



Designing out plagiarism

Title of case: Assessment design to discourage copy-and-paste assignments

Target audience: Academic teaching staff, Academic staff developers

Key issue being addressed: Assessments that invite copy-and-paste plagiarism

Purpose of the case: To assist academic staff in “designing out” plagiarism opportunities

Materials and preparation

- Remind participants to find and access appropriate policy and academic integrity resources at own institution prior to coming to session.
- Copy of university academic integrity policy, and procedures.
- Copies of recent assessment tasks in your own courses

The case

Abstract

Jennifer does not allow enough time to write her assignment and so copies and pastes from internet sources. She is found out and receives an outcome for a ‘first offence’.

Jennifer¹ is a 2nd year Bachelor of Education student. The topic of her first assignment was: ‘School Bullying: What are some causes of bullying in schools? What are the effects on the persons involved? What interventions are possible?’

The timing for submission coincided with two other assignments. She had put off starting on these during the earlier part of the semester, and had run out of time as the deadlines loomed. She remembered some personal experience of being bullied in her middle years of high school and so decided to put her effort into the other two assignments and ‘wing it’ with this one.

When she came to write it, there was very little time left. She scanned two readings on the topic, copied and pasted relevant passages together into a patchwork, with suitable linking texts of her own. She modified the downloaded material, changing sufficient amounts of the downloaded wordings to blend them in with her own style and felt that she had made a fair job under the topic’s three headings.

However, her lecturer is suspicious, puts the assignment through text-matching software. Jennifer’ short-cut is found out and she receives the prescribed outcome for a ‘first offence’.

Points for consideration

- Assignment question is asking no more than re-stating facts and ideas that are easily found and downloaded.

¹ All characters in the case are pseudonyms

- Coordinating the timing of assignments to avoid bottle necks
- The use of Turnitin or other text matching software on individual assignments rather than the whole class.

Questions for discussion

1. What would the outcome have been for Jennifer's blatant short-cut, according to your university's academic integrity policy?
2. Should the lecturer submit all the assignments to the text-matching service, rather than just the one that looked suspect? What action would she take if she found that Jennifer's approach was more widespread than first thought?
3. Would you agree that the assignment was "just asking for students to plagiarise"? (James et al 2002, p.47) (Check your own assignments against this point).

Some useful References

Carroll, J. (2002) *A Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education*. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development

Asking for drafts ... Assessing process as well as final product ... Reconsidering essay titles ... Using defined requirements and narrow ask specifications ... Insisting that students engage with the literature ... Using other methods of recording learning for assessment (pp41-48)

Dysthe (2011) 'What is the Purpose of Feedback when Revision is not Expected?' A Case Study of Feedback Quality and Study Design in a First Year Master's Programme. *Journal of Academic Writing* 1(1) pp 126-134

<http://e-learning.coventry.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/joaw/>

The most important implication for future practice ... is the importance of the study design for students' use of feedback for learning (p140)

James, R., McInnes, C., & Devlin, M. (2002). Assessing learning in Australian universities [Electronic Version]. <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning>

Insist on evidence for significant claims and let students know that the assignment will not be assessed if this evidence is missing (p45)

(Citing Culwin & Lancaster, 2001) Set the assignment specification on a unique or recent event on which there is unlikely to be much material available (p44)

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