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United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

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Abstract

The United States Army Sergeant Major Academy is the capstone in the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), with only one percent of the enlisted population reaching the rank of Sergeant Major. All students in the course have been selected to attend based on their performance over an average of a twenty year career. Class 58 has 288 college graduates, having earned Associate Degrees thru Masters Degrees in diverse subjects. With these simple facts, why is the integrity of every USASMA student questioned with the Turn It In plagiarism web program?

Turn it in

“Welcome to the United States Army Sergeant Major Academy, and congratulations on your selection for attendance to the capstone of the Army Noncommissioned Officer course. You are the top one percent of the senior enlisted personnel of our Army” (SMA Preston). Class 58 started with 647 students which included 48 international exchange students from around the globe. We the students were told that out of the 647 students 288 held college degrees ranging from Associate Degrees thru Masters Degrees, with one student working on their Doctorate. Again, the students were told of the educational demographics by my account to show that the senior enlisted ranks had reached new heights in civilian educational levels. Every guest speaker receives a briefing on the class, and this is a statistic that must be highly regarded because most speakers remark on that detail during their brief.

While the Sergeants Major Academy is proud to use these facts, and figures it seems that some of the Facility Advisors (FA) and other administrators in the Academy felt that new control measures needed to be in place to reduce the amount of cheating. The other 57 classes and all the non- resident courses since 1972 have somehow completed the course and went out to successfully leader in our Army without this “check on integrity”.

The Sergeants Major Academy for class 58 decided to use a new integrity check procedure called to Turn It In. This is a web based anti-plagiarism program which tracks and searches for matches of college, and professional papers submitted. The results provide the instructor or FA feedback on the paper by percentage and from what source plagiarism occurred.

I believe that this is an ethical dilemma for the reason that all students are under the suspicion of cheating or plagiarism from the first paper that was assigned, My Trip to USASMA.

I don't know if this was a test run for the school or just throwing a blanket policy in place to see what happens. No student could have experienced the same trip to USASMA. This is the first of several great examples of how this system just doesn't fit this school system. I turned my paper into Turn It In.com with the instructions from my FA that it would be in a standard Army Memo format. A 366 word paper giving a funny, action packed trip from Hawaii to El Paso, Texas with my family and pets. The results from Turn It In were sixteen percent plagiarism which resulted in an e-mail from my FA with a note to come see him.

The Sergeants Major Academy placed blanket percentages of plagiarism on the grading policy. With 647 students writing on specific subjects and with a very similar culture the result should have been easy to determine. The matching words on my paper were 36, words like Hawaii, El Paso, Texas, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Master Sergeant, etc.

This, in my opinion was a huge waste of time, and for the first couple of weeks was a huge source of confusion from the students and faculty alike. It is my understanding that as the classes go on more and more papers will be placed in the data base, this will only compound the problem as time goes by. I can only imagine class 62 turning in their Leadership Philosophy with over 2,400 papers on the data base with words like leadership, coach, teach, mentor, terms like set the example, lead the way all coming up under MSG Jane Smith Class 58. You can only right-click the thesaurus so many times until your writing has lost its meaning, and in this case the audience as senior military leaders.

The current NCOES system is said to be on a ninth to ten grade education level, with that being an established fact, I see no reason after four months worth of the assignments to include; Information Briefs, NSA, Leadership Philosophy, and the Haines Paper projects. Why there would be a huge outbreak of cheating needed to pass this course? Once again, there are 288

college graduates currently attending the Sergeants Major Academy. Also, just about every student in the Academy is attending college continuing to learn, and grow academically. From an Academic perspective, I see no reason to have to result in cheating.

The next reason for instituting Turn It In was said to be for the accreditation of the Academy for college credits. I talked to a director of a local college that gives the Sergeants Major Academy college credit and he told me that Turn It In had no factor in the awarding of college credits. He went on to say that his college did not subscribe to the program. There may be other colleges that are impressed by the Turn It In, but after thinking about the four major colleges I've attended I can't think of a time when a teacher or professor ever had me turn in a project to a plagiarism web site. The teacher may have done it after I turned a project in, but never did a college question my integrity first.

The next question I ask is why the Captains and Majors at the Captains Career Course and CGSC respectively are not required to turn their papers and assignments into a Plagiarism detection site? Why there are different standards for the officer education system? In my opinion the senior NCO's have done a poor job of taking care of its own. This was not forced on the Academy for accreditation, and all the Senior NCO's here (current institution) have attended the course without this requirement. There is always the next better idea, but it should be measured with the question of is this for the greater good of the Academy and its students? Maybe all Sergeants Major graduates prior to class 58 should have an asterisk placed by their names because there is a possibility that they cheated during their attendance here.

Integrity is the bedrock of a strong Noncommissioned Officer Corp, so at the capstone NCOES course, why we (senior leaders) are attacking it? I also questioned our foreign exchange students to see how they perceive this policy? They feel as if their body of work is not trusted, and make them wonder how much influence the senior Army NCO's have in the system.

Cheating the system is not acceptable, if someone is caught cheating they should be dealt with accordingly. The thought process I get from this is that all students are cheating until they "Turn It In" and get under 15 percent is just crazy. When I turn in a paper it's almost like a lottery, what General from 1967 used the three words from my Haines paper? Soldiers are subject to the rules and regulations and failure to follow will result in a punishment of some sort. That is the bottom line. If a Soldier gets a DUI all Soldiers are not punished just that Soldier period, simple.

The Sergeants Major Academy is using and paying for a system that is not needed in this institution, thus wasting time, money, and resources that could go toward improving the learning experience in many other ways. Hiring college teachers to teach writing, composition, and having good productive research classes taught by my graduate teachers would be a much more productive way of ensuring a quality and unforgettable learning experience, without questioning the integrity of the senior NCO's that attend the Academy from this point on.