

Responding to a case of academic misconduct in a class is one of the most distressing experiences faculty encounter. The problem of academic misconduct must be addressed with a combination of strategies: education of students about academic integrity, proactive design of exams and assignments, and diligent follow-up and enforcement when academic misconduct occurs. This teaching tip describes proactive approaches instructors might use to promote academic integrity. Although these strategies might not deter the student who is determined to cheat, they might reduce the frequency of inappropriate behaviors by students who violate norms out of ignorance or other situational factors.

Variability in scholarly conventions across disciplines creates ambiguous situations in which misconduct is more likely to occur

Many students arrive on campus with an unclear or erroneous understanding of appropriate methods for paraphrasing or citing ideas in scholarly writing. They may have inadequate authorship skills. Standards and criteria for when and how work should be cited, when direct quotations are necessary, when and how to paraphrase ideas, and conventions for citing ideas within the text of a written assignment vary across academic disciplines and are understood differently by faculty and students (Roig, 2001). These inconsistencies are an unavoidable aspect of academia, but they create opportunities for misunderstanding. Explicit instruction about discipline-specific scholarly conventions should be part of the student's socialization into the discipline.

Provide students with explicit instructions about acceptable and unacceptable practices

Rather than assume that students understand the scholarly conventions in your discipline, include explicit instructions and guidelines and provide clear examples (Roig, 2006). The web is an excellent source for a variety of exercises and examples of assignments designed to help students define

plagiarism, recognize examples of text that are plagiarized and those that are appropriately paraphrased, and develop skills for appropriate authorship practices. The UWF History department created a tutorial on plagiarism that is available on the UWF Library tutorials web site. This tutorial could be assigned as a class assignment. It includes a quiz that students can e-mail to their instructor to document their completion of the tutorial. The tutorials site includes modules to assist students with writing, conducting library research, and identifying plagiarism.

A variety of quizzes and exercises to improve the ability to recognize plagiarism and develop skill in writing paraphrases can be found on academic web sites. Michigan State University has a useful resource page on academic integrity that includes links to a large number of such sites. Indiana University hosts an excellent tutorial on how to recognize plagiarism.

Web Resources on Plagiarism and Paraphrasing

UWF Pace Library tutorials:

http://library.uwf.edu/eli2/new_tutorials/index.html

Indiana University plagiarism tutorial:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~istd/>

Michigan State University resource page:

<http://library.msstate.edu/content/templates/?a=393&z=0>

Advantages of these strategies for instructors

Instructors who discuss these issues as part of class instruction send a clear message to students that they value academic integrity and take these matters seriously. Instructors who include a description of institutional policy on academic integrity on a syllabus will have a strong case should they need to prosecute a student for misconduct. However, a statement about academic misconduct in the syllabus by itself is a weak endorsement of the instructor's commitment to academic integrity.

Explicit instructions clearly communicate the instructor's expectations for his or her course and

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eliminate ambiguity about “what counts” as acceptable and unacceptable behavior. This clarity is particularly important if the course includes collaborative work, which can raise questions about the degree to which written assignments should be based on individual writing or shared work. Clear articulation of your expectations might help you avoid future problems associated with dealing with students who mistakenly assume that your rules are the same as those of another instructor or a hypothetical instructor in the student’s high school.

Remember that some conventions for scholarly writing are discipline-specific. Explicit instruction about these scholarly conventions should be part of the student’s socialization into the discipline.

Structure assignments to make plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty ineffective

Meizlish (2005) describes eight strategies instructors can use to deter academic misconduct. These strategies generally entail creating unique assignments and structuring student work. When assignments make unique demands, students are unlikely to find suitable work to copy.

1. Vary the assignment by altering a few elements each time you teach a course. For example, use different cases or assigned readings as the basis for the assignment. This strategy renders most student work from prior terms useless for the current assignment.
2. Assign specific materials (a case study, readings, etc.) that students must use when completing the assignment. Collections of papers in a campus file or on a commercial web site are unlikely to include a paper that uses these specific materials.
3. Include elements in assignments that are difficult to copy or fabricate (data collection, analysis or interpretation of data using a particular method, work with a client on campus or in the community, formal evaluative feedback from the client).
4. Break large projects into a series of milestone assignments. A semester-long research paper might entail a series of related assignments: submit a brief proposal or overview of the topic by week 3, an annotated bibliography by week 7, a draft that undergoes peer review 2 weeks before the submission date for the final paper. Milestone assignments force students to begin projects earlier and reduce problems with procrastination, which is a common contributing factor to the decision to plagiarize (Roig & DeTommaso, 1995). In addition, milestone assignments can serve as low-stakes opportunities for students to practice skills. Interim assignments create an

opportunity for you to give students constructive feedback about their work. This strategy supports the development of skill and enables students to produce a better-quality final product. With appropriate guidelines, peer review assignments effectively delegate the task of providing constructive feedback to the students themselves and teach skills in self-reflection and self-editing.

5. Create specific criteria about the source materials that students will be required to use and describe how you expect students to cite sources.
6. Require students to submit their assignments electronically for potential screening with text-matching software (such as turnitin) as well as submitting a paper copy. Review the UWF guidelines on turnitin if you plan to use this tool to screen student work.
7. Require students to provide copies of all supporting materials as part of the finished assignment (e.g., data collection sheets, copies of cited work, etc.).
8. Create an in-class writing assignment on the day the project is due that requires a detailed knowledge of the project. Students might be required to reflect on their work by answering prompts such as: *Describe the most challenging aspect of the project. What did you learn by completing this project? If you were starting this project today, what would you do differently and why would you make this change?*

References

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