

# Detection, prevention discussed at plagiarism roundtable

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Texas Tech students, faculty and staff members considered methods to detect and prevent plagiarism during a roundtable discussion Thursday in the Student Union Building.

The Plagiarism Detection in Higher Education Roundtable, hosted by the Office of the Provost and the Tech Office of the Chief Information Officer, highlighted research and ideas discussed as part of Tech's five-year ethics initiative, said James Brink, Tech's vice provost and moderator of the discussion.

He said the ethics initiative is designed to make students and teachers more aware of ethical behaviors and the academic-integrity issues they face when using and citing others' words and ideas.

"It does not diminish us to pay credit to someone else," he said.

Though Brink said he hopes the ethics initiative encourages students to voluntarily avoid plagiarizing rather than using scare tactics, he quoted Tommy Lee Jones in the movie "Man of the House" when he said, "Plagiarism is an academic crime, and it's punishable by academic death," to explain the severity of plagiarizing.

"We sometimes don't go the distance in the academic-death part," he said.

Cynthia McKenney, associate professor of plant and soil sciences, said she uses the plagiarism-detection Web site [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com), which scores papers based on what the program considers the percentage of plagiarized material to be, as a resource for students to learn how to attribute their sources rather than

as a tool to punish students for plagiarism.

Kathleen Gillis, director of the University Writing Center at Tech, said one aspect of writing a research paper or essay that can trigger false positives on plagiarism-detection software is that writers have a tendency to adopt commonly accepted words and phrases to increase their legitimacy on the academic topic they are writing about.

Susan Lang, director of First-Year Composition at Tech and a panelist at the roundtable, said such software often flags commonly worded phrases such as "date rape" or "global warming" and commonly used phrases like "music can be used to..."

"They're a good tool, but they're not a silver bullet, and they're not a time saver for faculty," she said of plagiarism-detection software.

Because every major on campus requires at least six hours of writing-intensive course work, Brink said Tech is considering a university-wide license for plagiarism-detection software to ensure consistency and uniformity.

Though plagiarism-detection software can be useful in searching through databases of written material to help validate the integrity of a paper, McKenney said it should be used with caution because it is not always accurate.

"Faculty need to be taught to be skeptical about the results that come back from this software," she said.

Lang said she believes most of the plagiarism seen by writing-center tutors could be prevented if students work on properly integrating both sources and sourced material in their writing.

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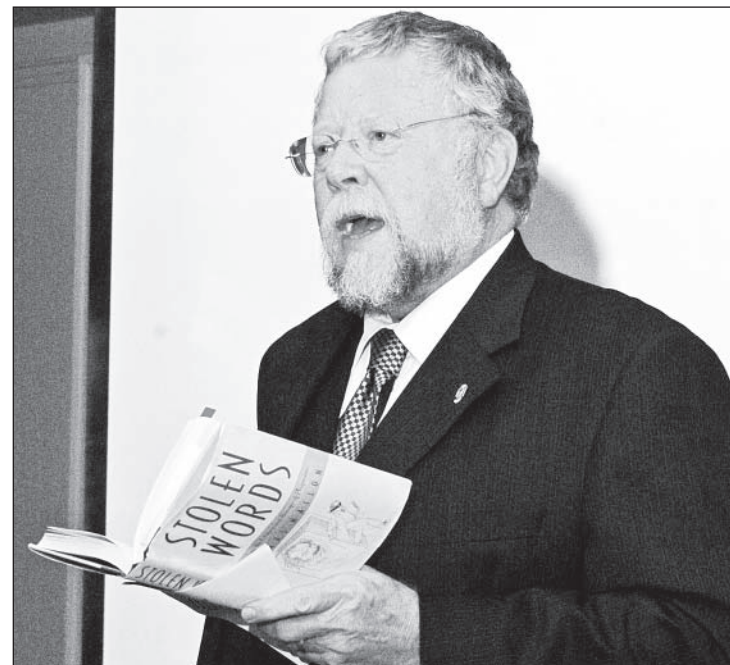


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**PLAGIARISM ROUND TABLE** moderator James Brink, reads a section out of Thomas Mallon's book "Stolen Words" during Thursday's discussion in the Red Raider Lounge of the Student Union Building.