Griffith
UNIVERSITY

GIHE | Griffith Institute for
Higher Education

Good Practice Guide

Issues of Academic Integrity:
Plagiarism

Context and Key Issues

Academic integrity is fundamental to academic life at the University. Academic Integrity means academic honesty and implies that students and teachers abide by a code of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (Centre for Academic Integrity, 2000) in relation to the production, publication, assessment and exchange of knowledge in learning, teaching and research.

The Griffith University Institutional Framework for Promoting Academic Integrity among Students, outlines activities that represent breaches of academic integrity such as cheating in examinations, fabrication of results, plagiarism, collusion, duplication and misrepresentation. Griffith University regards all forms of academic misconduct as unacceptable because they undermine the core academic values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

Plagiarism is both a complex and a key issue in academic integrity and, unlike cheating, which is always intentional, may be inadvertent or deliberate (James et al. 2002). Deliberate plagiarism should attract the same response as all types of cheating. However, in the case of inadvertent plagiarism, those individuals responsible for identifying and or dealing with these breaches need a broad understanding of why it occurs. Plagiarism can be minimised by a range of measures of which the most important is ensuring that students understand the value the University places on respecting the intellectual property of others, particularly through correct acknowledgement and referencing.

Effective approaches to reducing plagiarism are built on a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, what motivates students to plagiarise, and how to educate students, both domestic and international, so as to avoid both deliberate and inadvertent plagiarism.

What constitutes Plagiarism?

Plagiarism can take any of the five following (adapted from Murdoch University) forms:
- *Verbatim copying:* Copying word for word without any acknowledgement of the source
- *Incorrect/inadequate acknowledgement:* Verbatim material incorrectly noted as having been paraphrased, or material that has been paraphrased and has not been acknowledged adequately.
- *Collusion:* Copying material from another's assignment with his/her knowledge.
- *Ghost writing:* Submitting an assignment as your own when it has been written by a third party.
- *Purloining or appropriation:* Copying material from another's assignment without his/her knowledge.

What motivates students to plagiarise?

Academics indicate that they perceive the reasons for **intentional** plagiarism to include: laziness, greed for grades, deceitfulness, competitiveness, lack of time and apathy. However the list of reasons given by students themselves is more extensive and includes: helping a friend, extenuating circumstances, peer pressure, fear of failure, "everybody does it", laziness and cost of education (Franklin-Stokes & Newstead, 1995).

Further research by Park (2003) into this area suggests the following reasons for plagiarising amongst Australian students:
1. Efficiency gain – a better grade in less time;
2. Time management issues;
3. Students' personal values that may be influenced by social pressure – it's okay to plagiarise;
4. Defiance – a deliberate sign of dissent and/or objection to assessment tasks;
5. Negative student attitudes towards teachers and/or assessment tasks;
6. Denial or neutralisation of plagiarism-related behaviour;

7. Temptation and opportunity via the digitisation of information; and
8. Lack of deterrence –low chance of being caught/effectively punished.

What influences unintentional plagiarism?

In a DEST funded project (2002), James outlines factors that influenced unintentional plagiarism:
- Students' lack of understanding of the concept of plagiarism and what it means in practice;
- Students' lack of understanding of citation and referencing conventions;
- Students' limited skill base in academic skills (such as critical analysis, constructing an argument and paraphrasing) and in learning skills (such as time, group, workload and stress management); and
- Student misunderstanding and ignorance about why and how they should avoid plagiarism".

Cultural factors that may also influence either intentional or unintentional plagiarism include:
- A norm of learning by rote where it is acceptable not to acknowledge the source;
- Inadequate skills in paraphrasing because English is the student's second language;
- Belonging to a 'culture of pleasing', so desiring to submit first class work to a respected teacher (Mathews, 2007); and
- Fear of bringing dishonour to one's family by failing.

Strategies to reduce plagiarism

Orientating and supporting students
In order to adequately prepare, orientate and support students, academics need to:
- Explain explicitly and clearly what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. (Many students believe that it is simply copying work from other sources, a practice which is accepted in some cultures.);
- Raise awareness of the consequences of plagiarism and advise students about the use of text matching software;
- Provide information about academic writing including proper procedures for quotation, citation and referencing and how to paraphrase;
- Facilitate access to English language assistance;
- Provide guidance on time management skills to help students balance their academic and personal lives; and
- Provide appropriate study skills advice.

Teaching Practices
Academics can reduce the likelihood of plagiarism through:
- Effective assessment design such as: varying assignment tasks from year to year; making tasks course-specific and locally relevant; avoiding widely available case material; requiring multiple case studies or material from multiple sources to be included in student work;
- Applying text matching software to electronically submitted assignments;
- Appropriately counselling students when incidences of plagiarism are detected;
- Seeking advice on dealing with cultural diversity in the classroom. (For example, Mathews (2007) discusses the need to address international students' confidence in giving their opinion);
- Designing assignments that require students' opinions and emphasising that you are evaluating their opinions not their command of English. (Many students come from cultures where pleasing the instructor is paramount and are not accustomed to being asked for their opinion.); and
- Modelling appropriate behaviour by correctly referencing study materials and power point presentations.

What to do if you find instances of plagiarism

For RHD students, consult the University's Academic Misconduct Policy in the Griffith University Policy Library.
For all other students, consult the INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AMONG STUDENTS at http://www62.gu.edu.au/policylibrary.nsf

References:
Centre for Academic Integrity , 2000) http://ethics.sandiego.edu/eac/Summer2000/Readings/Principles.html
James, R., McInnis, C., & Devlin, M. (2002). Minimising Plagiarism. In *Assessing Learning in Australian Universities.* Australia: Centre for the Study of Higher Education.
Matthews, P, (2007), A system tailor-made for cheats. *The Australian.*(44)
Franklyn-Stokes, A. & Newstead, S.E. (1995). Undergraduate cheating: who does what and why? *Studies in Higher Education*, 20(2), 159-172.
Murdoch University Academic Integrity http://www.murdoch.edu.au/teach/plagiarism/)
Park, C. (2003). In Other (People's) Words: Plagiarism by University Students - Literature and Lessons. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(5), 471-488.