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**Ohio U. Investigates Plagiarism Charges**

By THOMAS BARTLETT

*Former graduate student says he found blatant copying in dozens of theses*

Ohio University is investigating 44 possible cases of plagiarism by current and former engineering graduate students, all of which were discovered by a former graduate student who believes that professors there have fostered a culture of cheating.

Thomas A. Matrka, who received his master's degree in mechanical engineering last summer and now works at a chemical plant, said he came upon several instances of plagiarism after his adviser told him initially that his thesis was unacceptable.

"I went to the library to see what he had approved and see why mine wasn't satisfactory," said Mr. Matrka. As he was looking through the theses, he noticed passages that were identical but were not cited. In one case, he said, more than 50 pages had been plagiarized from a previous thesis at the university. He then spent 10 hours a week for four months, he said, looking for further evidence of plagiarism.

"I think they have double standards," Mr. Matrka said. "They allow some people to cheat their way through and hold others to a higher standard."

He brought the apparent plagiarism to the attention of university officials in June 2004, he said. He has accused them of dragging their heels and refusing to acknowledge or respond to his allegations.

That is not true, said Dennis Irwin, dean of the Russ College of Engineering and Technology. Mr. Irwin said two of the cases had been deemed not to be plagiarism. But as Mr. Matrka presented more evidence, the dean became concerned. "We're not trying to minimize this at all," he said.

Panel to Investigate

The dean created a committee to look into the allegations. It comprises engineering professors (none of whom, he said, have been accused of wrongdoing) and two officials outside the college. He said he expected the committee to issue a report by the end of March. When it does, he said, he will consider appropriate punishments, including revoking degrees. Some of the alleged plagiarism goes back to 1989.

Mr. Matrka said two students now enrolled in the Ph.D. program had committed plagiarism in their master's theses. One of the students copied 14 pages verbatim, including typographic errors, he said. Mr. Irwin said that if charges of plagiarism against the two students are borne out, "I think they should be expelled."

The professors who were advisers on the theses in question may also be disciplined, Mr. Irwin said, but the dean was not sure how they would be punished.

And while the controversy has been an embarrassment for the engineering college, Mr. Irwin said he is grateful to Mr. Matrka for raising the issue. "Ultimately it was helpful," the dean said. "In the end he has to be commended."

Mr. Irwin said graduate students in the engineering college are now required to sign a statement of originality when they turn in their theses.

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