

Chapter 25

Combating Plagiarism: A Three-Pronged Approach to Reducing Prevalence in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a hybrid approach to combating plagiarism, as developed over the course of a decade. This approach is based on a three-component framework. The first step is educating students about the differences between quoting, paraphrasing and plagiarizing, using examples. Second, students are introduced to plagiarism detection software in use. Students are shown how the software works, the type of reports it generates, as well as some of the most egregious examples of plagiarism encountered in this class in past years (anonymized, of course). A key part of this second step is to show students what the expectations are, in terms of what level of similarity between their paper and their sources is acceptable (attributable to a chance match) and what is blatant (clearly a deliberate act). Finally, the third component is follow-through i.e., reporting students to the university's administrative structures.

INTRODUCTION

While reading a student's paper more than a decade ago, this author was surprised to encounter his first incidence of plagiarism. The changes in font type and size, as well as the surprising use of hyperlinks on apparently unrelated words suggested that text from the student's paper could have been copied directly from a website. A quick Google search, using quotation marks to search for blocks of text, led to the original document that matched entire paragraphs in the student's paper. As an Assistant Professor of Management Information Systems, the author was unprepared to handle the situation. Dealing with plagiarism after the fact is always more difficult and more unpleasant for all parties involved. The institution where the author worked was also less prepared to handle the situation, as it lacked dedicated and well-publicized processes and organizational resources to handle academic misconduct.

As the Internet is a tremendous resource for conducting research, it has also become a considerable concern for instructors requiring students to write research papers. The ready availability of informa-

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tion on the Internet has greatly facilitated plagiarism in academic papers. This chapter outlines a successful hybrid strategy for combating plagiarism, developed over more than a decade of teaching in a medium-sized public university. Using a three-pronged approach refined over the years, the author has been successful in greatly reducing plagiarism in his classes. The institution where the author works has matured, developing policies, organizational structures and communication channels connecting students, faculty and administrators dealing with academic misconduct. Rather than limiting itself to catching and punishing misconduct after the fact, a much more concerted effort goes into signaling an institutional commitment to academic honesty, in alerting students and faculty about potential problems and in aggregating and using institution-wide information about incidence and recidivism in academic misconduct.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Rising Threat of Plagiarism in Higher Education

Plagiarism among university students has always been a concern, and a rising one in recent years. In surveys, students give reasons for plagiarizing that predate the Internet. Some of these reasons include time pressure, peer pressure (others do it, so *why would I not do the same?*), perceptions that the class material is trivial or unimportant, the class expectations are unreasonably high, a sense of entitlement or a perception that this is how business is done for business majors (McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2006). Another contributing factor is that some faculty do not pay attention to plagiarism, which leads students to believe they can expect to get away with it (Winchell, 2013).

The Internet has made available countless databases with access to full text publications, which can facilitate research in general, but which can also make it easy and tempting for students to just copy and paste. Additionally, web based paper mills allow students to download papers, either previously written or bespoke, free or for a fee (Dante, 2010). Over the years, a number of authors have compared survey data about self-reported plagiarism, perception of plagiarism in others and views on what should be considered dishonest behavior. Examples include McCabe and Treviño (1993), Abasi and Graves (2008), Walker (2010) and Thornton (2014). Consistently, a minority of students admit to having plagiarized, but think that plagiarism among their colleagues is much more widespread. Consistent is the perception of what is plagiarism, although some of the infractions are judged almost universally as more egregious, while other types of infractions are viewed as serious only by a smaller percentage of the students. Although some authors see alarming growth in plagiarism with the widespread use of Internet research, others view plagiarism rates as relatively unchanged and unaffected by technology (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001).

As an example, a paper in the *Journal of College Student Development* (Scanlon & Neumann, 2002) reports on survey data from nine United States (US)-based Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)—both public and private—including responses from 644 students. While 92% of the students report they never purchased a paper to turn in as their own work, only 38% believe that their peers have not done so. In response to separate questions, roughly 89% of the students believed it was wrong to turn in somebody else's work as one's own, to copy text to hand as one's own writing, or to purchase a paper from a paper mill, whether online or in hardcopy. While these results may not seem surprising, it is surprising to find even a small percentage of students (3-4%) believing that it is *not wrong* to submit someone else's work

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