

Plagiarism Revealed

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Annotations in red reflect comments from the participants in the March 29, 2006 discussion.



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Plagiarism: Why Do We Care?

- Cheating appears to be on the increase everywhere.
- Paper mills are widespread.
- The Internet is an enabler of plagiarism.
- Tolerating cheating angers our best and brightest students.
- Tolerating cheating cheapens our degrees.



What is Plagiarism?

- Plagiarism is the use of the words or ideas of another *without giving proper credit*. (We must help students learn that use of the work of others is permitted and expected as long as proper credit is given.)
- Plagiarism can encompass creative work other than writing, such as music and pictures.
- The definition given does not consider intentionality or gain.



What is *not* Plagiarism?

- A botched citation is not plagiarism, so long as it was clear that the student intended to cite. (But it may be hard to know where to draw the line. Is a long quotation with a citation but no quotation marks plagiarism?)
- A cut-and-paste paper is not plagiarism if the material is properly cited. (But it is a D-paper!)



What are the Causes of Plagiarism?

- Lack of knowledge
- Misunderstanding of expectations
- Poor language skills
- Cultural differences
- Cheating
 - Procrastination, poor time management, or convenience
 - Laziness
 - Fear of failure



What We Tell Our Students

- Each orientation (graduate and undergraduate) includes an academic integrity session.
- We define plagiarism.
- We explain that using the work of others is permitted and valued with proper credit.
- We explain the consequences in general terms, but with specific examples.



Goal #1 Preventing Plagiarism

- Explain the value of authority
- Teach the value of academic integrity
- Teach the process of correct citation
- Be explicit about the limits of collaboration
- Design plagiarism-resistant assignments
- Be explicit about penalties



Explain the Value of Authority

- Help students understand that they're not expected to be universal geniuses.
- Help students understand that properly cited references improve their work:
 - No citations = no research
 - No research = no learning
 - No learning = D- !



Teach the Value of Academic Integrity

- Appeal to the value of the degree.
- Give non-academic examples.
- Ask students whether they'd trust a doctor or engineer who cheated his way through school. Who went to a school that tolerates cheating.
- Be explicit about the consequences. Threats don't seem to deter, but an explanation is necessary before penalties can be imposed.



Teach the Process of Correct Citation

- Face it: students don't know how to cite.
- Provide an example:
http://www.spsu.edu/cs/faculty/bbrown/papers/writing_example_apa.html
- Require (and correct) citations in homework and short papers
- Require drafts of longer papers and correct errors in citation.



Be Explicit About the Limits of Collaboration

- Different faculty members have different limits.
- Different assignments may have different limits.
- Students can be easily confused about where to draw the line.



Design Plagiarism-Resistant Assignments

- Assignments should be clear, specific, and in writing (Gordon, 2001).
- Design assignments with milestones
 - Proposal
 - Draft annotated bibliography
 - Draft paper
 - Final paper
- Require current (last two years) references.
- Require a "reflection on the assignment."



Design Plagiarism-Resistant Assignments

- Limit “Internet” references in favor of journal and book references. (Explain that electronic copies of journal articles are OK.)
Electronic documents should meet the spirit of the requirement. The citation itself should show why it is acceptable.
- Require oral presentations with questions.
- Vary assignments from term to term.
- Consider requiring copies of “important” references.



Be Explicit About Penalties

- Threats don’t help, but...
- If it’s not in the syllabus, it will be hard to make a penalty stick.
- The cost of cheating must be greater than the cost of doing nothing. (From Bunn’s economic model of academic honesty (1992); a zero is not a sufficient penalty.)
- The cost of cheating must be irrecoverable; no do-overs allowed! (But be careful not to penalize when *teaching* citation.)

Differentiate between process and product.



Detecting Plagiarism

- Does the student’s work match the assignment (especially with programming)
- Does the writing in the assignment match the student’s earlier work?
- Are there “discontinuities” in the writing?
- Are there references to figures not present?
- Are there unexplained font changes?
- Have you seen this material before?
- Can you find it in Google?



“Plagiarism Detection” Software

- “Detection” software has a **deterrent effect.**
- SPSU subscribes to Turnitin.com
- Other software may be available
- Three cardinal rules:
 - No surprises
 - No secrets
 - No automatic decisions
- These packages detect similarities, not plagiarism. (*You* have to do that.)



Confronting and Dealing with Plagiarism

- *Talk* with the student. (Consider having a colleague present.) **The role of the observer must not be conflict resolution.**
- Ask before accusing; give the student an opportunity to explain the things you have observed. **This is the student’s opportunity to speak.**
- Explain your conclusions; do not engage in debate. **This is your opportunity.**
- Explain the consequences.
- Explain the student’s options.



How SPSU Can Help the Faculty

- Uniform policies and procedures
- Uniform penalties (or ranges of penalties)
- Support for the faculty who apply the penalties
- A University honor code
- A University honor council



Bibliography

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This document is available:

http://www.spsu.edu/cs/faculty/bbrown/papers/cte_20060329.pdf

The full PowerPoint is also available.

http://www.spsu.edu/cs/faculty/bbrown/papers/cte_20060329.ppt

