

Teaching Tip

How To Reduce Plagiarism

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ABSTRACT

Academic plagiarism is on the rise at colleges and universities. The advent of the World Wide Web (WWW) enables students to sort through thousands of published documents ready to “cut and paste” into their own papers. This teaching tip deals with how to reduce plagiarism in higher education.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Cheating, Academic Dishonesty, Honor Offense, Proactive Approach

1. INTRODUCTION

The ease of use of the Internet technology is the number one factor blamed for the increase in academic cheating (Decamp 2001). Another factor is an increasing number of digital paper mills mushrooming on the Internet such as Buyapapers.com <http://www.buypapers.com/>, Term Papers & Term Papers <http://www.term-papers-term-papers.com/>, and Term Papers Amazon <http://www.termpapers.amazon.com/>. The past few years have witnessed an increased number of plagiarized papers in both graduate and undergraduate courses. Previously I spent several hours on each paper simply to validate that the paper was not copied from other sources without the author's permission. In order to identify the originality of the paper, I selected some sentences that look suspicious and processed them through Web search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Although I was able to detect several plagiarized papers, I had realized that the amount of time and effort spent was too extensive. Performing this detective work does not help reduce the number of misconducts or discourage students not to cheat.

2. A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO REDUCE PLAGIARISM

While there is no simple solution to this problem, an instructor should focus on “how to reduce and discourage cheating activities” rather than “why students cheat and how they did it.” A proactive approach rather than a reactive approach needs to be used to reduce academic misconduct. The following guidelines compiled from

several sources including Strategies to Minimize Cheating Online (2000) and Van Belle, G. (n.d.).

1. **Treat a paper as a process not a product.** Requiring students to submit a term paper at the end of the semester without monitoring their work-in-progress creates the opportunity for plagiarizing. As the end of the semester approaches and time is running out, students who have not started to work on a paper may seek an easy way out. A paper needs to be treated as a process that requires continuous supervising and progress monitoring. Instructor's involvement minimizes a chance of quick fix (e.g., buying or copying papers) since students need to demonstrate progress on an on-going basis.
2. **Assign group activities.** Working in a group whose members are selected by an instructor has a “deterrent” effect on cheaters. It would be difficult for someone in a group to cheat while members are watching. Students who do not know each other before are also likely to report honor offense when they come across it.
3. **Design questions that require discussion rather than rote memorization.** Instead of giving students multiple-choice or true/false questions, an instructor should ask them to relate the lesson learned to their own experiences and describe it in their own words. A personal essay is difficult to duplicate or be written by someone else.
4. **Assign different questions to different individuals.** If a test or quiz is given online, consider this option where a computer automatically delivers and grades the test.

Questions can be randomly selected from a large test pool where every access by a test taker will return a different set of questions. Students will not be able to copy answers from each other since they have to work on different questions.

5. **Give tests, quizzes or assignments more frequently.** A student may receive help from other individual who is not enrolled in a class. If assignments are given frequently, that person may not be available every time and may hesitate to spend too much time and energy on something that he/she cannot take a credit for. Giving frequent tests or quizzes also motivate students to study and prepare them to be on top of their materials all the time.
6. **Assign more in-class activities.** Giving students homework does not mean that they will spend more time to study or do a better job. Assigning tasks to complete within a class time prevents them to procrastinate and drives them to prepare before the class. If students have questions while working on the assigned tasks in class, they can ask the instructor immediately. In-class activities not only reduce cheating, but also increase interaction between the instructor and students and among the students themselves.
7. **Don't allow make up tests.** Allow students to make up a test opens the door for cheating. Students may collaborate by having someone who took the test previously pass the information to friends who have not taken it. Prohibiting make-up tests reduces this collaborative attempt.
8. **Rotate curriculum.** Instructors especially those who are in the fast changing discipline (e.g., information systems/information technology) should frequently update their materials. Rotating course materials regularly helps the instructor prepare and makes the course interesting, and in turn, students cannot use the old test obtained from their fellows who took the course before.
9. **Build trust.** Forming a strong instructor-student relationship early in an academic program or a course helps discourage cheating. By creating an atmosphere in which an instructor and students trust one another, a productive and collaborative learning environment is encouraged. Ice breaking activities in the first class and open communications throughout the semester can reinforce trustworthiness within students.
10. **Educate students.** In order to raise awareness among students, teachers must communicate what plagiarism is and why it will not be tolerated. It would be naïve to assume that every student knows what plagiarism is given the fact that they are from diverse cultures some of which do not recognize copying intellectual properties without the author's permission as wrong doing. It is the duty of an instructor to educate students what is acceptable and unacceptable, to discuss the consequences, and

to take swift action when and where a violation occurs.

3. CONCLUSION

I have found that the above guidelines very effective in reducing plagiarism, especially the first point. I request every student to keep an electronic journal of how they complete a term paper from the beginning to the end. They need to submit all articles they use in their paper along with highlighted areas from where they borrow ideas or concepts. Student electronic journals are recorded on a course management system called Blackboard where I can access and monitor student progress. One may find this activity very time consuming; however, I schedule my time to access each student's journal only once a week and set aside 15-20 minutes in every class to discuss with individuals about their paper. I believe that this on-going effort helps bring out the best in students.

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