



Plagiarism Education: Considerations for the Semester Start-up



Plagiarism is concerning for colleges and universities (Curtis & Vardanega, 2016). Students begin higher education with varying degrees of knowledge on the topic of plagiarism; sometimes students have a limited understanding of the behaviors that constitute plagiarism. Gourlay and Deane (2012) suggest “a proportion of plagiarism is committed via confusion over how to integrate and reference source materials into academic writing” (p. 19). Moreover, some students might be unfamiliar regarding when they can claim an opinion as their own and when they need to use a citation (Ballantine & McCourt Larres, 2010). Being unfamiliar with the behaviors that constitute plagiarism might be a reason why students engage in this type of academic misconduct (Insley, 2011).

Providing students with plagiarism education, including class discussions on what is and what is not considered plagiarism, may help to combat the plagiarism engagement rate across campuses. Gullifer and Tyson (2010) reveal students feel that the plagiarism education they receive includes rules and warnings. Rules and warnings may do little, if anything, to teach students what plagiarism is. Instead, focusing on educating students about plagiarism may be more advantageous in developing their plagiarism knowledge.

Below are some ideas to consider if you are implementing plagiarism education in your courses:

Know your institution’s policies. Be familiar with your school’s academic misconduct policies. Having a thorough understanding of these policies, including the process for reporting and the location of necessary documents, can help when suspected plagiarism surfaces.

Find out what your students know about plagiarism. Learn what your students know about plagiarism. Discovering their background knowledge about plagiarism can help direct the conversation. Asking the class an open-ended question that focuses on what constitutes as plagiarism can help determine what type of education a particular group needs.

Provide different scenarios, some that include plagiarism and some that do not, and ask students if plagiarism is present. Instead of reading what plagiarism is from your institution’s policy, use different scenarios for interaction and discussion. Allowing students to engage with the content may help them better retain it. Consider the tasks that your students will complete in your course and create scenarios that are based on those tasks; this can help students learn what is unacceptable regarding plagiarism.

Scenario Example 1: Carla is preparing a draft for her research essay. She includes research from a study she found online, and she uses two of the sentences from the research study word for word in her submission. She does not cite these two sentences.

Is Carla engaging in plagiarism?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I am unsure

Scenario Example 2: Juan needs to compare two psychologists for his first-year Introduction to Psychology course. In high school, Juan wrote a profile on Albert Bandura for an assignment. He wants to use Albert Bandura as one of the two psychologists for this assignment.

Is Juan engaging in plagiarism?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I am unsure

Asking students to respond to different scenarios can facilitate dialogue regarding plagiarism, which is important as it can help students feel comfortable continuing this dialogue with you as they work through your course.

Ask students why they think students engage in plagiarism. As a class, create a list of reasons why students might engage in plagiarism. Doing so will allow students to share ideas with each other; if this list is created at the beginning of the semester, it can help students begin to form relationships with one another as well as initiate a plagiarism conversation.

Create strategies to avoid plagiarism based on the reasons provided by the class. By looking at the list of reasons why students might engage in plagiarism, the class can then formulate strategies that can be implemented to avoid the reasons identified. For example, if time management was a reason listed for plagiarizing, have the class create a strategy in relation to time management skills. If not understanding the assignment requirements was a reason identified for engaging in plagiarism, ask the class to determine what a student can do if they do not understand the assignment. This list, which now includes reasons and solutions, can be posted in the LMS and updated as necessary. Having the class compile solutions together can help support community building and provide students with strategies to use should they find themselves in any of the listed situations.

Discuss why plagiarism should be avoided. As mentioned, students might be presented with plagiarism rules and warnings as the form of plagiarism education they have received. This tactic does not provide benefits to students, especially to students who are unaware of what plagiarism is. Through a class discussion, ask students, Why should plagiarism be avoided? Having students think about the “why” may help them develop an understanding of the topic. The “why” relates to “the need to know” (an adult learning principle). “The need to know” encompasses the idea that learners should be informed why they should or should not do something. Knowing the “why” can help learners develop an understanding of why this form of academic misconduct should be avoided. This idea is reinforced by a focus group participant in Power’s (2009) study. This participant shared that “professors do not share this was why you shouldn’t do it but more this is what will happen if you do it ...” (p. 651).

Provide students with resources and ongoing support. A final consideration is to provide your students with relevant resources that they can easily access to learn more about plagiarism. These resources can include a direct link to your institution’s writing guides or external links to online plagiarism activities. One of the best resources you can provide, of course, is you. As such, be sure your students have easy access to your contact information should they have any questions about plagiarism as they work on their assignments.

Credits

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