Statement on Plagiarism

Students faced with the task of writing a paper are sometimes tempted to borrow facts, ideas, or phrases from other writers as an aid to their own expressions. While it is possible to do this in an acceptable manner, the beginning writer in particular should be aware of the dangers of straying into the area of plagiarism. PLAGIARISM, SIMPLY DEFINED, IS TAKING SOMEONE ELSE'S WORDS OR IDEAS AND REPRESENTING THEM AS BEING YOUR OWN. It is specifically prohibited by University regulations, which state:

Good academic work must be based on honesty. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work that which he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are responsible for plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students responsible for, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university. (Undergraduate Catalog)

The essence of plagiarism is theft and misrepresentation. One who plagiarizes is attempting to get credit, in the form of a grade, for someone else's work; in effect, he or she is doing the same sort of thing as copying another person's answers on an exam. Thus guilt or innocence in plagiarism cases is not a matter of how much material was stolen or what the motives of the thief were. Any material which is taken from another writer and presented as if it were the student's own original work comes under the prohibition.

Specifically, the following are examples of plagiarism:

1. A paper or assignment actually written in whole or part by another.
2. A paper or assignment copied word-for-word or with only minor changes from a book, magazine, or other source.
3. A paper copied in part from one or more sources, without proper identification and acknowledgment of the sources.
4. A paper which is merely a paraphrase of one or more sources, using ideas and/or logic without credit, even though the actual words may be changed.
5. A paper which quotes, summarizes or paraphrases, or cuts and pastes words, phrases, or images from an Internet source without identification and the address of the Web site.

Notice numbers 2, 4, and 5. Direct quotation is not the only kind of plagiarism. Taking someone else's ideas, judgments, or logic, even if you put them in your own words, is as unacceptable as stealing the words.

This does not mean that outside sources may never be used. Many subjects and assignments require research and the quotation of other writers' work. But all such use of outside materials
must be properly identified, through quotation marks, internal citations, endnotes, and/or other accepted ways of acknowledging such borrowings. It is not the use of an outside source that is wrong; it is the implicit claim that any material obtained in that manner is in fact original.

Nor does this mean that every single fact that you learn from some outside source must be documented. Material which is general knowledge or generally available from many sources (such as dictionary definitions, familiar historical facts, and the like) need not be identified; a reader assumes that you got the information somewhere. In most courses, facts drawn from the textbook in that course (but not the author's judgments or conclusions) are fair game. But it is always better to err in the direction of over-acknowledgment: when in doubt, identify your source. Better yet, unless the assignment requires research, rely on your own knowledge, ideas and words.