SPSE essay
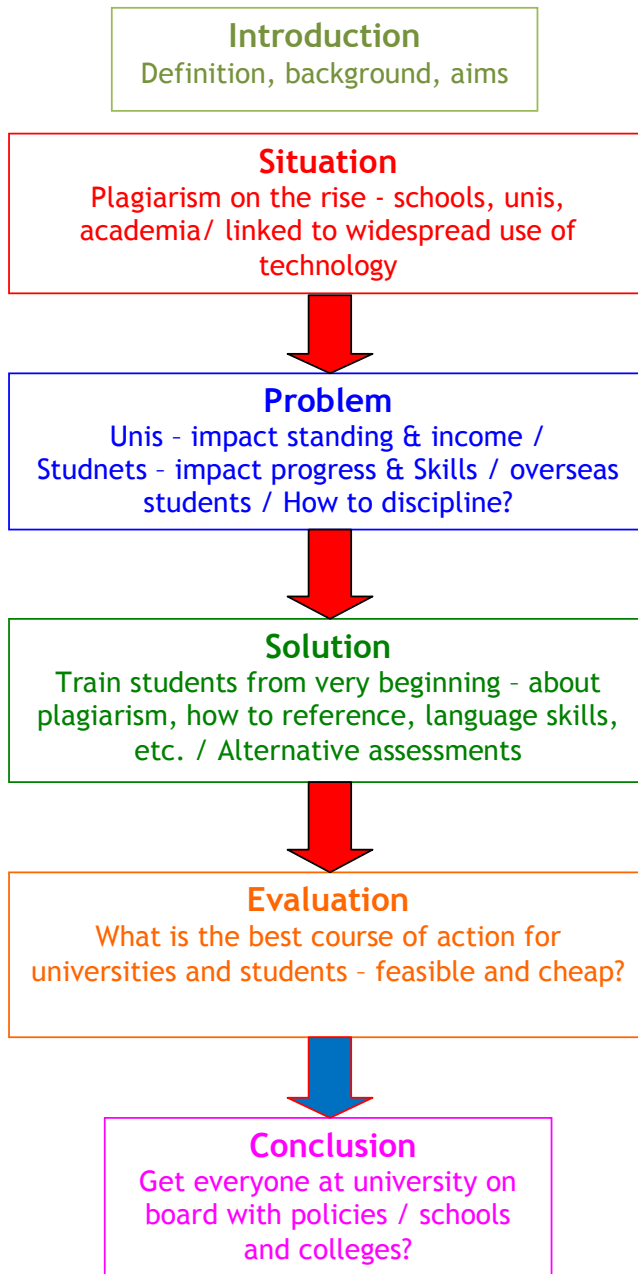
Plagiarism is currently a major issue for all universities. What is the **problem**, and how can it be **dealt with**?

Introduction
Definition, background, aims

Situation
Plagiarism on the rise - schools, unis, academia/ linked to widespread use of technology

Problem
Unis – impact standing & income / Studnets – impact progress & Skills / overseas students / How to discipline?

Solution
Train students from very beginning – about plagiarism, how to reference, language skills, etc. / Alternative assessments

Evaluation
What is the best course of action for universities and students – feasible and cheap?

Conclusion
Get everyone at university on board with policies / schools and colleges?

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Essay 4

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Level 1

10 credits

2,000 word essay

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Course title   : Academic Skills

Seminar tutor   : Andrew Doig

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Contents

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Plagiarism is currently a major issue for all universities. What is the problem, and how can it be dealt with?

Introduction

Plagiarism is defined as "the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work." (Dictionary.com). It is a serious offence and can occur in two different situations. The first being when an individual's work is passed off as someone else's without reference and the other is when someone's work mirrors another piece. (Oshima and Hogue 1999, p.83).

> **Comment [AD1]:** Definition

Plagiarism is on the increase in all higher education institutions throughout the country.   It is so much of a problem that universities have had to buy in special technology to scan every assignment handed in and plagiarism councils are having to sit most days during term time. Without question, it is something that students also must be constantly aware of and on the alert for risk of committing; accusations of plagiarism can lead to serious penalties for academic misconduct.

> **Comment [AD2]:** Background

This essay looks into the growing problem of plagiarism in universities and suggests reasonable solutions to it. It also evaluates the effectiveness of these solutions.

> **Comment [AD3]:** Aims for the essay

Situation

Plagiarism is an academic problem noticeably on the increase. This issue begins right at school level. "According to the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) exam board there has been a 'significant' rise in pupils caught copying work from the web" (BBC News, 2006). It is costly to invest funds in systems such as 'Turnitin', a piece of software that sends out alerts when work has been copied, and yet over 80% of the tertiary institutions in Britain have thought it worthwhile to have this software (Education Guardian, 2006).

> **Comment [AD4]:** Plagiarism on the rise

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Unfortunately there have been examples of plagiarism effecting high-up academia. A rather famous recent case was that of Dr Raj Persuad, a consultant psychiatrist who "admitted copying the work of other scholars for publication in his book and in articles that he submitted." (Malvern, 2008). In another case, Professor Judith M Okley, social anthropology in Hull, claimed her work had been plagiarised in Isabel Fonseca's book *Bury Me Standing* (Armitstead, 2008). Due to her studies of anthropology Professor Okley spent months living with gypsies, events which were described in Fonseca's book with no acknowledgement. Regrettably, situations like this occur fairly frequently in academia due to researchers carrying out similar studies to one another (ibid). This can have a negative impact as it filters through the higher education system as more people are accused of plagiarising.

> **Comment [AD5]:** Examples

The rise in plagiarism appears to be almost directly linked to the wider availability of technology as people now have internet at home, on their mobile phones and even on games consoles.   Cut and paste technology has made it too easy for the lasy or ignorant student (or academic) to lift another authors words into their own. There's also been a drastic increase in 'essays for sale' via the internet. This is a service through which a student can log on and either pick an essay from a catalogue of subjects, or pay another student or specialist to write it for them. A quick Google search on 'buying essays' results in approximately 4,840,000 results. A few websites offer guidance and advice but the majority are essay writing businesses where thousands of papers can be accessed for as little as £4.

> **Comment [AD6]:** Link to technology

Problem

A large amount of plagiarism can have a bad effect on a university's standing and on its income. Universities pride themselves on being able to teach students how to write in an academic style. Those with a track record of high plagiarism cases are frowned upon. It is understandable that their

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intake of students may decrease as they gain a bad reputation and therefore their ability to earn will decrease.

For students, plagiarism can impact badly on their academic progress. Some universities have a 'zero tolerance' policy in which people who commit plagiarism are asked to leave with immediate effect. The establishments that do not expel students will give them considerably lower grades than they were originally likely to achieve. Even the plagiarist who is not caught suffers through lack of skills and knowledge development which can only negatively affect them when they join the workforce, in effect under false pretences. In any case, the student has effectively wasted their time and money in attending university.

Another problem that poses itself to students is plagiarism of their own work. If two essays throughout their course are very similar, it is easy to copy and paste chunks of one into the other. If the person marking the paper picks up on it, the punishment will probably not be too harsh but the paper will not be graded.

For overseas students plagiarism can be a big problem. Language barriers can force them to copy work if the university they attend does not support them when they move to the UK and they may have a different understanding of what is required of them as a student at a British university. Moreover, students from foreign cultures may have very different ideas about what plagiarism actually is. Follow research with a group of Chinese students at Northumbria and Newcastle universities, Julia Banwell (2003, p.22) concludes, "Western perceptions of what may be seen to constitute plagiarism and the gravity of the issue are not universally held."

A big problem facing universities is how to discipline students who commit plagiarism. An obvious answer is to expel the students but one strong argument against is that university league tables will show that one particular institution has a large drop out rate. If the student is kept in the institution their grades might be cut and again the league tables will show

poor results for the university. A major difficulty in policing plagiarism within a university is that the student may have plagiarised by accident (as does sometime happen) and then a mark deduction effecting the rest of their university career would seem to be unfair.

Comment [AD10]: How to discipline

Solution

Many academics have come up with solutions to the plagiarism problem but it appears that the simple strategies are the best. Jude Carroll, an Educational Development Consultant and plagiarism specialist at Oxford Brookes University suggests four ways to combat it.

Firstly, teach the students. Instead of simply telling them about plagiarism and its perils, show them how to paraphrase, quote well and set a few examples for practice. An added bonus would be for the lecturer and the peers to give feedback to each other as points might be raised to help the learning process. (Carroll, 2008)

Similarly, students should be taught a few basic English and grammar skills. These may not have been outlined at school and college so a session in their first few weeks at university could clear up some errors and ensure that no mix up can occur when they are writing an academic essay. It could be included as part of a student's induction experience and even introduced to the curriculum at school and college so that every person who goes through education is aware that plagiarism is a criminal offence. Or this information should be made available through the university's online learning platform. (University of Bristol, 2008)

Another option is to teach that organisation is vital. When writing an essay student should keep all their notes and books together so that references can be made quickly. If the student gets half way through an essay and takes a break, any additional references can be added in with ease rather than forgotten.

Finally, Carroll says:

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Several studies have shown that students are less likely to submit work that is not their own if they believe the teacher has made an effort to design and deliver the course and if they care about what they are learning. A focus on detection and punishment alone could encourage students to become ever more inventive in their attempts to get around a task they do not believe is worth doing or to 'win' against a teacher who is trying to stop them. (Carroll, 2008)

These points show that some additional education included into each degree curriculum could help solve the big issue of plagiarism. Many universities alert their students to the problem of it without actually showing them how to look out for and avoid it whereas a simple instruction lesson could reduce the occurrence of plagiarism within higher education institutions.

Comment [AD11]: Train the students

There may be answers in the way in which students are assessed. Instead of just setting essays, more exams, individual portfolios or presentations could be marked in order for the student to explore more around their subject and present their findings in a different way. As Carroll points out in the same HE Academy article, "Students are unlikely to be able to buy ready-made coursework that integrates theory and practice, uses personal experiences or reflects on a case study you made up."

Overall, the combating of plagiarism could change the way university assignments are assessed. Instead of having straight essays in which it is easier to incorporate copied work, sole scholars have tried and tested new projects that mean a student has to produce everything that is one-hundred percent their own. A few have tried setting their students annotated booklists where the student records their findings and how it is relevant to the course and then they have a viva (interview) with the lecturer so their work can be assessed based on their handed in work and their answers in the viva.

Others who still like set students essays ask them to submit photocopies of reliable sources that they have used (books etc). This way the marker can

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check the students paraphrasing and referencing throughout the project. (Carroll, 2008)

Systems like this may have to be brought in nationwide across all higher education institutions. It will eventually lessen the work for the staff as they will not have to thoroughly check every individual's work and plagiarism councils will have to sit less often. It will also introduce a new type of essay which is seemingly less academic but actually means the student can get more involved in the research and writing process and eventually it may lead to higher scores at university and more knowledgeable graduates.

Comment [AD12]: Alternative assessments

Evaluation

The problem of plagiarism will never completely disappear but there are several things that both universities and students can do.

The best course of action appears to be the introduction of compulsory classes for students upon arrival to attend so that they are made aware of the issues surrounding plagiarism. As back-up, institutions should still employ the use of the technology available to them to scan all assignments as this well help students get the best degree they can and stop the university gaining a bad reputation.

There is an option for universities to introduce the use of more technology and have students' work scanned and checked. Although it would be ideal for all institutions to have access to this, for the universities which do not have much money, it is not feasible to expect them to buy it.

The cheapest option for universities is to teach their students about plagiarism in their induction week and keep enforcing the information throughout the course. This means that the student are aware of the severity of committing plagiarism and the lecturers are all aware of university policy and what their students think about copying someone else's work.

Comment [AD13]: The best course of action

Conclusion

Plagiarism is never going to go away but the points above show that there are things that universities can do to prevent it. By getting all the people at the institution (staff and students) on board with university policy about plagiarism then it will be easier for everyone involved to look out for it. Students can notice it when reading their own work and other students and lecturers can point it out when marking. By doing this everyone learns what plagiarism involves and how to prevent it. The various methods outlined all have their merits and all universities should adopt as many as possible.

Comment [AD14]: Get everyone on board

However, these have deliberately focussed on what can happen within the institutions. Perhaps the problem could also be approached in schools and colleges as students prepare for their university life. Plagiarism should be taught earlier on in education.

Comment [AD15]: Schools and colleges?

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