

Plagiarism FAQ

sources.

What is it?

Plagiarism is the practice of claiming or implying original authorship of (or incorporating material from) someone else's written or creative work, in whole or in part, into one's own without adequate acknowledgement. (Wikipedia Contributors, 2008)

How much of a problem is it?

- In the first national survey of plagiarism in the UK carried out by Northumbria Learning 97% of the 114 HE institutions surveyed felt that it was an issue for institutions (Davidson, 2004).
- In a survey of 300 sixth form teachers carried out by ATL (2008) 58% said plagiarism was a problem and a third estimated that more than 50% of student work contained plagiarised material.
- A QCA paper providing information on the issues affecting coursework assessment (QCA, 2005) highlights 'the internet has increased the potential for plagiarism'. It also warns 'Coursework assignments are available on the internet at any level and in any subject'.
- Freshminds (2004) in association with JISC-iPAS surveyed 600 recent graduates and 1000 NUS student officers in June 2004.
 - Whilst 97% felt plagiarism was cheating, 9% had plagiarised once, and 16% more than once
 - 21% believe plagiarism policies aren't strictly enforced by their institutions.
 - 26% believe policy is not effective in deterring students from plagiarising.
- Professor Don McCabe (2001), leading expert in academic integrity, in a May 2001 study of over 4,500 high school students, found the following:
 - 72% of students reported one or more instances of serious cheating on written work
 - 15% had submitted a paper obtained in large part from a term paper mill or website
 - 52% had copied a few sentences from a website without citing the source
 - 90% of the students using the internet to plagiarise had also plagiarised from written

What has changed to make plagiarism a problem now?

- Plagiarism is not a new problem, but whereas it used to be a local problem, the increase in use of the internet means that billions of documents are now freely available for downloading into an assignment.
- People may confuse freely available with 'free to use' and fail to acknowledge.

Why do students do it?

- Lack of understanding
 - Desire for a better mark
 - Bad time management
 - Different values
 - Challenging the system
 - Lack of respect for lecturers
 - Denial
 - Temptation and low perceived risk.
- (Park, 2003)

What role does technology and Internet play in the rise of plagiarism issues?

- IT literate students ('the Google generation') are familiar with a cut and paste and download culture. Freely available doesn't mean materials do not need to Cited.
- It has made certain types of information easier to assimilate and certain types of assignment more prone to cut & paste plagiarism.
- We have never had such ubiquitous access to good information and e-resources, unfortunately neither have we had such ubiquitous access to such large amounts of poor or non-authoritative information at the same time.
- The openness of the Internet does mean that the content is more diverse and less coloured by political or cultural barriers. Different perspectives can be examined and potentially important minority views discovered fairly easily. It is therefore essential for learners to have an enquiring mind, to be able to assimilate diverse information, to build a case for the authority of a source and to question all information

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which is placed in front of them. You might say that these are the very skills that would typify a University education.

Is traditional assessment at fault?

- Some traditional assignments that at one time would have required a student to demonstrate research skills, now only require them to type a question into Google.
- Well taught courses with well designed assessments are less prone to plagiarism by fostering a desire to learn through the assignment process.
- Personalised or discerning assignments which draw on the skills needed to extract information from the Internet and electronic resources can make the assessment both more relevant and rewarding for the learner. In this way assignment redesign can be an essential part of dealing with plagiarism on any given course.
- The Internet, arguably, can also provide a more interesting means of assessment, using tools which students are familiar with using in their personal lives, such as blogs and social networking tools.
- Occasionally people ask if we should stop written work? Written assignments are a valuable learning tool, removing them from the education process penalises the majority of hard working students who would benefit from extended written work assignments.

What do students feel about it?

A three-month survey of 3,200 students, conducted by Malcolm Bell (2006) of Northumbria University provided the following information:

Student understanding of plagiarism:

- 98% of students felt that “downloading or purchasing a piece of work from an essay bank and handing it in as your own work” constituted plagiarism. 97% understood plagiarism to cover “including material taken directly from a website

without referencing”.

- 93% felt that qualifications were devalued by students who used bought essays from the Internet.

Confidence in themselves and their Institution in dealing with the issue of plagiarism:

- When asked to rate their own confidence in correctly referencing others’ work when incorporating it into their own, 83% of students felt confident or very confident.
- Whilst 4 out of 5 students felt that Institutions dealt with plagiarism seriously, only 47% felt that their tutors would be able to spot plagiarism from the Internet.

Views on electronic detection:

- 87% of students supported the use of electronic detection tools, such as TurnitinUK with a small minority, 10%, feeling that it would make little difference to current practice.
- Perhaps with a view to future practice, respondents felt that the use of such software would help address the issue by discouraging the submission of work which is copied from the Internet but not credited (76%).
- 34% felt that students guilty of plagiarism should be made to re-sit either their module or course whilst 39% suggested a zero mark should be given. 1 in 10 felt that the guilty party should be kicked off their course.

How does Turnitin work and why is it seen as being important?

- Turnitin takes a student essay as input, compares it against the biggest specifically targeted database of essays, journals and Internet pages in existence and produces a report which identifies content which has been cut and paste from elsewhere.
- Nearly all UK universities, the unitary awarding bodies and a growing number of schools & colleges use Turnitin as their plagiarism detection solution.
- Turnitin is a fantastic catalyst for change; it provides an originality report which shows matching/copied content. This can operate as a really tangible way for staff and students to discuss the issues surrounding malpractice related to plagiarism as well as operating as a deterrent.

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- The use of this type of technology engages people in the process of addressing plagiarism by providing at least some measurable evidence of the extent of the issue.
- Although historically it has been referred to as a 'plagiarism detection system' it is actually the academic that makes the decision. It is really a decision support tool.
- It is used by many institutions and practitioners as a formative learning tool to make students more aware of good research practice and management skills.
- It can assist as part of a well-defined plagiarism prevention strategy by:
 - Encouraging tutors to easily monitor and teach about correct attribution
 - Working as a quality check for screening assignments
 - Operating as a catalyst for discourse between students and tutors about writing
 - Producing evidence of malpractice in extreme cases.
- One of the reasons the JICQ give for the rise in plagiarism is that "...candidates plagiarise the work of others because they think their production of coursework during the course will not be monitored" (JICQ, 2005). Detection software can be an effective way to make it clear that an institution is taking this issue seriously.

What of cheat sites and essay banks?

- There have always been books of model essays, short cuts and notes for sale and at least some students studying predictable academic curricula have been able to borrow the work of their predecessors.
- Now the process of managing and sharing essays has been automated and commercialised and it's proliferating.
- The internet makes it very easy to buy example essays on any subject. However originality is not guaranteed and a joint investigation by Professor

Charles Oppenheim of Loughborough University (UK) and the BBC concluded the quality was poor (BBC 2005).

- Some providers offer banks of model solutions and are keen to prevent students from submitting bank resources in place of their own work. Acumen PI for example, responded to requests from the academic community to place their content in Turnitin to prevent it being submitted as original work.

What about bespoke essay sites?

Potentially these sites are more problematic in that students are told that they are getting original and undetectable works.

However:

- It is difficult to know how original these essays are, and some independent evidence to date would suggest that they are not high in quality (BBC 2005).
- The actual authors of the content could well provide the same content to multiple sites.
- Google's move to ban advertising of contract essays is reducing the impact these sites have.

Can we address bespoke essay sites?

- The first thing to do is to improve the design of assignments to make them less prone to this form of malpractice (see 'Is traditional assessment at fault?').
- Turnitin can also help in this area because many of these essay sites make money by providing the same script multiple times (BBC 2005a).
- By default every item of work that enters Turnitin is stored for future comparisons by the system. By storing student papers we can, over time, build a record of contract essays and prevent their long-term value to these sites.
- Storage of student papers also prevents work being passed down from year group to year group or distribution via social networking sites.

How can we address plagiarism?

- Institutions should take a strategic approach to addressing plagiarism through a range of measures including technology solutions, study skills, changes in

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teaching learning practice and adjustments to institutional policies/procedures.

- It is important to engage students in a debate on plagiarism, and how academic misconduct can affect not only their academic careers, but also other students' prospects by devaluing their qualifications.
- But we need to take a step back and ask why students are so disenfranchised from their studies. Why don't they perceive there to be any value of the assignments they have been set? What is wrong that leads to this cynicism and can we change our teaching, learning and assessments strategies to achieve the learning objectives in ways that re-engage the students?

Plagiarism Debates

The following are a list of debates that are currently common within the sector:

- Information literacy
- The ethics of essay writing services
- Internet aware assignment setting
- Effectiveness of current policies
- When does collaboration become collusion
- How to reengage the learner

Disclaimer: These debates are raised purely in the interests of promoting discussion and debate on the topic of plagiarism and in no way reflect the beliefs and attitudes of either Northumbria Learning or the JISC Internet Plagiarism Advisory Service, their customers and their business associates.

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Notes to the editor:

About JISC iPAS

www.jiscpas.ac.uk

The JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) Internet Plagiarism Advisory Service (iPAS) provides generic advice and guidance on all aspects of plagiarism prevention and detection for academics and students to around 700 further and higher education institutions in the UK. The service promotes a holistic approach to plagiarism prevention incorporating the consideration of institutional policies and procedures, teaching practice and study skills. The JISC-iPAS is managed by Northumbria Learning a spin out of Northumbria University.

When was JISC - iPAS established?

The JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service was established in 2002 by JISC and is making significant progress towards raising awareness of plagiarism issues and promoting best practice in acknowledgement of sources.

From the beginning we have taken a solutions based approach which has led the service to grow into areas of University policy, procedures and consistency.

The non-technology related aspects of the service, for HE, have now been given a special focus within the Higher Education Academy as part of new complementary academic integrity initiative (AJIAS) being headed up by Dr Fiona Duggan. Our work continues as before for both FE and HE sectors under the slightly modified title of 'Internet Plagiarism Advisory Service'

What does iPAS provide?

In our view few students deliberately plagiarise and our key objective is to help institutions improve the learner's view of electronic information sources and their use in learning to improve education for all.

- ❖ Awareness Raising: Events, Orientation Guidance, JISC Mail
- ❖ Needs analysis and evidence base development: Surveys, Current practice, Risks and Gaps in best practice, conference papers (www.plagiarismconference.com)
- ❖ Creation of best practice: Case studies, review recommendation, content
- ❖ Support the community: Website, tip sheets, help desk, training

About N-Learning

www.nlearning.co.uk

Northumbria Learning is a spin out company of Northumbria University. Maintaining its solid academic roots, Northumbria Learning specialises in providing plagiarism prevention and detection products to a range of academic bodies throughout the UK and Europe. As well as managing the JISC iPAS, Northumbria Learning provides Turnitin to the education sector across Europe.

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