PREVENTING PLAGIARISM

Dealing with students who have plagiarized can be one of the most unpleasant aspects of teaching. Some plagiarism is clearly intentional; however, much of it can be traced to poor research habits developed in high school, unclear understanding of the conventions of the academy, careless paraphrasing, or poor record keeping.

Fortunately, by carefully planning your instruction and assignments, you can do a number of things to prevent, or at least limit, plagiarism.

Robert Harris, author of "Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers," notes that preventing plagiarism starts with your syllabus, where you include the definition of plagiarism. Then, before you assign a paper or oral presentation, you explain how important academic integrity is and how you deal with plagiarism. Next, you make the assignment so specific to your course that downloading or "borrowing" a paper is difficult. In other words, the narrower the topic or the more specific it is to your class, the less likely it is that a papermill will have a paper on that topic. Harris suggests that your assignment require several of the following:

- Two very recent sources (published within the last year)
- A personal interview
- Information that you provide
- A discussion of an article or book you assigned
- A very specific format

It is an excellent idea, according to Harris, to educate students about plagiarism, including showing them acceptable and unacceptable paraphrasing, appropriate ways to quote, and the citation style you want. A transparency or Power Point slide showing good and poor examples of citing and paraphrasing can be shared with the whole class quickly. Students should also know that, as an experienced instructor, you are very familiar with the difference between the writing style of an undergraduate and that of a professional journalist or experienced scientist.

In addition, he notes that getting involved in the various steps of the paper makes it more difficult for students to plagiarize. You can do this by requiring at least two of the following:

- A preliminary bibliography (annotated is even better)
- Different sections due over the course of the semester
- At least one conference with a rough draft
- An oral presentation that includes a question and answer session
- Working URL pointers to all pertinent web sources
- Photocopies (within reason) of sections of print sources where material has been cited
- All rough drafts handed in with the final draft

Finally, when the paper is handed in, Harris recommends that the students write a cover note (similar to a memo of transmittal in a business setting). It should be a short written reflection on what they have learned from their research, what research strategies they followed, what the most frustrating part of the research process was, what is strong and what is weak in the paper, and what they would like to learn more about. This activity not only benefits the students because they have a chance to think about their own learning process, but it also makes it easy for you to see if a student's knowledge matches the depth of the paper and whether the student's writing style differs considerably from the writing style of the paper.

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Harris also adds that you should make sure that your students know that you know how to use the web to detect plagiarism. If you go to Google.com or Dogpile.com and—using quotation marks—type in a suspect phrase or a sentence directly from the student's paper, you can find not only if those words have been previously published, but also where they have been published. In addition, you might have students attempt to find plagiarized passages in each other's papers during a peer review exercise.

If you do decide to ask students to provide printed copies of their source materials, whether from websites or print sources, be judicious. Many campuses already spend too much money on printing. Reviewing student papers online is one way to quickly check links to web sources. You might also have students bring in a couple of source pages from cited material as part of a review lesson on how to cite directly quoted language and how to paraphrase with attribution.

QUICK AND DIRTY WAYS TO DETECT PLAGIARISM

- Mixed citation style

- Lack of references, paraphrases, or quotations

- Unusual formatting

- Datedness (all references at least 5 years old)

- Straying from the assigned topic

- Shifts in diction

- Shifts in style

USEFUL SOURCES

http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm takes a while to load

http://www.chron.com/content/chronicle/editorial/97/09/29/galles.0-0.html

http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html

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