that has traditionally fallen to a subordinate. In this case, a dean described a secretary's reaction to his trying to take over writing a part of a college e-newsletter (the "note from the dean"). The staff member responsible for producing this piece for previous deans took this dean's attempt to write his note for himself as an accusation that her work was unacceptable and as an indication that the dean was dissatisfied with its quality, not as an instance of the dean's preferring to author his own messages to his faculty. She was proud of her work writing for the dean, which may have been one of the more responsible and interesting of her duties. In bureaucracies, there is an inertia that resists changes in duties that are seen to hold prestige and power, duties that may also confer power to the person writing for an administrator's byline. For example, everyone at my university (and I would expect most universities) wants the chance to talk to the president's main speechwriter, in the hope of getting projects and programs mentioned in her presentations. My point here is that the institutional work for which an administrator may take credit involves a range of human interactions and feelings, and for staffwriters, who writes what for whom can be more important than accurate attribution—pretty much the opposite of how most faculty consider their own and their students' writing.

The discrepancy between attribution practices of administrators and faculty, then, may come not from a “lack of ethics” on the part of administrators but from the fact that as administrators they are operating in different professional communities than faculty and students. In the implications section below, I discuss the work of ethicist Michael Davis (1991), who argues that professionals in different discourse communities operate in different ethical (although not necessarily different moral) communities. Faculty and students operate under different assumptions about the ownership of intellectual property than administrators do. But because these professional communities continually overlap in an academic institution, there is potential for faculty to disapprove of the discourse practices of administrators and for administrations to be ambivalent or defensive about how they produce and use documents. This anticipated disapproval may, in turn, contribute to the ethic of silence discussed below.

SILENCE AND CONFIDENTIALITY

From my very first interview with an administrator, the one that provoked my interest in investigating the ownership of ideas in university administration, it was clear that issues of confidentiality and silence are as crucial to administrators’ conceptions of the ownership of knowledge and information as issues of dissemination, and much more important than clear attribution. This was no surprise to me, having served in administrative positions myself, but this point was raised by almost every administrator I interviewed. Typically, administrators who came from the faculty were more uncomfortable with this silence than those who did not, but all saw it as an essential part of their jobs.

The associate dean in my first interview said that the really important intellectual property in her position was knowing how to make things happen, and that meant knowing what needed to be kept confidential as well as what could and needed to be revealed—not just in print or publication, but in person-to-person discourse. A large part of her work consisted not

only of putting decisions and actions into appropriate written form, but also of dispensing additional institutional knowledge to people in new positions, that is, in selectively communicating what was not written. Part of this knowledge is procedural, communicating established practices and insight into how things are actually done. For example, that associate dean described how she taught new faculty committee chairs and department heads to make themselves heard by the administrators to whom they are responsible and to whom they should go for what. As an associate dean, a significant part of her work was guiding faculty through the unwritten processes of functioning in their non-academic roles and in their interactions with other administrators. These processes may not be written down or widely known, although they are not strictly confidential.

An equally important aspect of administrative silence is maintaining the confidentiality of documents such as exit interviews and evaluations, which are full of unacknowledged information, such as the real reasons for resignations and promotions. Earlier I mentioned the deadpan and generic memos and letters used to distribute such information to the widest audience. Eventually, as we all know, most of this information leaks out if it is important to the faculty; no institution can maintain complete confidentiality forever. However, adherence to this ethic of confidentiality does give participants some privacy in what can be tense negotiations—for better or worse. However, this confidentiality, like decisions about attribution and protection, relies on the authority and discretion of administrators involved. Most of the administrators I subsequently interviewed also expressed the need for confidentiality and for understanding the importance of knowing what could not be openly communicated. This valuation of silence offers a sharp contrast to faculty perceptions of intellectual property as consisting of revealed information and arguments, reports of investigation, sites, populations, or designs. While administrators often hold onto information to keep institutional knowledge “their own,” faculty tend to actively seek that institutional knowledge and

pass around what they know of it; this might be called “gossip,” but in my opinion, that is too trivializing a term. It might better be called “lore.”

HOW ADMINISTRATORS PERCEIVE ATTRIBUTION, PLAGIARISM, AND COLLABORATION BY STUDENTS

Even though all the administrators I interviewed recognized the ambiguity of their own attribution practices in institutional writing, they expected students to learn and follow the conventional academic rules of attribution, and even more important, to learn what needs to be cited. Moreover, administrators did not think that for students those rules and conventions are particularly ambiguous. Only those administrators drawn from English departments (and only a few of them) thought that conventions about what needs to be cited vary from discipline to discipline. That is, the idea behind this book—the concept that intellectual property might vary from discipline to discipline—was not common to the administrators I interviewed, except for the very few who knew of the Council of Writing Programs’ statement on plagiarism. The people I interviewed did, however, tend to find the concept plausible and interesting. Although all administrators could see the difference between “cheating” and “insufficient knowledge” that Rebecca Moore Howard outlined in 2001, when I raised the possibility of thinking about plagiarism in this way, most of the administrators above the level of department chair focused on the difficulty of making decisions fairly and consistently when cases were brought to them. Because many of the more obvious cases of plagiarism are resolved in the classroom or at the level of the department chair, the cases that are brought to a higher administrator are often contested, and sticking with the written rules for “academic integrity” may have seemed clearer and fairer than distinguishing between students who did not know or understand the rules and those who were consciously trying to get away with violating them.

Every administrator above the rank of department chair mentioned how little students seemed to understand using

sources appropriately, not only the rules for citation, but also and, more importantly, understanding the reasoning behind their institutions' statements on academic integrity. Although many noted that they did not personally follow these academic rules in their administrative work, they believed it crucial for students to know and use academic conventions for attribution and citation correctly and consistently. The further the administrators were from actually teaching, the less they acknowledged how much teaching it takes to make those conventions seem sensible and comprehensible—particularly to students writing in a discipline they have no intention of entering.

Most of the administrators I interviewed considered students to be individual agents responsible for their own learning and behavior, not collaborators in a learning or work environment. Like many faculty members, they considered the “real work” of students to be individual rather than collaborative (See Mullin and Haviland 1999). Most said that when they had been faculty members, they seldom assigned collaborative work to their students (particularly to undergraduates), and they were suspicious of its efficacy. Their underlying beliefs were that all students should learn all aspects of a field and that collaboration discouraged students from learning new skills. Although they did not actively discourage collaborative learning projects set up by the faculty, neither did they particularly encourage them at the undergraduate level, even though they themselves worked in what they considered to be a highly collaborative environment. Again, this may be the “faculty” ethic at play here, as compared to the ethic of an administrative working community.

Almost all the administrators I interviewed saw the gap between their own practices and their expectations for students, but most of them emphasized the difference between student, faculty, and administrative work. All were aware not only of the academic hierarchy, with administrators at the top and students at the bottom, but also of the complicated relationships of higher administrators with professional and clerical staff. One of them made fun of the academic hierarchy,

and two others described attempts to bring students closer to the places where decisions were made. None of them, however, questioned the idea that students learning the conventions of the academy—and particularly its conventions for using research and disseminating knowledge—was an important aspect of the education of undergraduates (and graduate students, for that matter), even though academic conventions might differ across the university and even though some were irrelevant to administrators' own practices.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

A definition of professional ethics given by Michael Davis (1991) more than fifteen years ago helps me to explain why ideas of intellectual property can differ so greatly from place to place (and rank to rank) in the same institution. A philosopher specializing in professional ethics, Davis considers ethics to be socially constructed—a matter of group consensus: “Ethics consists of those standards of conduct that, all things considered, every member of a particular group wants every other member to follow even if their following them would mean he has to follow them” [italics by Davis] (1991, 25). According to this definition, it would seem that faculty follow the ethical practices of source use defined by the catchall term “plagiarism.” However, as I said at the beginning of this study, the term “plagiarism” is dangerously misleading because as it is used in different disciplines and domains, it includes many different kinds of attribution practices about which there may be considerable disagreement (Howard 2001, Haviland and Mullin 1999, and, more recently, Valentine 2006). This study suggests that administrators work in a discourse community whose practices are even more different than the differences among fields and disciplines.

Administrative work is highly collaborative, and administrators' conception of the ownership of knowledge (when they are working as administrators) tends to be much looser than their ideas and expectations about student and faculty work. In administration, there is a (sometimes shifting) hierarchy of who

writes for and reports to whom, and administrators are expected to put their names to documents they have not written. In Martin's terms (1994), in current bureaucratic practice, "plagiarism" (using the generic term in its widest sense) is allowed and even encouraged when the "plagiarist" is of higher rank than the writer. However, it is not tolerated when the participants are at the same level and therefore in competition with each other, as in the case of faculty research and student papers. This assertion once again illustrates the problem of using "plagiarism" as a generic term (as well as ignoring the elaborate hierarchies of attribution common in technological and scientific fields). Deans certainly compete with other deans, but they often share boilerplates. The people who write for them may be faculty or lower-level administrators competing for their places, but some of these writers are also administrative assistants or professional staff, who compete with others in their own career lines.

Because teaching, research, and administrative communities overlap within the university, and because most administrators come from and may expect to return to the faculty, many administrators (particularly at the level of department chair) are not comfortable with the different discourse practices in which they may participate as administrators. They tend to judge these practices against what they think of as "standard academic practice," that is, against the attribution practices of faculty and student academic work that are common in the fields of study from which they come. I would expect administrators to suspect, often correctly, that neither the faculty nor the general public may see or understand the different discourse conventions under which administrators work and thus the different expectations for attribution between the academic and administrative functions of the university. If ethics are a matter of community practice rather than a single moral mandate, as Michael Davis argues, there is considerable ground for mistakes as well as malfeasance in applying the appropriate convention to a particular discourse situation in the university. Administrators may have expressed discomfort with how they

attribute authorship because they measure their involvement in the production of institutional documents against the practices of research and attribution they learned in graduate school, which at best taught them more about the rules of academic discourse in a particular field of study than about the practices of administrative discourse. And given the ferocity of denunciation that can occur when administrators are accused of plagiarism, they are well advised to feel worried and ambivalent about these practices.

Because neither their faculty colleagues nor the general public may see that the discourse communities and conventions in which administrators work are different from those of faculty and students, administrators are liable to be judged according to the standards of faculty conceptions of intellectual property. Those judgments can be unexpected, harsh, and damaging—and are often motivated by political clashes. As Randall (1999) suggests, the accusation of plagiarism is a particularly powerful weapon when the accuser uses it to exert power over the accused. The accusation of plagiarism, which cuts to the heart of the faculty ethic of academic and intellectual honesty, is taken seriously because of the unexamined assumption that knowledge, particularly textual knowledge, can be owned, and that it is owned in the same way in different professional settings. This assumption is dangerous, in my opinion, because it can be used to destroy reputations and careers and because it keeps us from recognizing the times when administrators actually do step over the boundaries of appropriate use of institutional documents. This chapter, and indeed this entire book, argues that we must complicate the concept of plagiarism and proposes that values about the ownership of intellectual property are not timeless and universal but are centered in the practices of particular groups—even within the same university.

APPENDIX

E-mail Request for Participants

I know you are very busy, but I am asking for about half an hour to interview you about intellectual property issues from an administrator's point of view. This investigation is part of a larger project undertaken by writing faculty from seven universities across the United States, who are working on questions of ownership and attribution raised by the Intellectual Property Caucus of the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

The idea behind this project is our observation that different disciplines hold somewhat different understandings of ownership, fair use, and appropriate attribution of intellectual property, and that therefore students may have trouble transferring what they learn about these issues from English composition courses to courses in other disciplines and eventually to their careers. My piece of this investigation involves examining how academic administrators view ownership of the documents they produce or that are produced for them. My purpose is to identify the common understanding of intellectual property in administrative discourse.

The interview questions (which you are welcome to see in advance) are based on a general list of questions devised by the Intellectual Property Caucus, although because of the exploratory nature of this project, I may invite particular individuals to answer some questions in more detail than others and to digress in ways that uncover disciplinary thinking.

I will not be asking questions about the content of specific documents, decisions, or negotiations. The questions are generic questions about the kinds of documents produced, who actually writes them, who signs them or takes responsibility for them, and to whom the information in them belongs. I will make no attempt to gather any information that is confidential.

The interviews will last about 30 minutes each. I will take notes and audiotape the interviews. (Phone interviews will not be audiotaped.) I will be interviewing some 10–20 administrators or former administrators from various disciplines at Purdue and at other universities. I have obtained approval from the Purdue IRB for this research project.

I am willing to conduct the interview at your convenience during the next two months. I have no compensation to offer, but most of the people I've interviewed so far have found the discussion interesting, and I'll be glad to share the results with you when the project is completed.

Please reply if you would be willing to help me with this, and I'll try to arrange a time that works for you.

Thank you,

Linda S. Bergmann

Associate Professor of English

Director, Purdue Writing Lab