Academic integrity and referencing: Whose job is it anyway?

Key Words

academic integrity, plagiarism, referencing, academic literacy, learning development, subject librarians

Abstract

The use of originality checking software, such as Turnitin (iParadigms, 2010), has afforded academic institutions opportunities to more consistently identify instances of plagiarism, so as to ensure students acquire the ethical and scholarly practices expected of graduates and professionals. Unlike some other New Zealand universities, which respond to lower-level student misconduct at the paper or faculty level (Massey University, 2016; University of Otago, 2015), the University of Waikato operates a centralised referral process intended to "detect and deter academic dishonesty" (Guthrie, 2009, p. 2) and enable appropriate interventions or penalties to be applied. This institution-wide approach has, somewhat unfairly, led the University of Waikato to gain a reputation as being "top of the class at cheating" (Wilson, 2014), as a higher proportion of students are formally censured for plagiarism and other offences than by any other New Zealand university (Carson, 2012; Pearl, 2013; Wilson, 2014). In 2016, Turnitin originality reports were used by a marker in a second year paper to identify unattributed or incorrectly attributed sections of text in student essays. This led to 40/161 (25%) students from this class being referred to the Student Discipline Committee and 34 (21%) to subsequently be referred to Student Learning for assistance with in-text citation and referencing following a summary jurisdiction process. It was determined that most of these students had plagiarised unintentionally, as they had used "another person's work in an assessment item without … full and accurate referencing", constituting a breach of the Assessment Regulations (University of Waikato, 2016). This misconduct finding had the potential to affect the students in future professional endeavours requiring background and "good character" evaluations. It was clear that this cohort of students lacked sufficient experience to summarise and paraphrase effectively, and had not yet learnt to reference accurately in accordance with the prescribed style despite having completed a compulsory academic writing module in their first year of study. Ordinarily, they would be expected to meet one-to-one with a learning advisor from Student Learning to revise and resubmit their work; however, due to the volume and nature of referrals, it was determined that workshops would be more efficient. Subject librarians were invited to co-teach these workshops as they had been involved in the academic writing module and had greater familiarity with discipline-specific style expectations.   Several issues emerged during this teaching collaboration, the most significant of which was that students could not recall having been taught the academic literacies they were expected to demonstrate. The use of the Moodle online learning environment was identified as a barrier to accessing discipline-specific resources from the first year course that could have been used by students and staff to consolidate prior learning. Learning advisors and subject librarians consequently gained insights into the impact of siloed teaching practices on their work with students, which led to an ongoing commitment to co-creating new and more accessible writing resources to prevent the recurrence of these issues. This presentation will outline the process, challenges and future directions of this partnership in action.

References

Carson, J. (2012, October 25). University on the lookout for cheats. Waikato Times. http://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/7862718/University-on-the-lookout-for-cheats

Guthrie, C. (2009). Plagiarism and cheating: A mixed methods study of student academic dishonesty. (Master's thesis. University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand). Retrieved from http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/4282/thesis.pdf

iParadigms. (2010). Turnitin: Answers to questions students ask about Turnitin. Retrieved from https://turnitin.com/static/resources/documentation/turnitin/sales/Answers_to_Questions_Students_Ask.pdf

Massey University. (2016). About academic integrity. Retrieved from https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/about-massey/university-management/avc-academic/academic-integrity/about-academic-integrity.cfm

Pearl, H. (2013, July 20). Cheating and plagiarism among misconduct cases. Waikato Times. Retrieved from http://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/8943627/Cheating-and-plagiarism-among-misconduct-cases

University of Otago. (2015). Student academic misconduct procedures. Retreived from http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otago116850.html

University of Waikato. (2016). Assessment regulations 2016. Retreived from https://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/assessment/assessment.html

Wilson, L. (2015, April 25). Waikato top of class for cheating. Waikato Times. Retrieved from http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/9976496/ Waikato-top-of-class-at-cheating