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

**Introduction**

‘Plagiarism’(n.d.) 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”. 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).



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.

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

**Situation**

The situation nowadays clearly shows that plagiarism is an academic problem noticeably on the increase. This problem is exacerbated by the advancement of technology and academicians who have no scruples in plagiarizing other people’ work.

The rise in plagiarism in schools 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 lazy or ignorant student or, even, academician 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(Malvern, 2008). According to the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) (as cited in BBC, News 2006), “exam board there has been a ‘significant’ rise in pupils caught copying work from the web” . 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 (Kellerman, 2006). Due to advancement in technology, plagiarism nowadays has become much more popular and easier to do.

Academicians have also been caught plagiarising. Plagiarism is not a crime committed by only students. There are examples of plagiarism affecting 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). Academicians who plagiarise will tarnish the image of the higher education.

Plagiarism affects every corner of academia. If this is not curtailed, this issue can be dangerous once students enter the working world.

**Problem**

A large amount of plagiarism can badly affect a university’s standing and its income. Plagiarism can also affect students’ academic pursuit.

A university’s image will be tarnished if plagiarism is rampant among its staff and students. Those with a track record of high plagiarism cases are frowned upon and looked upon as unable to teach students how to write in an academic style. It is understandable that their intake of students may decrease as they gain a bad reputation and therefore their ability to earn will decrease (Banwell, 2003). An obvious answer is to expel the students but one strong argument against it 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 big problem facing universities is how to discipline students who commit plagiarism. 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 affecting the rest of their university career would seem to be unfair (Armitstead, 2008). By disciplining students who commit plagiarism, universities can also be in danger of hurting their image.

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 (Redman, 2006). Another difficulty 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 (Malvern, 2008). Plagiarism is considered the most serious crime in the academic world and students who commit plagiarism will be punished and their chances of graduating with excellence or even graduating at all may be jeopardised.

In conclusion, it is evident that plagiarism does not only affect the universities but also the students. The integrity of the students and their universities will be questioned if rampant plagiarism by the students go unchecked.

**Solution**

Many academics have come up with solutions to the plagiarism problem but it appears that the simple strategies such as teaching students how to write proper essay, how to avoid plagiarism and assessing them in a different manner are the best.

One popular solution would be to teach the students how to write a proper essay. This includes lessons on paraphrasing, quoting and basic English grammar skills. Similarly, students should be taught a few basic English 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 (Kellerman, 2006). 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. 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). Learning to write a proper essay is the first step to stop students from plagiarising.

How to avoid plagiarism can also be included as part of a student’s induction experience. It should be 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). 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 (Carroll, 2008). Getting the information across to students on how dangerous plagiarism can be to them will help them in being careful when writing their essay.

Another solution would be 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 (2008) points out, “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.” 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 check the students paraphrasing and referencing throughout the project (Redman, 2008). Overall, the combating of plagiarism could change the way university assignments are assessed.

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 mean that 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.

**Evaluation**

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

The best and 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 students 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. Introduction of compulsory classes during induction week should also include lessons on paraphrasing, synthesis and citation. If these actions are taken, students will be more aware of the issues surrounding plagiarism. Students can also be introduced to technology that the institutions are using in checking plagiarism in students’ papers. This will lead to students becoming more aware and careful when using other people’s work and citing the sources. Creating a compulsory class for students on plagiarism and its effects and continue reminding them about it will help students get the best degree they can without relying on plagiarism and stop the university from gaining a bad reputation.

If learning institutions take proactive steps to counter plagiarism, plagiarism in the academic world can be reduced

**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. 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.

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