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# Why Should I Cite Them? Student Writers in the Academy

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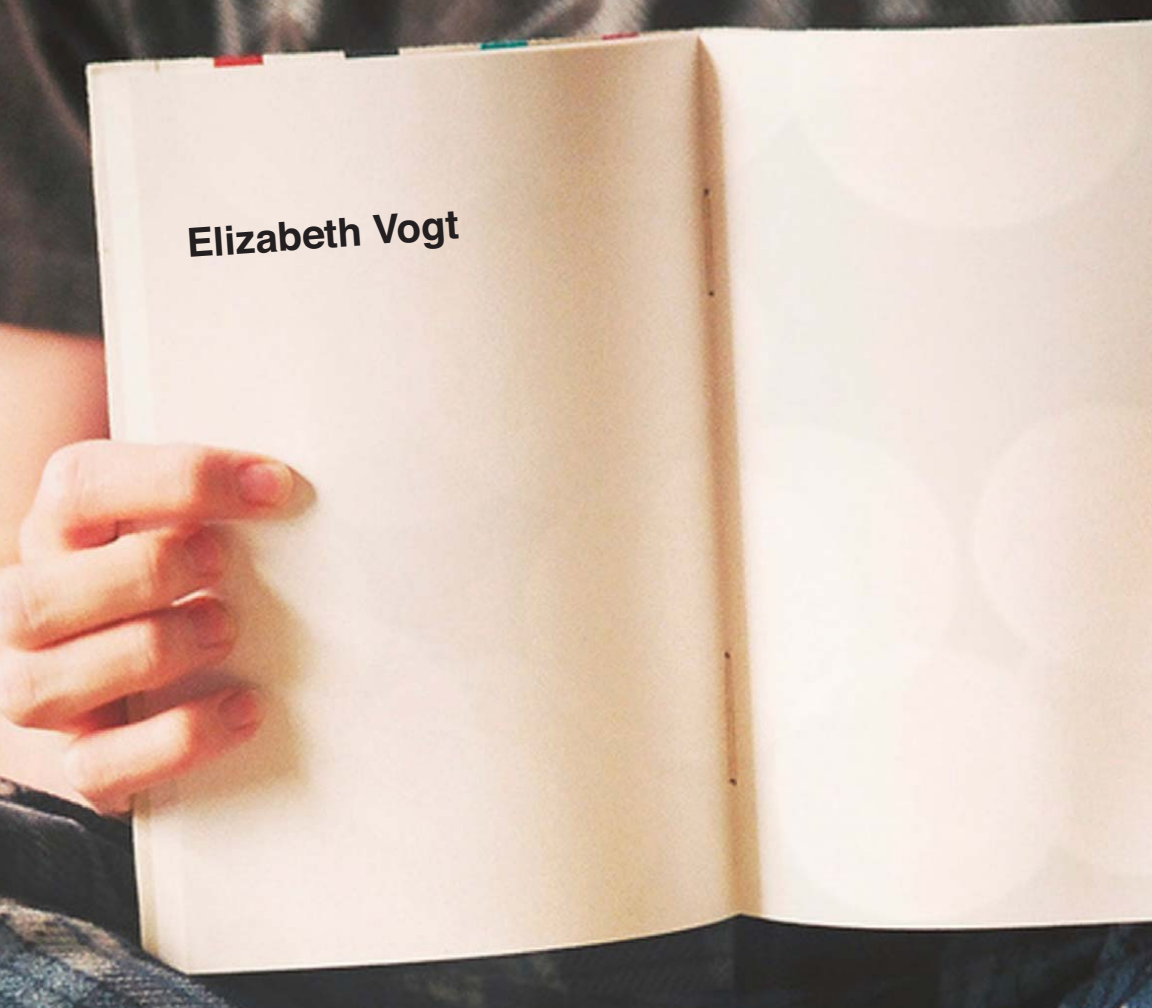
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# **“Why Should I Cite Them?”**

## **Student Writers in the Academy**



Plagiarism is not a crime that can be committed by students alone. After reading TyAnna Herrington's *Intellectual Property on Campus: Students' Rights and Responsibilities* and Amy Robillard's "Young Scholars Affecting Composition: A Challenge to Disciplinary Citation Practices," I have come to realize that students are vulnerable to misuse or even theft of their intellectual property when they create work in an academic setting. Due to the simple fact that they are students producing work for academic purposes, they are in danger of being taken advantage of by the "all-powerful" academic institution as well as the professors for whom they are producing work.

I will begin with the issue that troubles me the most: students' not being properly cited for their work or not having their work attributed to them. As a student who produces at least two major works of writing per week, I often wonder where my writing will go after I submit it. A professor could block my name out and pass my paper around his next class as an example. Or a professor might surreptitiously use an idea I presented as his or her own in his or her scholarly writing. Although Syracuse University does have its own Human Research Protection Program in conjunction with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), that does not ensure a student's work cannot be misappropriated.

It is difficult for the student—and even the university—to discover this injustice if they are not actively looking for it. Robillard eloquently addresses the need to recognize students as authors in the academy. In her essay, she writes how an editor of *Young Scholars in Writing* believes that student writing should be read "as scholarship that contributes to the 'on-going' formation of this disciplinary community" (257). With this idea in mind, Robillard points out that student writing is seen as a "contribution to the work of composition" rather than as a pedagogical effort

(257). This shift in thinking of student writers as authors raises important questions of who claims authorship in academia. If a student submits his or her work to a journal such as *Young Scholars*, will it be read as a contribution to scholarship? That's the aim of the journal. If my work were ever to be published, I would consider myself an author because work produced by me had gotten into print whether or not I had contributed to scholarship.

Too often, however, students are not given such power. In *Intellectual Property on Campus: Students' Rights and Responsibilities*, Herrington describes the powerlessness students sometimes feel. In discussing students' intellectual property rights, Herrington asserts that "students, as creators, can hold a weak position against instructors or institutions who might use their work without permission or make claims against the work they create within their scholarly institutions" (17). This relates back to my own fear of my professors' blacking out my name on one of my essays and distributing it to their students. While Herrington does believe that students should be seen as "creators" rather than "contributors," she also realizes that they are incredibly vulnerable to an entity more powerful than they are, and that a figurehead such as a professor can take advantage of their work. Moreover, the fact that students produce work in an academic setting makes it difficult to discern whether or not they can claim true ownership of their creative work.

While I do understand the complicated nature of the matter, I do not feel that just because work might have been produced for a class assignment or other academic endeavor, I do not have the right to claim ownership of it. As Herrington declares, "under U.S. law, authorship gives students rights to control their work, notwithstanding that it is created within an educational context" (17). This should be enough reason

for students to have full authority over the use of their work, right? Wrong. Considering the fact that the student is still working within an academic institution, “determining student rights to creative products can be complex and cannot be decided without an understanding of the context in which they create work” (Herrington 17). If, for example, a student is working on a research project for his or her university and writes an essay about it, the university has the right to take ownership of the student’s work. While this notion is not included in the student Academic Integrity Policy, it is perfectly clear in Syracuse’s Faculty Manual discussing intellectual property with ties to the university. According to Section 3.07 of the manual, when research or creation of intellectual property by faculty “have been supported by the University and have resulted in the creation of properties that have economic interest and value, Syracuse University shall have title to, or have a fair and equitable income interest proportional to the University’s investment in, those properties.” If a claim such as this applies to faculty, who are presumed to have a decent amount of power over their work, could not this clause possibly pose a danger to students who have even less power over their work than faculty? One would hope, however, that the university would maintain a sense of integrity and at least credit that student as the author of the essay and curator of the research.

What is even more distressing is that the student’s professor could take an essay written by a student and use a portion of it or all of it in his or her own scholarly work without properly attributing authorship to the student. As previously mentioned, despite

the protections presented by the IRB and the university, the student may never know of the professor’s exploitation. What is even more frightening is the fact that the professor’s wrongdoing may never even be exposed if he or she is covert enough to hide it, which even further permeates the student’s authority over something that is essentially his or her own property. While this behavior is highly unethical, the belief that students do not have full ownership of their work, if it was created for academic purposes, almost sets students up to be taken advantage of. Robillard accurately claims that “when [scholars] cite one another but leave students

**“I would like to think that my writing will not be considered something that can be used without permission, or at least full attribution, just because I am a student.”**

nameless or pseudonymous, [they] perpetuate an author/student binary” (257). As long as scholars continue to improperly cite student work they use, how will students ever be recognized as true authors? I

would like to think that my writing will not be considered something that can be used without permission, or at least full attribution, just because I am a student.

To make matters worse, it seems as if there has been a recent shift in the way scholars view student writing. According to Robillard, this shift disregards “composition scholars’ earlier suggestions that...[scholars] read the work of beginning writers as [they] might read any other authors’ texts,” for now they are read as “the ‘emerging’ or ‘failed’ work of outsiders”(257). Clearly if scholars feel student work is just “emerging” or even “failed” work, it is perceived as writing that is simply not on par with scholarly work. As a student writer, I am incredibly offended by this. To be considered an “outsider” is bad enough, but “failed” writing? Now that is something by which I am outraged. Yes, it is true that I



am a student, and thus I am still learning and perfecting the art of writing, but that does not give any scholar the right to use my work without proper citation.

While my opinion of the extent of students' rights to their work produced in an academic institution under academic instructors may seem strong, I do not believe it is out of line. Reading the passages I have quoted in this essay has enraged me to a point where I am hesitant ever to submit an essay again. Sure, it may be a fantastic opportunity to be asked by a professor whether he or she may feature my work within his or her scholarly writing. Sure, I would love to be considered a published writer as an undergraduate. The fact of the matter is, though, that if my work is published as a part of my professor's scholarly work, I want to be considered a published author, not simply a published writer. I want to know that I will be properly credited for my writing, no matter how little of it has been used, and that I will still hold full authority over my own writing, regardless of where it is published. The fact that some scholars believe students do not deserve citation and are not even worthy of being considered "authors" of their own work simply because it was produced for academic purposes is absolutely sickening to me.

If I were to write an essay and use quotes

without proper citation, I would undoubtedly be severely punished for plagiarism. If a professor quoted from an essay I wrote and did not properly attribute authorship of it to me or cite me as a source, however, he or she could get away with it much more easily. As a student, I feel powerless. I feel vulnerable. Most of all, I despise the fact that students are actively being taken advantage of this way. It is unfair and unethical. My hope is that scholars and institutions alike will put their pride aside and realize that students are writers just as they are. We may not have perfected our craft yet, but we are trying. We may never reach perfection, but then again, does any writer?

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