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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.

Pedagogical Strategies and Training to Avoid Plagiarism

Integrity, ethics, and communication are essential ingredients in academia. Blended together, they form the coating surrounding the dissemination of ideas. Without these essential ingredients, ideas and words – the core – can be stolen and copied. Digital access to articles, texts, blogs, and a myriad of other sources is widespread. A majority of college presidents in a 2011 Pew research survey reported that plagiarism has increased since the turn of the 21st century, with the Internet and computers playing a key role (Parker, Lenhart, & Moore, 2011). A three-year survey of 63,700 undergraduate students in the United States and 9,250 U.S. graduate students showed that a third of undergraduates and a quarter of graduate students admitted to paraphrasing or copying a few sentences from both online and written sources without citing them (McCabe, 2005).

Plagiarism is a complex phenomenon, and studies have produced contradictory findings. For example, one recent study of university students showed that the threat of plagiarism-detection software did not reduce the amount of plagiarism (Youmans, 2011), while another study of university students found that awareness of the application of plagiarism-detection tools deterred plagiarism (Heckler, Rice, & Bryan, 2013). Use of plagiarism-detection software resulted in formative effects in other studies, as some students sought education on the issue and favored the tools for both education and detection (Dahl, 2007; Rolfe, 2011).

This presents educators with a quandary. Online access to material and digital-only documents are vital aspects of learning and teaching today. How do educators instill the integrity and ethics required for students to communicate their own ideas using support from previous research rather than copying someone else's work? What strategies can be used to create a culture of learning where integrity and ethics are valued?

Common reasons for plagiarism include ignorance, procrastination, access to papers for sale, cultural acceptance, and ease (Gibson, C. W. Blackwell, Greenwood, Mobley, & R. W. Blackwell, 2006; Rolfe, 2011). The City University of Seattle Scholastic Honesty Board (SHB) has witnessed all of these reasons in hearings of scholastic dishonesty allegations. The Youmans (2011) and Heckler, Rice, and Bryan (2013) studies reflected many of these motives.

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 discredits 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 (Delcours & 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

and resources foster critical thinking, connections, and originality. Critical thinking leads to fewer instances of plagiarism (Heckler, Forde, & Bryan, 2013). Creating these more personalized assessments has an added benefit of being harder for students to find such papers on pay-for-paper websites.

Use Scholastic Honesty Committees as Teaching Opportunities

Scholastic honesty committees can send powerful messages to the student body regarding academic values of integrity, scholarly recognition, and accurate citations and attributions of other people's words. The model used at City University of Seattle is a blend of education and punishment. The SHB, made up of faculty and staff from all schools, treats every case on an individual basis, seeing its role as educating students on paraphrasing, use of quotation marks, and use of in-text and bibliographic references. Yet the Board's actions are punitive as well, so the seriousness of the infraction is understood and sends a clear message that academic integrity and scholastic honesty are of utmost importance to a community of scholars. As each case is different, the Board may require the student to rewrite the paper with a penalty, give the student a 0 for the assignment or a 0 for the course, or suspend the student for repeated or particularly egregious acts of scholastic dishonesty.

Based on thorough discussion with the student regarding motives, situation, prior learning, understanding of the problem and its significance, willingness to learn, and recognition and ownership of the offense, the Board assesses whether it is an educational issue or a moral problem. Getting away with using someone else's words and ideas as one's own is not an option; intentionality is irrelevant, as copying is stealing regardless of intent, and it is wrong. A student-friendly approach means teaching this philosophy to students, providing resources and guidance to prevent future plagiarism, and using plagiarism-detection reports as educational tools. Yet even though plagiarism-detection reports should be used as student-centered tools to teach writing skills, they still serve a purpose to catch scholastic dishonesty, including matches to pay-for-paper websites, large chunks of material copied word for word with few of the student's own words, no or few in-text citations or references, and the majority of the paper's content and structure coming from a single source.

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.

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