

Scientific plagiarism: A growing problem in an era of shrinking research funding

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As scientific researchers become evermore competitive for scarce funding, scientific journals are increasing efforts to identify submissions that plagiarize the work of others. Still, it may take years to identify and retract the plagiarized papers and give credit to the actual researchers.

"We need a better system," said Harold Garner, executive director of the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute at Virginia Tech. Garner discussed the problem and solution in a Comment in the January 4, 2012 issue of *Nature* and in a January 19, 2012 radio interview with NPR's Leonard Lopate.

Garner, creator of eTBLAST plagiarism detection software, identified numerous instances of wholesale plagiarism among [citations](#) in MEDLINE. "When my colleagues and I introduced an [automated process](#) to spot similar citations in MEDLINE, we uncovered more than 150 suspected cases of plagiarism in March, 2009.

"Subsequent ethics investigations resulted in 56 retractions within a few months. However, as of November 2011, 12 (20 percent) of those "retracted" papers are still not so tagged in PubMed. Another two were labeled with errata that point to a website warning the papers are "duplicate" -- but more than 95 percent of the text was identical, with no similar co-authors."

But even when plagiarism is uncovered, it does not guarantee that the plagiarized articles will be retracted. In Garner's study, as noted in his

Nature commentary, "Three of the 56 retracted papers are cited in books, including one citation after the [retraction](#). Another eight were cited in other PubMed Central archived articles before retraction, and seven were cited after retraction."

Some researchers say plagiarism has become a [pandemic](#) in many large institutions and schools, and that there is an entire industry built on the business of copying the work of others for the purpose of developing theses content and technical papers.

Quelling the [proliferation](#) of scientific plagiarism by identifying and retracting plagiarized articles is not the only issue. Publication editors and researchers must agree on the definition of plagiarism as noted in Nature.

Said Garner, "Ultimately, plagiarism comes down to human judgment, similar to other questionable practices -- you know it when you see it."

More information: The Comment in *Nature* appears here:
www.nature.com/nature/journal/...-plagiarized-studies

Provided by Virginia Tech

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