

Juror allegedly steals 'jury duty' paper

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As far as the judge was concerned, the paper he ordered Brandon Dickens to write as punishment for ducking jury duty was plagiarized.

To the 20-year-old Dickens, the report merely contained "quoted" material.

Not surprisingly, Livingston County Circuit Judge David Reader had the last word.

"Really, what I was looking for, Mr. Dickens, was your own work," Reader said last week in upping Dickens' punishment from three days in the courthouse to four days — and ordering him to rewrite the paper.

Dickens, formerly of Tyrone Township, originally landed in Reader's doghouse in June, when he failed to return to jury duty after a lunch break. The judge ordered him to spend three days observing a civil trial and to write a five-page paper on the history of jury service.

When Dickens turned in the paper Aug. 30, a court employee recognized phrases from something else the employee had read previously. An Internet search showed many of the phrases came word for word from "Trials and Tribulations," a story by Seattle writer Matthew Baldwin that appeared in an online magazine, The Morning News.

Dickens denied plagiarizing Baldwin's work, saying: "I quoted it. I quoted a Seattle man's experience." He also said Reader wasn't clear about what he sought in the writing assignment, and he could find little information on the history of jury service.

Reader could have had Dickens jailed for up to 30 days, but instead ordered him to spend a fourth day in court and to come up with another five-page paper on the topic.

Dickens told the Livingston County Daily Press & Argus of Howell that he had moved to the Flint area about seven months before he was called for jury duty in Livingston County. But he failed to change the address on his driver's license, which is how prospective jurors are located.

At least one line of Dickens' paper was his own, however: "When picked you show up and serve your country."

On the Net:

The Morning News: <http://www.themorningnews.org/>

Information from: Livingston County Daily Press & Argus, <http://www.dailypressandargus.com>

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