

■ From P28

progress as far as his assignment is concerned.

Easy way out

Of course, at the end of the day, the root of the problem has to be addressed.

Why do students plagiarise off the Internet if they know that it's wrong?

Dr Pradeep Taneja, director of International Programmes at the Graduate School of Management, La Trobe University, Melbourne, tells *The Star Online* in an e-mail interview that while students are aware of the inherent wrongfulness of the act, any feelings of guilt they might have are conveniently swept aside when they realise how easy it is to filch material off the Web.

"It's not that the students do not know that lifting material from the Internet is as wrong as copying from a book or a journal article. But I think the temptation to copy material from the Internet is great because of the ease with which you can simply cut and paste," he says.

"Moreover, there is always this feeling at the back of the students' minds that they won't get caught because it is unlikely that the lecturer would be familiar with all the material that is available on the Internet."

Plagiarism is just a 'convenience'

Gan concurs: "Students simply want an easy and lazy way out. I don't think they rationalise their habit and action at all.

"And students who plagiarise don't think about moral issues at all. For most students, plagiarism is just a 'convenience.'"

This brings us to the age-old problem of students thinking that they will get away with stealing material, despite it being an essentially wrongful act. In a way, the Internet has justified plagiarism; the sheer volume of information out there on the Web has compounded the problem.

As Pradeep says, plagiarists often believe that lecturers will find it hard to pinpoint the exact source of the information. It would be akin to looking for a needle in a haystack - in this case, a haystack that cannot be measured by any conventional means, and one without boundaries or limits.

Another factor in students' frequent use of the Internet as a source of plagiarised material is plain and simple laziness.

Some students are simply too slothful to dig up information and put it to use, preferring instead to make use of the Internet's accessibility to simply steal chunks of

other people's work and pass it off as their own.

"Undoubtedly, the Web offers a multitude of information and knowledge, but plagiarists extract information for personal use, not considering the moral or legal implications. Most of them feel that they can get away with it," says John Siow, an official with the inspectorate division in Malaysia's Education Ministry.

The worst culprits

There are also some disciplines that encourage Internet plagiarism more than others.

"I think humanities subjects in particular are most susceptible to plagiarism, where essay writing and reports constitute a sizeable chunk of assessment," says Schwartz.

"Subjects like politics, literature, sociology and other arts courses are where I have seen most cases of plagiarism occur."

Siow agrees. "It is definitely easier to copy material for essays, where ideas and opinions can be lifted from the Internet and passed off as the plagiarist's own work," he says.

A particularly worrying trend, especially in the West, is the mush-



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rooming of websites that sell essays to would-be plagiarists, which merely heightens the magnitude of the problem.

For the black marketeers running these websites, profits are put ahead of ethics and conscience, and any inherent sense of right and wrong is ultimately subsumed for the lustre of lucre.

The students who pay to get assignments done for them want immediate gratification, more so if



the assignment is something not of interest to them.

"The Internet, I think, is a wonderful place, but of course, with every good thing, there is the other side of the coin," says Schwartz. "The fact that some websites are even offering complete assignments and essays in exchange for cash just deepens the problem."

In a nutshell, it looks as though the problem of Internet plagiarism will get bigger before it can be brought under control. As more and more students use the Internet to do their research, the temptation to plagiarise will increase in direct proportion, thus making it harder for lecturers to track down the perpetrators.

You may ease the symptoms in the meantime, but a magic bullet is still far from the offing.

Schwartz has this to say in conclusion: "Plagiarism is an age-old problem, it's just that today's technology has made it easier to cheat."