

FINAL REPORT
OF THE
AD HOC COMMITTEE ON
STUDENT PLAGIARISM (ACOSP)

Presented at the
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COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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Ad Hoc Committee on Student Plagiarism (ACOSP)

INTRODUCTION

The Ad Hoc Committee on Student Plagiarism was established by the University of Massachusetts Faculty Senate on 3 November of 2005 (Sen. Doc. No. 06-009) due to the increasing accessibility of computers and the ease of copying material from other sources; thus, creating the potential for plagiarism. Specifically the Committee was charged with making recommendations to the Faculty Senate with respect to:

- How the University of Massachusetts Amherst should conceptualize the issue of student plagiarism in the 21st century and communicate that concept to the academic community;
- How the University of Massachusetts Amherst should teach to the issue of student plagiarism;
- How the University of Massachusetts Amherst should support faculty in preventing student plagiarism;
- How the University of Massachusetts Amherst should protect the student's right to due process in student plagiarism cases while ensuring a maximum of effectiveness and efficiency of the process with a minimum of bureaucratic "red tape;"
- How the University of Massachusetts Amherst should improve any or all of its practices and procedures with respect to student plagiarism;
- The revision of the guide from the Ombuds Office, "What to Do If You Suspect Academic Dishonesty, a Guide for Faculty and Instructors."

The Committee first met in December, 2005 and chose Profs. Hertzbach and Conner as co-chairs. The Committee was composed of faculty, librarians, and administrators including representatives from the Ombuds Office, the Writing program, and the Center for Teaching and both graduate and undergraduate students. Two working groups were assembled to address the areas of (1) teaching about plagiarism, and (2) enforcement of a "modified" honesty policy at UMASS. The committee memberships are indicated below.

"Process / Policy" – Catharine Porter, Chair

Members: Carey Dimmitt, John Kleschinsky, Stephen (Olbrys) Gencarella, Sigrid Schmalzer, Pat Stowell

"Teaching" – Donna LeCourt, Chair

Members: Jane Baran, Judith Goodenough, Susan McKenna, Anne C. Moore, Sigrid Schmalzer, Stephen (Olbrys) Gencarella, Mathew Ouellett

The Committee as a whole investigated the use of alternative forms of software (Turnitin® and Mydropbox®) that were available to detect plagiarized material within submitted documents. During this investigation, the Committee uncovered several court cases that raised questions regarding several of the practices being employed by these two services. The Committee, however, was able to induce the software manufacturers to modify their policies and practices so that the Committee and the campus community could responsibly evaluate the efficacy of these two plagiarism detection programs. The evaluation that ensued covered a full academic year and led us eventually to recommend Turnitin® as the preferred software program. We also recommended changes to the Academic Regulations that were consistent with the use of detection software. These changes were adopted in the spring of 2007.

The two subcommittees have completed their portions of the Committee's duties. Details are provided below.

Policies and Procedures Subcommittee

The subcommittee met to discuss and review the proposed revisions of the existing *Academic Honesty Policy* as presented by the Academic Honesty Office. The Policy as well as a *Brief Guide for Faculty and Instructors* were studied and suggestions for revisions were offered to Catharine Porter and Mary Wardwell in the Academic Honesty Office, c/o the Ombuds Office.

Several changes to the current policy were proposed, intended to address the main faculty concerns about handling of academic dishonesty cases.

- Faculty expressed reluctance to file formal charges because of the long term effect on the student's record and, thus, their professional and educational opportunities. Now, except where University sanctions are involved, the discipline record is expunged upon graduation.
- Faculty expressed reluctance about settling a case informally, concerned that a student might "cheat her/his way through college". In the new policy, informal resolutions must be reported to and are tracked by the Academic Honesty Office. An informal resolution requires the signature of both parties agreeing to the resolution, including the sanction. If a student is found to have more than two informal resolutions, a University sanction hearing is automatically scheduled to determine if sanctions should be invoked. Faculty do not need to attend this hearing.
- Both faculty and students expressed concern about the complexity and duration of the process itself. The process has been simplified. Forms were developed to simplify filing charges, agreeing to informal resolutions and filing appeals.
- Faculty were concerned that existing language in the policy held students responsible for plagiarism only if they "intended" to plagiarize. Language relating to intentionality has been stripped from the new policy, thus removing any suggestion that faculty filing plagiarism charges are required to prove intent or that students may appeal on the grounds that they did not understand the significance of their actions.

Students' rights to due process continue to be protected under the newly revised policy as they have the right to appeal a formal charge of academic dishonesty. No student can be dismissed from a class because of academic dishonesty until her/his appeal has been heard.

Once the Academic Honesty Office reviewed the suggestions, the revisions were completed, and the document was sent to a joint meeting of the Rules Committee, Academic Matters Council and the Graduate Council. Following input from these committees, the Policy was finalized and approved at a special meeting of the Faculty Senate on May 17, 2007.

A guide for faculty and instructors was also reviewed by the Rules Committee and ACOSP.

Education and Teaching Subcommittee

The subcommittee began by discussing plagiarism and the educational needs of faculty and students in this area. The following needs and/or requirements were identified.

- Students must be informed of our expectations regarding academic integrity, why faculty feel strongly about academic honesty (and plagiarism in particular), and why they should care as well.
- Students also need help in understanding what constitutes plagiarism and techniques to avoid plagiarism.
- Faculty need assistance in structuring their assignments¹ in a manner that does not facilitate plagiarism, and in teaching about the issue.

¹ This does not mean limiting written assignments, but instead, avoiding repeating the same assignments year after year, as an example.

- Faculty also need information about the technology available to detect plagiarism, and how to use it as a teaching tool.

The subcommittee on Teaching began developing educational materials on plagiarism for students and faculty in the spring 2006 semester. Early in the process, committee members conducted a phone-survey of faculty who had participated in the trial of Turnitin, the plagiarism detection tool that had been used on campus the previous spring. The resulting information on how faculty viewed plagiarism, their response(s) to it, and the instructional support they needed, provided guidance for the subcommittee's work. The Center for Teaching was asked to collect "best practices" from across campus on teaching issues related to plagiarism.

The subcommittee drafted content for a Web site (<http://twiki.brianhoule.net/bin/view/Plagiarism/WebHome>). Once the content has been approved by the Faculty Senate, the Web site will be posted to <http://www.umass.edu/academicintegrity/> and maintained by the Libraries. In addition to resources for students and for faculty, the Web site contains the UMass definition of academic honesty, including plagiarism, and links to the current Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures, and to the Brief Guide for Faculty and Instructors, "What to do if you suspect academic dishonesty."

Student resources available on the Web site are organized around education on (1) why academic honesty matters, (2) plagiarism and intellectual property, and (3) tips on avoiding plagiarism. Much of this material was written by the committee, but there are some external links. In the first section, there is emphasis on intellectual integrity, the integrity of information, intellectual growth, and the learning process. This section ends with examples of plagiarism, using external links.

The section on academic honesty recognizes that our students come from a variety of schools and backgrounds. Their understanding and attitudes on plagiarism, and academic honesty in general, vary widely, depending on the norm in their high school and country of origin. For this reason, statements were developed on cultural differences in approaches to intellectual property, and related law. This is important information for both students and faculty.

Tips to help students avoid plagiarism include web-based guides, tutorials, and quizzes from other universities, citation styles for various academic disciplines, and the research literacy web page at our Commonwealth College (<http://www.comcol.umass.edu/academics/researchliteracy/index.html>).

Resources for faculty include advice on the use of the Turnitin interface and suggestions for two possible statements about plagiarism that faculty might include in course syllabi, depending on how the faculty has chosen to use Turnitin: for all assignments or just for checking suspect papers. This section includes a discussion of the use of Turnitin as a teaching tool. There is also information on introducing plagiarism to students and structuring assignments that make it more difficult for students to plagiarize. Content also provides "quick tips" and extensive resources for classroom instruction around questions of plagiarism and intellectual property. It ends with a few selected external links.

Subscription Plagiarism Prevention Services

The UMass Amherst Libraries subscribed to the Turnitin plagiarism prevention service for the campus population beginning in January 2006, following an 11-month trial period. The service detects textual matches between UMass Amherst papers submitted by the student or faculty member electronically and other documents available in electronic form on the Internet, in subscription databases, and in databases of student papers. UMass Amherst student papers are stored in a segregated database exclusively accessible to

UMass Amherst faculty during the grading process. Hence, student intellectual property is respected and protected from others. Faculty review color-coded “originality reports” that display sections of text with significant matches to other papers and make their own assessment of whether the student has cited sources appropriately. In cases of improper paraphrasing, documentation, or other issues, the faculty member decides whether to follow informal or formal procedures.

Between February 16, 2005, when the trial subscription began, and May 1, 2008, Turnitin has been used at UMass Amherst by 366 faculty and 7,241 students with 15,416 student papers submitted (438 matched 75-100% while 519 matched 50-75%). Over time, faculty interest in using Turnitin has expanded exponentially. Most faculty begin using Turnitin because they receive one or more suspect papers and want to check them to provide documentation to talk with and teach the students respect for intellectual property. Once faculty use Turnitin to check isolated assignments, the next semester they typically integrate its use into their courses by having the entire class submit assignments directly to Turnitin either through the standalone product or through the Powerlink inside SPARK. Since the Powerlink, which enables students to submit assignments directly to Turnitin inside SPARK without a separate sign-on, was installed by OIT in January 2007, 77 instructor or TA accounts have been set-up for use inside SPARK.

ACOSP maintained a trial to another plagiarism prevention service, MyDropBox, alongside the subscription to Turnitin from spring 2006 through spring 2007. During this period, faculty were encouraged to test both services, although Turnitin received 98% of the traffic. MyDropBox signed a contract with Blackboard in spring 2007 and the SafeAssignment product will be integrated into the Blackboard Course Management System and eventually into Vista (SPARK) at no additional expense. SPARK courses will be able to use SafeAssignment as they presently use Turnitin integrated into SPARK through the Powerlink that was configured by OIT in January 2007. The SafeAssignment and Turnitin services both check papers against the open Internet, publicly available databases such as PubMed, Medline, and Project Gutenberg, papers submitted by students at the institution, and articles included in ProQuest ABI Inform. Turnitin also checks student papers against the Gale Infotrac Onefile database of published articles.

The UMass Amherst Libraries provide access and technical support for faculty and students using the standalone Turnitin service. For information, faculty can visit <http://www.library.umass.edu/tools/plagiarism/>. The Office of Information Technologies supports Turnitin integrated into SPARK. For information, faculty should visit <http://www.oit.umass.edu/webct/campus-vista/faculty/turnitin/>. Faculty can also get help from Academic Computing's Instructional Media Lab (545-2823 | instruct@oit.umass.edu). Students can get help from the OIT Help Desk (545-9400).

In December 2007, the Libraries renewed the license for Turnitin and the Powerlink that integrates Turnitin into SPARK for the calendar 2008 year. One Psychology faculty member was given an account to experiment with the Grademark feature (a digital markup system that gives instructors the ability to edit and grade papers completely online) to determine if it provides features of instructional advantage that are not available through other interfaces such as SPARK.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee offers the following recommendations to the Faculty Senate

- Appoint a small group of faculty, staff and student representatives to publicize and institutionalize this program. The charge for the committee would be to:
 - Maintain currency and accuracy of materials.
 - Communicate to all faculty the academic honesty policy, the Turnitin service, and sources of supporting information for both faculty and students.
 - Incorporate instruction in academic honesty and plagiarism in a First-Year Experience course, English 112, and other appropriate courses.
 - Encourage faculty to inform students about the academic honesty policy and plagiarism.
- Encourage centralized funding of the standalone and SPARK-integrated Turnitin service with licensing managed by the Libraries and support shared by the Libraries and OIT.
- Approve migration of the Teaching Subcommittee's web content (<http://twiki.brianhoule.net/bin/view/Plagiarism/WebHome>) to <http://www.umass.edu/academichonesty/> with maintenance of the Web site assigned to the Libraries.
- Dissolve the present Ad Hoc Committee on Student Plagiarism.

MOVED: **That the Faculty Senate receive the Final Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student**
34-08 **Plagiarism, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 08-032, and thank the Committee for its**
 excellent work which is now complete.