

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: A Case Study

Mr. Prakash I N

Dr. H. R. Badrinath

Abstract

In order to avoid plagiarism, academic institutions need to maintain high academic standards through the use of various ethical codes and rules. Plagiarism in academic circles may not always be intentional and may stem from lack of awareness of the issue. We present a case study on how we have approached this issue at Alliance University.

Keywords: Plagiarism; Academic Integrity; Academic Malpractice

1. Introduction

Academic integrity is essential to the foundation and ongoing viability of an academic community. Academic integrity has been defined as having an understanding of what it means to be truthful in the present academic environment. It is the base of academic success.

Higher education has always taken academic integrity extremely serious and has made efforts to make members to act in an ethical manner, both in research and teaching. Faculty members play an important role in the process of building and upholding academic integrity. Academic work in university depends on having Academic Integrity as one of the core values for both faculty as well as students. Within academia, plagiarism by students, professors, or researchers is considered academic dishonesty or academic fraud, and offenders are subject to academic censure, up to and including expulsion. For professors and researchers, plagiarism is punished by sanctions ranging from suspension to termination, along with the loss of credibility and perceived integrity.

Research or any other kind of academic work is grounded in the existing body of knowledge. All the work produced must, therefore, acknowledge the various sources from which the concepts and data

have been sourced from so as to give credit wherever it is due. Plagiarism occurs when we knowingly or unknowingly fail to do this and in the process, end up using someone else's work without giving proper acknowledgment.

2. Reasons for Plagiarism

As mentioned earlier, plagiarism is not always intentional and in these cases, it usually comes down to lack of awareness of the issues involved. However, many a time, it is intentional and this is a more difficult area to address. There are many reasons for the increased levels of plagiarism and we list some of them. The list is only indicative and not exhaustive:

- Lack of awareness of plagiarism
- Lack of training in report writing and citing
- Lack of time management skills
- Academic pressure
- Peer pressure
- Pressure from families and friends

The first cause can be addressed by building respect for rights – their own and rights of others – from the beginning. This is where families and schools can play an important role. A person who is aware of the rights of others and respects them is unlikely to indulge in plagiarism. This has to be supplemented at the university level with awareness of plagiarism in all its forms and libraries and faculty have to take the lead in this.

The second cause can be addressed by incorporating the concept of acknowledging and citing sources of information in every report or article written by students as part of their classwork. This has to be done often enough for the idea to be ingrained in the minds of students.

The third issue, lack of time management skills, is one of the major contributors to the rise of plagiarism. Students need to be taught how to manage their time and this has to begin at an early age

for it to be effective. By the time they reach the university, it becomes more difficult to teach them as they have already become set in their ways to a certain extent. It is often seen that students put off working on an assignment until the last minute, often starting work the night before a deadline and working late in order to complete it. This creates multiple problems

- the quality of the work is suspect as it has been done in a hurry
- the temptation to copy and paste is higher due to the deadline
- the student(s) do not learn much about the topic as the focus is on completion and not on learning
- the lack of sleep the previous night affects their concentration levels the next day when they are in class and they don't learn much

The fourth issue, academic pressure, comes from the fact that students cover 5 or 6 subjects during a semester and each course has its own requirement of assignments, projects, quizzes and other assessments. The student faces multiple and sometimes, competing deadlines, on a regular basis. The temptation to cut corners is therefore high and together with the lack of time management skills, creates a fertile ground for plagiarism to occur.

The fifth issue, peer pressure, is harder to tackle as it is a product of the culture in the institution(s) the students have been exposed to before they come to the university as well the university's own culture that has developed over time. Students who have been able to get away with plagiarism in the past due to various deficiencies in the system send out the message that it pays to follow their lead as the risk of censure is minimal and it frees up valuable time to pursue other interests. There are obviously lots of activities going on in a student's life, both at home and at the university, for this to be a serious issue.

The last issue, parental or family pressure, is perhaps the most difficult to address. Every parent has his or her own dreams for their child and some even try to fulfil their own unfulfilled desires through their children. In Indian society, doing well in academics is seen as a passport for success in life and historically, this has been true to a significant extent as education does open up opportunities that would not be available otherwise. With a significant proportion of our population still studying, there is an enormous amount of competition for seats in prestigious institutions and with cut-off percentages

being absurdly high, the pressure to perform well is intense. Overall, it creates an environment in which academic excellence is sought by parents and this puts students under pressure for basically the whole of their academic life.

3. Types of Plagiarism

3.1 Direct Plagiarism:

Word to word copying. This is the most clearcut form of plagiarism. In this case the user doesn't try to hide his/her mistake.

3.2 Self-Plagiarism :

The practice of self-plagiarism has increased among researcher across all the subject fields where they reproduce their own work in multiple forms. It involves making some changes in an existing article and submitting it to a different conference or publication as a new article
Mosaic Plagiarism:

This is one of the most common forms of plagiarism. It can include a few different methods, but ultimately comes down to copying material from various sources without acknowledgement and presenting it as their own. The belief appears to be that as long as we don't borrow everything and we contribute a few of our own words or paraphrase a few words or sentences, it does not amount to plagiarism.

3.3 Accidental Plagiarism

This one is pretty understandable, but is still considered serious. While writing larger articles or dissertations, researchers go through a lot of literature and data and they may forget to provide the source of some material inadvertently. The problem is, it's still plagiarism and the user receiving the work has no way of knowing if you're telling the truth about it being an accident.

4. How to Reduce and Prevent Plagiarism

The research process normally involves studying existing literature and finding a gap where the efforts of the researcher can be focused. Researchers review existing literature and provide the motivation for their own study through this. In the course of our study, one of the areas we found a high level of plagiarism was in the literature reviews written by students. Of all the sections in various reports/dissertations, this was the worst affected. This is where the first two causes listed – lack of awareness and lack of training – matter the most.

As part of coursework, we do not really cover the issue of plagiarism and its consequences. Most students are therefore, unaware of the many dimensions of plagiarism and are therefore vulnerable. In addition, implementation of an anti-plagiarism policy is not really done in a uniform manner at all levels of an academic institution. If the students are exposed to this issue right from the very beginning and implementations of these policies are done consistently, then it is easier to create a culture of academic honesty within the institution. If this is successful, we can see a significant reduction over time in the amount of plagiarism.

A few simple steps that can be followed to reduce plagiarism in an academic context are given below:

Cite - Citing is one of the effective ways to avoid plagiarism. Follow the document formatting guidelines (i.e. APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) used by educational institution or universities. This usually requires the addition of the author(s) and the date of the publication or related information. Citing is really that simple. Not citing properly can constitute plagiarism.

Quoting - While quoting the source, user should quote exactly the way it appears. When we are reproducing material from a particular source, the best way to do so is to quote it in its entirety and provide the source. Paraphrasing it is another option, but is not advisable in such cases.

Citing our Own Material - If some of the material are using for our research paper which was used by us in our current research also we must cite our own work. However, utilizing our own research beyond a point would amount to self-plagiarism.

5. Facts and Figure

There are several cases have been registered and given the judgement on Plagiarism in supreme court and other high courts in India (SCC, 2016).

- No of Judgements given on Plagiarism: 147
- Judgement/Cases related to plagiarism in Academic Environment: 44
- Judgements given on plagiarism at the University level: 28
- Judgements on plagiarized Thesis: 15

These facts says that within a academia, plagiarism by students, professors, or researchers is considered as academic dishonesty/ academic fraud. The punishment for such activities in academia may lead to suspension or termination from the position, along with the loss of credibility and perceived integrity.

6. Plagiarism Activity in Academic / University Environment: A Case

We have conducted a study on the levels of plagiarism in the City Campus of Alliance University over a two-year period from January 2014 to December 2015. As part of our efforts at eradicating the problem of plagiarism, the university subscribed to Turnitin in 2014 and its introduction provided us with an opportunity to check the existing levels of plagiarism within the university and take remedial steps. We present some data on the prevalence of plagiarism in 2014 and the impact of the steps taken by us (faculty and staff) as evidenced by the results for 2015.

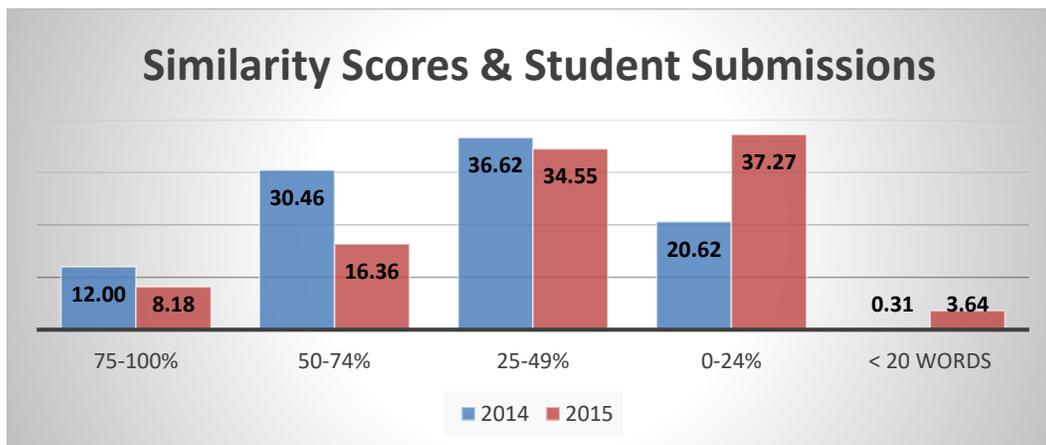


Fig-1: Similarity Scores and Student Submissions

The above chart is based on data from a total 325 and 220 reports submitted in 2014 and 2015 respectively. The number of submissions include resubmission of the same reports multiple times as students revised their reports after receiving feedback.

As can be seen from the chart, in 2014, the number of submissions where the similarity score was higher than 75% was 12% and this declined to 8.18% in 2015. Similarly, in 2014, the number of submissions where the similarity score was between 50 and 74% was 30.46% and this fell sharply to 16.36%. The number of submissions where the similarity score was less than 25% increased from 20.62% to 37.27%. The reduction in the number of submissions from 325 to 220 also reflected the fact that the reports did not have to go through multiple revisions before reaching an acceptable level with respect to similarity. The total number of students involved in the study was not available as student data was not uploaded when submitting the reports, but should be around 60-75 in the two years under study. Overall, we can see a clear shift in the levels of similarity in the two years. How did this come about?

When Turnitin was introduced in Alliance in March 2014, the university conducted a training program for faculty. The first round of student submissions started soon after, but awareness of the tool and its usage was still limited as many faculty had not been able to attend the training session due to class commitments and the fact that we had three separate campuses with the training session being conducted at the main campus on the outskirts of the city. At the city campus, a consensus was reached that faculty should use the software and ensure that the students understood the issue and took remedial steps to correct their reports. The process took some time as faculty had to familiarize themselves with the software and its various options, but progress was swift and the enthusiasm of the faculty played a big role in this.

The first year was obviously more difficult as student awareness was low and many of the submissions had high levels of content taken from other sources without due acknowledgement. Students were initially reluctant to admit that they had done this, but on being shown the evidence from the software, most of them accepted their mistake and the process of correcting the errors began. Some students tried to take the easy way out and used software such as Turn It Off, Synonymizer, etc. in an effort to reduce

the similarity score on Turnitin, but were caught out in the process as these attempts destroyed the sentence structure significantly and were easy to spot. In other cases, the lack of awareness and the lack of writing skills were obstacles and it took a few attempts for the students to get this right.

All this was done with submission deadlines looming and ongoing classes and it obviously put an additional burden on faculty as well as students. However, most persevered and many faculty members spent time well beyond working hours to educate the students on how to write their reports and how to cite work done by others properly. The result of all this was that word went out amongst students that plagiarism was not acceptable. In 2015, we took the additional step of informing students that their submissions will be checked on Turnitin before being accepted. We also informed that we were aware of the use of software to reduce the similarity scores and we educated them on the impact of using such software. The result can be clearly seen from the statistics presented earlier. In addition, the number of students trying to use software to reduce the similarity score dropped drastically and we saw only one or two such instances in 2015 as opposed to more than 15 in the previous year.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that a systematic and concerted effort involving all the faculty members and staff can go a long way in reducing the scourge of plagiarism over a period of time. Raising awareness of these issues at various levels through training and frequent user awareness programs would be a good start.

However, for this to be more effective, the process has to begin a lot earlier with an appreciation of property rights and a change in mindset with regard to the whole concept of academic excellence and rankings.

References

1. Emily A. Holt. (2012). Education Improves Plagiarism Detection by Biology Undergraduates. *BioScience*, 62(6), 585-592. doi:1. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/bio.2012.62.6.9> doi:1

2. Lewis, B., Duchac, J., & Beets, S. (2011). An Academic Publisher's Response to Plagiarism. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 102(3), 489-506. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41476314>
3. Naik, Ramesh R.; Landge, Maheshkumar B. ; C. Namrata Mahender (2015). A Review on Plagiarism Detection Tools. *International Journal of Computer Applications*, 125(11), 16-22
4. TshepoBatane. (2010). Turning to Turnitin to Fight Plagiarism among University Students. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 13(2), 1-12. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/jeductechsoci.13.2>
5. Valentine, K. (2006). Plagiarism as Literacy Practice: Recognizing and Rethinking Ethical Binaries. *College Composition and Communication*, 58(1), 89-109. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20456924>
6. Walker, B. (2009). New Twists on an Old Problem: Preventing Plagiarism and Enforcing Academic Integrity in an Art and Design School. *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 28(1), 48-51. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27949510>
7. Turnitin (2016). Retrieved from <http://turnitin.com/>
8. SCC Online (2016). Retrieved from <http://scconline.com/>
9. <https://unplag.com/>

About Authors

Mr. Prakash I N, Dy. Librarian, Alliance University, Bengaluru- 562 106.

Email: prakash.in@alliance.edu.in

Dr. H. R. Badrinath, Associate Professor, Alliance School of Business, Alliance University, Bengaluru- 562 106.

Email: badrinath.hr@alliance.edu.in