

Teaching Tip #5 for 2015: Encouraging Work That Shows Attainment of Outcomes While Preventing Plagiarism and Cheating

Questions: Why do students submit work that is not their own? How can we prevent this? How do we draw lines between documentation errors and subversion? Are there generational and cultural issues with plagiarism?

Key Words: Assessment, Cheating, Course Outcomes, Grading, International Students, Plagiarism.

Conestoga's Academic Offence Numbers

Since 2009, 1124 academic offence forms have been filed at Conestoga. One hundred academic offences were filed in 2009 and 302 in 2014. A large number of the offences relate to plagiarism. We need to reduce this number.

A charge of plagiarism is not a positive experience for anyone. The consequences to the student can be substantial yet faculty must file. Faculty are responsible for determining the degree to which each student has met the course learning outcomes and we must know that the student is demonstrating his/her own ability and work.

Avoiding researched or written projects is not the answer. A report, essay, or paper can be a useful way of collecting evidence of student attainment of outcomes. Students can show evidence of achievement through this type of product and learn from the process. Written work can also become part of a student portfolio.

We need to design written projects so that they allow students to display their own learning while decreasing the likelihood that a student will plagiarize or cheat.

Discriminating between original, plagiarized, and illicitly obtained work is challenging. Students may fail to document their sources in an attempt to make their writing and ideas appear stronger. Pretending that the work of another is your own in a written product or in a presentation is plagiarism. Students may also simply be poor researchers and writers struggling with locating, expressing and documenting their research sources.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

There is no doubt that the reasons for plagiarizing are complex. Anecdotally, it seems that more international students are caught plagiarizing. This may make sense as faculty would more easily be able to identify a change in the writing or a mismatch with the student's usual work. However, the two references for this teaching tip both refer to the fact that many (about 50%) of North American university students admit to plagiarizing or cheating at some point in their post-secondary studies. See those articles for some of the reasons students may plagiarize. Our goal is not to catch more students but to prevent the act from occurring.

Brillinger, Moran, & Sivell (2014) offer insights into student plagiarism and advice for preventing it. They suggest that "there are reasons to remain open to the perspective that writing from scholarly sources is a legitimately difficult task, that unacceptable paraphrase may reflect error resulting from lack of skill rather than duplicity, and that in such cases the most appropriate response may be educational rather than punitive."

A study of post-graduate nursing students, many returning to formal schooling after years at work, comes to a similar conclusion:

Punitive responses to students who do not reference appropriately should be avoided in the first instance, except where gross breaches occur, and clear distinctions should be made between formatting problems and failure to recognize sources. A preventative approach, followed by an educative response to plagiarism, could form the first level of response to most minor cases of plagiarism. Software that detects plagiarism will not successfully decrease plagiarism unless they are linked to referencing skill-development programs. However, such software can be used in an educative framework, where students are encouraged to assume responsibility for correctly attributing ideas to the work of others. (Greenwood, Walkem, Smith, Shearer, & Stirling 2014).

We need to work together to create opportunities for students to demonstrate learning through written work where plagiarizing is not an option. We can build in preventive measures.

Suggestions and Innovations:

Be sure that students do not submit high stakes writing to you without having had helpful instructions and formative feedback.

Instructions and Examples for the Assignment

1. Ensure that you provide written instructions that warn about the consequences for plagiarism and link to college resources. The Learning Commons Writing Centre provides guidance to students at [Learning Commons](#) or by appointment.
2. Provide instructions on your expectations for resource use and quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing.
3. Have an example of previous student work (with permission). Highlight how it meets the expectations.
4. Use examples of the type you expect to see in student work in your teaching and call attention to the examples. Say, "As you can see I am quoting directly from _____. They conducted research on _____." and "This slide summarizes a research study by _____. You can see my citation here and the associated reference on the last slide." and "Here I am paraphrasing the findings of _____. Note the citation with the authors and the year."
5. Show the student the Academic Offences Form and be clear that you will file it for plagiarism and cheating.
6. Show the class that poor documentation is assessed on the rubric and will have an impact on the mark.

Set Up of the Assignment

1. Do not recycle topics (or have a large pool and randomize the topics over several years). Change the variables within topics each semester. Personalize the task to each student.
2. Limit the number of sources and the volume of the final product. Carefully consider how much you need to read and the student needs to research and write so that you have evidence that they have met the course learning outcomes.
3. Institute a "three-before-me" mechanism. Have students tell you what three steps they will take to get feedback prior to submission. Feedback sources could include: visiting the LRC for research advice, making an appointment at the Learning Commons, making an appointment with you for formative feedback, or arranging a peer feedback session. Always be willing to consult with the student.
4. Separate the PROCESS from the PRODUCT so that students can see your expectations for both. Have an in-class workshop after they do their preliminary research. Have each student bring evidence of their work to date. Circulate and provide feedback and guidance. You can

reward this with a section on the final rubric for evidence of preliminary work.

5. Click the "Turnitin" button in the Conestoga drop box and allow multiple submission so students can check their own papers for originality and make adjustments prior to submitting the paper for marking.

Documentation Error, Plagiarism or Cheating

1. It takes time to confirm plagiarism. A high percentage score on "Turnitin" may alert you to a problem but it can also just indicate the student has poor writing skills and has used extensive quoting. Go to [Turnitin Instructor Training](#) and watch one of their videos on interpreting the results and preventing plagiarism.
2. A student may have made some documentation errors. Be sure to have a section(s) of your rubric where you evaluate scholarly work: resource choice, citing, referencing, etc. In cases of faulty documentation, penalize in this section. Don't file an offence.
3. Even with all your efforts at prevention, the student may have used pieces of someone else's work in an attempt to subvert the system and get a higher grade (plagiarism) or have bought or borrowed someone else's work (cheating). Such cases must be filed as Academic Offences. Call the Registrar's Office to see if this is a first offence and file the form. See the Academic Integrity Policy and Procedure under Academic Administration at [Conestoga Policies](#)

References

Brillinger, K., Moran, K., & Sivell, J. (2014). Understanding Student Plagiarism and Advice for Practical Action. CONTACT English Language Learning Magazine, 36-44. Volume 40, Number 1. [Link to Article](#)

Greenwood, M., Walkem, K., Smith, L. M., Shearer, T., & Stirling, C. (2014). Postgraduate nursing student knowledge, attitudes, skills, and confidence in appropriately referencing academic work. The Journal Of Nursing Education, 53(8), 447-452. [LRC Permalink](#)