

# Letters to the Editor

## Ethics and the Plagiarized Teaching Statement

This letter concerns the article “Awareness of ethical pitfalls...” in the April 2010 issue of the *Notices*.

In my view the big ethical problem here is that it is unethical to demand a teaching statement from young graduates who clearly have only little or no teaching experience. Requesting this statement means requesting a lie; it is then secondary whether this lie is fabricated by using one’s fantasy; by asking older friends, relatives, or teachers for help; or by copying something from the Internet.

Apart from favoring applicants who have relatives in the teaching profession whose help they can enlist, the only qualifications that this statement can possibly measure are the willingness to faithfully complete a meaningless task and the ability to write an essay on a topic about which one has little knowledge—a cynic might say that these are indeed important qualifications in modern academic life, but I think one shouldn’t base hiring decisions on them. The key phrase in the article is for me “selling oneself as a job candidate”: We shouldn’t try to hire a gifted salesperson but an able mathematician.

In fact, thinking about it, I come to believe that the best answer to this request is what happened in the reported case: To send the hiring committee the teaching statement of one of its members, thereby exposing the absurdity of the process. It is sad that the only reply that our academic system comes up with is activation of “the internal process for penalizing the ethical violation” instead of a hearty laugh and some self-critical thoughts about what we are doing.

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