Pedagogical Strategies and Training to Avoid Plagiarism

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Abstract

Plagiarism-detection tools provide valuable information to instructors and students by helping students reap the rewards that can be attained through the insights from comparisons with existing papers and resources. Training on how to read plagiarism-detection reports, as well as how to cite, quote, and paraphrase, is necessary to demystify the process for both faculty and students and to inculcate better writing skills and use of sources among students. Pedagogically, teaching strategies, particularly in the online arena, will enable students to engage with writing skills that will promote their own work while building on others’ knowledge. Draft submissions of student papers to plagiarism-detection tools and faculty development of unique assessments that encourage synthesis and student interpretation are two key areas that help create a culture of learning and enhance student writing skill development.
Reframing plagiarism-detection tools as learning and self-assessment tools leads to the following strategies that also address common reasons for plagiarism:

- create a culture of learning and collaboration among faculty and students;
- apply plagiarism-detection reports, through draft submissions, to develop students’ skills in paraphrasing, quoting, and citing;
- train both faculty and students on how to read plagiarism-detection reports;
- design unique assessments that include experiential work and synthesis; and
- approach the university scholastic honesty committee as a forum to provide valuable teaching opportunities.

Create a Culture of Learning and Collaboration

Erosion of ethics, ignorance, or uncertainty of what scholastic dishonesty constitutes, academic competition for grades, and lack of consequences are among the rationales for student plagiarism (Klein, 2011; Megehee & Spake, 2008). A culture of learning and collaboration that focuses on educating students about plagiarism and ethics and working with students on research and writing skills requires transparency regarding the use of plagiarism-detection services and faculty involvement. “Somewhat surprisingly, the blame for a culture of cheating is often put on the faculty and administration by the student body” (Gibson et al., 2006, p. 39). Hands-on faculty involvement, availability of learning resources, and strong ethical and moral stances against academic dishonesty through policies, discussions, and sanctions are strategies that promote scholastic honesty. Peer attitudes as well have been found to be important in creating a learning community that discredit and discourages academic dishonesty (Novotney, 2011). When a small group of students was introduced to Turnitin.com in 2007, the professor found that students were generally positive about its use, but those students who were insecure about how to correctly quote and cite were less positive (Dahl, 2007).
Develop Students’ Skills

Requiring students to submit their drafts to plagiarism-detection tools creates an opportunity for instructors to show students where, how, and why they need to put quotation marks around a passage or include an in-text citation for paraphrased information. This makes the plagiarism-detection report a tool for learning, rather than for punishment, as well as increases the collaboration between faculty and students. While a strategy is to use plagiarism-detection software as “a learning tool rather than policing tool,” having faculty engage with students in the writing process can contribute to reducing plagiarism (Delcouse & George, 2012, pp. 6-7). Faculty can use draft plagiarism-detection reports to show students how they effectively or inadequately drew from and synthesized texts while having acknowledged the work of others. A study of feedback through plagiarism-detection reports found that most students believed that it helped them improve their writing, but it did not improve citation skills (Rolfe, 2011).

After assessing student skills in paraphrasing, quoting, and citing through the draft reports, online modules and workshops can be used to build student skills in paraphrasing, quoting, and citing conventions.

Leading up to the research paper assignment, faculty can use the Discussion Board in online or mixed-mode classes or small group discussions in face-to-face courses to interact with students as they explore texts, draw out relevant points, and synthesize ideas. Having students submit outlines, drafts, annotated bibliographies, or sections of the paper enables faculty to review style, references, and quoting and paraphrasing skills. This benefits students since they are not rushing to submit a final paper on deadline, thus preventing potential procrastination issues (Gibson et al., 2006).

Train in Reading Plagiarism-Detection Reports

Reframing plagiarism-detection reports as tools to identify matches rather than to catch plagiarism can help faculty train and guide students toward skills of using existing research and texts to support students’ interpretation and analysis. However, faculty and students need to be competent in reading plagiarism-detection reports. The match percentage is the percentage that matches other sources, but that percentage does not necessarily reflect plagiarism. Quotations and references can be flagged in reports. While a preponderance of quotations signals lack of original thought and analysis by the student, it is not plagiarism. But the report provides a strong illustration of a quote-heavy paper and enables faculty to work on this issue with the student. Flagging quotations can also prompt faculty to see if there are in-text citations. Common phrases, common knowledge, and paper headings are among the matches identified in the report, leading to higher match percentages. Matches may be layered – meaning a match to a student paper is actually a match to a primary source. Training faculty and students in these nuances of reading the reports contributes to the understanding that these reports are teaching and learning tools to enhance writing skills.

Design Unique Assessments

When students are required to go outside of their texts by observing events, interviewing people, or using multimedia forms of presentation, they are incorporating their own unique experiences, observations, and presentation styles into their assignments. “Since one of the most frequently cited reasons for plagiarism is a lack of interest or a failure to see relevance in assignments, one of the most powerful antidotes is to make instruction more relevant, more interesting, and more social” (Evering & Moorman, 2012, p. 41). As noted by Evering and Moorman (2012), connecting to the demands and expectations of the global society in which students live and will work enhance the students’ engagement with learning.

In an intercultural communication course, assignments requiring journal entries linking personal and cultural artifacts to themes and theories, analysis of verbal and nonverbal patterns at a cultural event, and the evaluation of gender roles, symbols, and cultural stereotypes in a trio of films bring the students into the assignments, actively participating and creating connections between their experiences and course concepts and theories. In the context of the cognitive tasks, these types of assignments necessitate hands-on activity (or active manipulation of information) and are not laid out for the student on the Internet or in a book. Students have to operate on the information, not just regurgitate it” (Heckler, Forde, & Bryan, 2013, p. 96). Interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of course material
City University of Seattle has a uniform, institution-wide policy that defines scholastic dishonesty and uses the same reference format across schools. This consistency in messaging is a key aspect of an exemplary practice that creates a student-friendly approach to prevent plagiarism. “While plagiarism will never be eliminated, if they wish to attack the problem with more than words and penalties, good governance is a beginning....Governance, including consistent management, cohesive policies, guidance, processes and decision-rights, is a broad canvas, but given willpower and resources, there is no reason it cannot work” (Choo & Paull, 2013, p. 293).

Conclusion

An atmosphere of learning and collaboration – fostered by efforts to reduce plagiarism, increase student awareness, and strengthen skills in synthesizing, quoting, paraphrasing, and citing – starts with the institution’s efforts. Student buy-in to values of academic integrity and ethics is a fundamental ingredient to success. Equally, faculty bear responsibility for mitigating plagiarism through creating experiential and unique assessments, defining plagiarism and emphasizing academic integrity, and enhancing opportunities in the classroom to learn proper citation style and paraphrasing and quotation skills (Choo & Paull, 2013; Evering & Moorman, 2012; Gibson et al., 2006; Heckler, Rice, & Bryan, 2013). Teaching faculty and students how to read draft plagiarism-detection reports and how to use these reports to help address the causes of scholastic dishonesty is a recipe for academic success. Framing the institution’s scholastic honesty committee as a tool that educates, as well as sanctions, students inculcates skills of ethics and communication, forming the coating that protects academic integrity and academic honesty of scholarly work.

References


