

# Plagiarism and the Classroom: The Faculty Role in Awareness and Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent news reports ranging from national network broadcasts to traditional academic research journals have reported on the growth and ease of cheating in America's classrooms. While teachers at all levels should become more knowledgeable on how to recognize plagiarized work, higher education can take a lead and educate future teachers, current teachers, and college faculty on plagiarism detection and prevention. In fact, some scholars challenge faculty to better understand plagiarism and how and when it occurs and further, to pass on that understanding to students through better constructed assignments which discourage plagiarism (Jeffes & Janosik, 2002; Kennedy, 2004).

The following provides an overview of plagiarism in today's classrooms and discusses the important roles awareness and education must play in plagiarism detection and prevention. Advice for educators is included along with recommendations for plagiarism detection resources based on actual testing by graduate students and use of those resources.

## BACKGROUND

The Center for Academic Integrity (CAI), in a 1999 study across 21 college campuses, found that about one-third of the students surveyed had cheated on tests and half had cheated on written assignments (The Center for Academic Integrity, n.d.). In a later study (2005) by CAI, with 60 campuses involved, 70% admitted to cheating. Plagiarism is not a new problem, however, and with the proliferation of the Internet and its vast array of services from online paper mills to multiple database access, a student can, with a few keystrokes, plagiarize an entire paper or portions of one. And, in today's online world, plagiarism may occur because students misunderstand what is public domain on the

Internet and what is not. Further, students may not understand how to properly paraphrase or cite information in their individual work (Bates & Fain, 2003). To that end, educators must have a full understanding of plagiarism, its detection, and its prevention.

## INCREASING AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

### Understanding Student Abuse

From dictionaries to university honor code statements, included are common definitions of plagiarism are phrases such as to copy ideas or words of another, and, present as new a work of another (e.g., Dictionary.com, n.d.). While most universities include honor codes or statements regarding plagiarism policies, we must spend time on educating students on what plagiarism is and how it can be prevented. Further, while universities publish an honor code it may not always be enforced; therefore detected plagiarism goes unpunished, contributing to the cycle of student abuse. Other contributors to plagiarism should also be examined, such as students' lack of knowledge of what plagiarism means, student laziness, sloppy note taking, boredom with a subject, students' lack of necessary skills to complete an assignment, and difficulty managing time (Muha, 2000; Moeck, 2002; Harris, 2000, as cited in Jeffes & Janosik, 2002).

In many cases, students may, through unintentional plagiarism, not cite sources properly or may paraphrase incorrectly, thinking that simply changing a few words or phrases is okay. The Center for Academic Integrity, in its 2005 report, noted that most students believed that using a "direct sentence or two," without citations, was okay. The adage, "if it is on the Internet, it must be free," must be overcome through proper education. For students who intentionally plagiarize, as noted ear-

lier, multiple conditions may lead the student to make a decision to intentionally plagiarize. For instance, the student may be overburdened with assignments or may plagiarize out of mere laziness (Bate & Fain, 2003). The Internet and its available resources (such as the infamous paper mills) can become a quick *copy and paste* outlet for students. How an assignment is structured may help avoid plagiarism. Consistent feedback from the instructor can encourage improvement throughout the writing process (Moeck, 2002) and deter the need to plagiarize, as can the requirement of writing process documentation from initial note taking through the final draft.

### **Some Tips for Educators**

First and foremost, educators must be aware of how students can cheat (and, then, let the students know we are aware!). And, we must be willing to emphasize academic integrity in every class, throughout the year. Baron and Crooks (2005) encourage faculty to “clearly indicate their position on academic dishonesty via verbal discussion and in writing” (p. 42). To further help prevent plagiarism, assignments may need adjusting as noted earlier. McLafferty and Foust (2004) comment, “When students are instructed appropriately and given certain types of assignments, plagiarism is minimized or rendered virtually impossible” (p. 186).

Further, in today’s technological world, we must be familiar with the paper mills and how multiple, even customized topical papers, can be obtained. We must also realize that such “resources” are not going away; therefore, we must educate ourselves on prevention techniques and be fully aware of the “potential” in these resources. Simply doing an Internet search for “paper mills” and researching those available online is a start. There are also some great educational resources online that have links to paper mills, along with other links to tips on correctly citing sources, understanding copyright and fair use, how to paraphrase properly, and other useful educational resources for students and faculty. For example, visit the University of Alberta, Canada library (<http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/index.cfm>) or The Center for Academic Integrity (<http://www.academicintegrity.org/>), both excellent online resources. Harris (2004) also provides excellent materials for strategies of awareness and strategies for detection.

While at one time students could be “caught” with minor mistakes, such as copying and pasting information where the font style changes and the Internet address is listed in the header, today, students are more sophisticated with technology and may not make such common mistakes. Therefore, instructors need to be more astute than ever. Some common advice includes: explain your institution’s plagiarism policy clearly in the course syllabus; discuss academic integrity with your students; explain and demonstrate proper citation principles; require outlines several weeks in advance and compare the final paper to the outline; give written quizzes in class or in a timed online environment; search for Web addresses on the printout in the header and/or footer; spot check references for verification; ask students to provide copies of cited material; let students know *you* are aware of paper mill sites; and finally, go one step further and start using a plagiarism detection resource.

### **Use Plagiarism Detection Resources**

Many institutions are turning to plagiarism detection software or Internet based detection services to identify similar or copied text. In the implementation of one plagiarism detection resource (turnitin.com) at Hofstra University, Burke (2004) surveyed faculty who used the resource and found an overall satisfaction among users. Burke further reported that the incidence of online plagiarism at Hofstra decreased from 34% the first year to 12% at the end of the second year the resource was used. Using such a detection resource and either involving the students in the process of identifying similarity, or making students aware that a detection resource is being used can help deter plagiarism (Auer & Krupar, 2001; Bates & Fain, 2003; Burke, 2004; Hamlin & Ryan, 2003; Jeffes & Janosik, 2002; Scanlon & Neumann, 2002).

There are many plagiarism detection resources available and since they change and develop as dynamically as other Internet resources, it is in the educators’ best interest to investigate each to determine which resource may meet student and faculty needs. One of the ways to do this is to incorporate the investigation of plagiarism detection resources into an assignment. This author actually incorporated such an assignment into her educational technology class during two consecutive semesters with one semester having 9 graduate students enrolled and the other having 7 enrolled. Of these 16

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