Kenneth A. Sahr, a student at Florida International University, has created a web site at which he intends to include thousands of college level research papers on all kinds of topics for free. The name of the site is "School Sucks"—and its slogan is "Download Your Work." Sahr says that his web site will ultimately drive pay for paper services out of business. He describes "School Sucks" as a checks and balances system- students have open access to the archive of research papers, he says, but so do professors. Sahr argues that the most important check, however, is on the professors, because, he contends, "School Sucks" will discourage them from assigning nebulous, overly broad research paper assignments.

Is it morally justifiable for Mr. Sahr to maintain "School Sucks" in operation? If so, why" If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: It is morally unjustifiable for Mr. Sahr to continue operating his web site. Doing so clearly aids and abets cheating by college students. Mr. Sahr's arguments to justify "school Sucks" are fallacious. The fact that professors can access Mr. Sahr's archive of essays doesn't make "School Sucks" a checks and balances system. In terms of this reasoning one could just as well say (absurdly) that a checks and balances system already exists because professors have access --e.g. in public libraries, book stores, etc. to the works from which most students plagiarize. Mr. Sahr's argument that "School sucks" is morally justifiable because it improves education by forcing teachers to avoid overly broad assignments is equally fallacious. By appeal to the same kind of reasoning safecrackers could justify their actions on the ground that they force banks to improve their security measures.

Case from the March 6, 1997 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. Copyright Robert Ladenson, Center for the Study of Ethics at the Illinois Institute of Technology, 1997.