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Re-writing the script: supporting academic integrity the library way!

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Abstract

An article published in the Guardian Newspaper this week asserted that: 'However much we warn students of the dire consequences of plagiarism, some continue to take the risk, partly because the consequences tend not to be so dire after all ...' Wolff, J. (2006). The article then went on to reveal that a growing number of universities are 'turning to agencies that claim to be able to detect plagiarism by sophisticated electronic searches'. Wolff, J. (2006). The two messages that come across from the article are that, combating plagiarisms is best achieved by putting fear into students; a don't do it or else approach. The second message suggests that the punishment is not meeting the crime. These messages are becoming more and more accepted yet there is little proof of their effectiveness, indeed other approaches may yield better results. So as the dramas of plagiarism are increasingly played out on centre stage isn't it time to re-write the script?

Combating plagiarism has become a major issue for Higher Education and not only in the UK. At the 2nd Asia-Pacific Educational Integrity Conference in Australia in December 2005 a great deal was said about policy. The main points were that institutions need to have transparent policies and practices relating to educational integrity. The punishment structures and penalties must also be transparent. Policies must be written in plain English, easy for all students to understand. Institutions should aim to build a culture where cheating is not acceptable. These are all excellent points but there were two which stood out above the others:

1. a culture of crime and punishment does not foster learning
2. good policy is necessary but not sufficient in tackling plagiarism issues

The first point was addressed several times during the conference. Systems have to be in place to punish those few who deliberately set out to cheat. Institutions however, appear to be finding difficulty with creating policies and procedures that allow mistakes to be made, lessons to be learned, without appearing to allow 'students to get away with it' This problem could be helped by the second point. Policy is required most certainly, but if students are simply told they must not plagiarise or terrible things will happen to them, then that institution's policy is ultimately doomed.

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In re-writing our script we can change the emphasis of our play. Instead of pointing out the dire consequences of plagiarism we need to help students to understand that by not plagiarising they are enhancing their own learning experience, their academic credibility and developing the knowledge and skills for their future careers and personal development. Dangle the carrot rather than swing the stick - provide the tools to understand and avoid plagiarism while at the same time nourishing a sense of pride and satisfaction within the student.

New scene, enter the library (stage left!)

This is the point at which Librarians can help. By providing a good Information Literacy programme that teaches students to understand how to find and evaluate information, what plagiarism is, how to reference their work appropriately. Librarians can assist students to understand their responsibility regarding the use of information. This paper will look at how libraries in two institutions are supporting and collaborating with academics to provide a holistic approach to countering plagiarism, outlining practical examples of tactics and strategies that provide dramatic improvement. This is an innovative approach which creates a happy and constructive ending to the play.

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Wolf, J. (2006). *Does plagiarism matter? Answer in your own words*. The Guardian. February 21. [online] Available from: <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/comment/story/0,,1714001,00.html> [Accessed: 22/02/06]

This paper will look at how libraries in two institutions are supporting and collaborating with academics to provide a holistic approach to countering plagiarism. It outlines practical examples of tactics and strategies that provide dramatic improvement.

Plagiarism has been hitting the headlines in the UK press over the last few years. Articles range from discussing whether plagiarism is a real problem in higher education and how it should be overcome, to authors, personalities and the government being accused of plagiarism. For example, Bryony Lavery for her play *Frozen* (Gardner 2006), Dan Brown and *The Da Vinci Code* (BBC News 2006) and Kaavya Viswanathan for *Opal Mehta* (Goldenberg 2006); Raj Persaud, the well-known psychiatrist (Pidd 2005); and the British Government and the Iraq dossier (BBC News 2002).

A recent article published in the Guardian newspaper asserted that: 'However much we warn students of the dire consequences of plagiarism, some continue to take the risk, partly because the consequences tend not to be so dire after all' (Wolff 2006). The same article then went on to reveal that a growing number of universities are 'turning to agencies that claim to be able to detect plagiarism by sophisticated electronic searches'.

Four messages that come across from articles that discuss whether plagiarism is a problem are:

1. combating plagiarism is best achieved by putting fear into students; a don't do it or else approach
2. institutions are beginning to rely heavily on electronic detection to help solve the problem
3. perhaps returning to exams and avoiding coursework can help
4. the punishment is not meeting the crime.

These messages are becoming more and more accepted yet there is little proof of their effectiveness. Indeed, other approaches may yield better results. So as the dramas of plagiarism are increasingly played out on centre stage isn't it time to re-write the script and create a happy and constructive ending to the play?

So why do students plagiarise? If we understand this, we may be able to help prevent plagiarism. Students tend to plagiarise either deliberately or because they have poor academic skills. Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead (1995) argue that those students who plagiarise deliberately, do so because they have either run out of time, have a desire for high marks and / or the knowledge that others had cheated but had not been caught. Many students also have to juggle study and work, so that they can support themselves in order to stay in higher education and 'may therefore consider all their options as an essay deadline approaches' (Carlowe 2002).

Crace (2002) suggests that A-level students have often been taught 'to cut and paste material into essays' and 'thinly paraphrase secondary sources' so they arrive at university with no real understanding of plagiarism. This is supported by Wilhoit (1994), Parlour (1995) and Roig (1999) who argue that most students plagiarise unintentionally because they are unsure of academic practices and have poor referencing skills. This includes time management, understanding the assignment question, reading & note taking, writing skills, as well as an understanding of plagiarism and the rules of citation.

Combating plagiarism is not just a major issue for Higher Education in the UK. In the US plagiarism has been a discussion topic for the last twenty five years and several studies on cheating have included sections on plagiarism. Australian academics are also heavily involved in a debate on how to deal with the 'plagiarism plague' (BBC News 2002). At their 2nd Asia-Pacific Educational Integrity Conference in December 2005 a great deal was said about policy. The main points were:

- institutions need to have transparent policies and practices relating to educational integrity
- the punishment structures and penalties must also be transparent. Policies must be written in plain English, easy for all students to understand
- institutions should aim to build a culture where cheating is not acceptable.

These are all excellent points but there were two that stood out above the others:

1. a culture of crime and punishment does not foster learning
2. good policy is necessary but not sufficient in tackling plagiarism issues.

The first point was addressed several times during the conference. Systems have to be in place to punish those few who deliberately set out to cheat. Institutions however, appear to be finding difficulty with creating policies and procedures that allow mistakes to be made, lessons to be learned, without appearing to allow 'students to get away with it'. This problem could be helped by the second point. Policy is required most certainly, but if students are simply told they must not plagiarise or terrible things will happen to them, then that institution's policy is ultimately doomed.

So how can we help students avoid plagiarism? Carroll and Appleton (2001) argue institutions need a variety of mechanisms in place to prevent plagiarism:

- clear and transparent policy that is communicated to students (Carroll & Appleton 2001)

- clear punishment structure and penalties that should be enforced consistently (Parlour 1995)
- redesign of assessment (and no, not just return to exams) (Brecher 2006)
- teach students academic skills (Carroll & Appleton 2001)
- discuss regularly what plagiarism is (Brecher 2006).

In re-writing our script we can change the emphasis of our play. Instead of pointing out the dire consequences of plagiarism we need to help students to understand that by not plagiarising they are enhancing their own learning experience, their academic credibility and developing the knowledge and skills for their future careers and personal development. Dangle the carrot rather than swing the stick - provide the tools to understand and avoid plagiarism while at the same time nourishing a sense of pride and satisfaction within the student.

New scene, enter the library (stage left!)

This is the point at which Librarians can help. By providing a good Information Literacy programme that teaches students to understand how to find, evaluate information and ethically use information librarians can assist students to understand what good practice is.

Case study 1 – Loughborough University

Loughborough University has approximately 15,000 students and three faculties: Engineering, Science, Social Science and Humanities. The undergraduate population is primarily composed of home students with a small international mix. The majority of the students are eighteen straight from school.

The University does not have strong concerns about plagiarism. Despite this the issue is taken seriously and Academic Registry, Professional Development and the Library have been working with academics to look at how plagiarism can be excluded from student study practices. Academic Registry has written clear guidance for students that outlines a definition of plagiarism and provides six examples. It also outlines the consequences of plagiarism. These are published in the Student Handbook and on most departmental web pages. Professional Development offers guidance on best practice in setting assignments and runs the TurnItIn detection service. Currently four departments use this service. The Library offers academics guidance on how to help students avoid being a plagiarist, as well as delivering courses for students. These are delivered both face-to-face and online via the University's virtual learning environment, Learn. All the support departments encourage academic staff to discuss the issue of plagiarism with students on a regular basis, but it is difficult to ascertain how regularly this happens within modules / programmes.

Until now the Library has provided guidance to academics on a one-to-one basis. However, the Library will soon be running afternoon workshops via the Professional Development training programme. These workshops will cover: different shades of plagiarism; University policy on plagiarism; how to help students avoid being plagiarists and detecting plagiarism using Turnitin. The Library also delivers a

workshop four times a year on plagiarism and bibliographic software management to PhD students as part of Professional Developments Research Methods training programme.

The workshops for undergraduate students on plagiarism are normally embedded into second or final year modules, prior to the students undertaking a major piece of research. Most of the lecturers who invite library staff to talk to the students have normally already discussed plagiarism with them. The lecturers want another 'voice' and approach to the topic to reinforce the message the students have already been given. The major benefits of inviting Library staff to run workshops on plagiarism is that students find library staff non-threatening and therefore they are more willing to show their ignorance in this area. Library staff have found that students are keen to discuss the grey and more intricate areas of plagiarism in a safe environment. As Wilhoit (1994) recommends, library staff aim to make the workshops subject specific and prefer the lecturer to be present. The workshops are similar to those that will be delivered to academic staff as they cover: definitions of plagiarism and the consequences of being caught. But they also include a lot of self-reflection and group activities and cover additional topics such as note taking, the mechanics of citation and bibliographic management systems.

The Library has provided supporting material on Learn. The materials include activities that ask students to recognise examples of plagiarism, FAQ and an online quiz and an online test. The quiz is designed to be non-threatening and takes the form of a magazine style quiz. It aims to indicate to a student whether their academic practices (e.g. leaving assignments to the last minute and / or poor note taking etc.) may lead them to be a plagiarist. The online test is more formal and assesses student comprehension and application of citation rules and plagiarism.

The face-to-face courses are evaluated on a regular basis. Feedback is always positive. Both the undergraduate and postgraduate students state that they feel the classes give them a greater understanding of the intricacies of plagiarism and citation. The students feel far more confident in approaching their academic writing and using the ideas of others. Academic staff have stated that they generally see an improvement in the quality of student citation practices.

Case study 2 – Imperial College London

Imperial College London has approximately 12,000 students and four faculties: Natural Sciences, Medicine, Engineering and Business & Humanities. The undergraduate (UG) population is primarily composed of an International mix of eighteen year olds straight from school. As with many universities the College faces the same issues with their UG population:

- students arriving from school with the copy and paste mentality and a tacit understanding that plagiarism is acceptable
- growing population of students from other countries for whom the cost of getting to university in the UK is high and failure is not an option who also come from

academic traditions that positively encourage the learning and reproduction of secondary research.

However, the situation at Imperial is exacerbated as students studying for science degrees often have little experience of academic writing compared with their peers who follow humanities and arts pathways at A-level.

The Centre for Educational Development provides advice and links for the academic staff on plagiarism and the College subscribes to Turnitin, which is being used by several departments. The College also provides information on plagiarism in the student handbook. This informs students that they should not plagiarise and the procedures followed when cases of plagiarism are suspected. Policy and procedure have to be in place and ensure a quality of process for any who may find themselves accused of plagiarism. The Library is aiming to provide the missing link by teaching students what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

In 2005 the Library developed an online information literacy (IL) course (OLIVIA) which contains units on plagiarism and referencing. The course is delivered using the Virtual Learning Environment WebCT. The course was designed with the specific aim of creating a brand that the students would recognise. Although hosted in WebCT it is written in HTML and therefore acts as a secure website. Student feedback has been very positive and as the programme is designed as a website they find it easy to navigate. The course is interactive with online tutorials, self tests and quizzes.

Plagiarism should not be taught in isolation. It is part of an education process and only through a full information literacy course can students really understand the ethical issues surrounding the use of information. A blended teaching approach is taken and once teaching is finished the students have access to 'their OLIVIA' as a reference tool until the end of their degree programme. The course initially introduces students to information, how to search effectively and evaluate the quality of the information they retrieve, but also introduces the concept of intellectual property. As students become more confident, the programme aims for a more in-depth understanding of plagiarism and the issues surrounding the ethical use of information.

When teaching plagiarism the librarians will begin by showing and discussing with students the different types of plagiarism. Examples of cut and paste, word switch, collaboration, misinterpreting common knowledge, collusion, concealing sources and self plagiarism are provided. The second part of the session concentrates on how to avoid plagiarism and looks at paraphrasing, quotation, quotation style and also provides a list of verbs which can be used when quoting. The session encourages them to think about how they utilise secondary resources and blend their ideas into their essay and develops their skills in paraphrasing.



Illustration 1: OLIVIA: Online Information Assistant. WebCT Course. Imperial College London

Once students have a clear understanding of plagiarism the librarians then introduce them to referencing. Citing is explained for books, journal articles, chapters in books, multimedia etc. They are then shown the format for information sources for a reference list. This includes sources such as emails, official papers, interviews etc. At the end of the session they submit a quiz. If any person who takes the quiz receives a low mark (and these are in the minority) the librarian contacts them and arranges a one to one session to discuss areas that the student may be confused about.

Evaluation of the course is through evaluation sheets and focus groups. The course is seen as a valuable resource by the students. The pilot IL programme was introduced in 2004. In 2005 after student feedback on the pilot, the programme was redesigned and with funding from a teaching development grant, OLIVIA was created for the academic year 2005 – 06. Olivia has now been running for two academic years and the management information available through WebCT shows that students continue to use the programme in their second year.

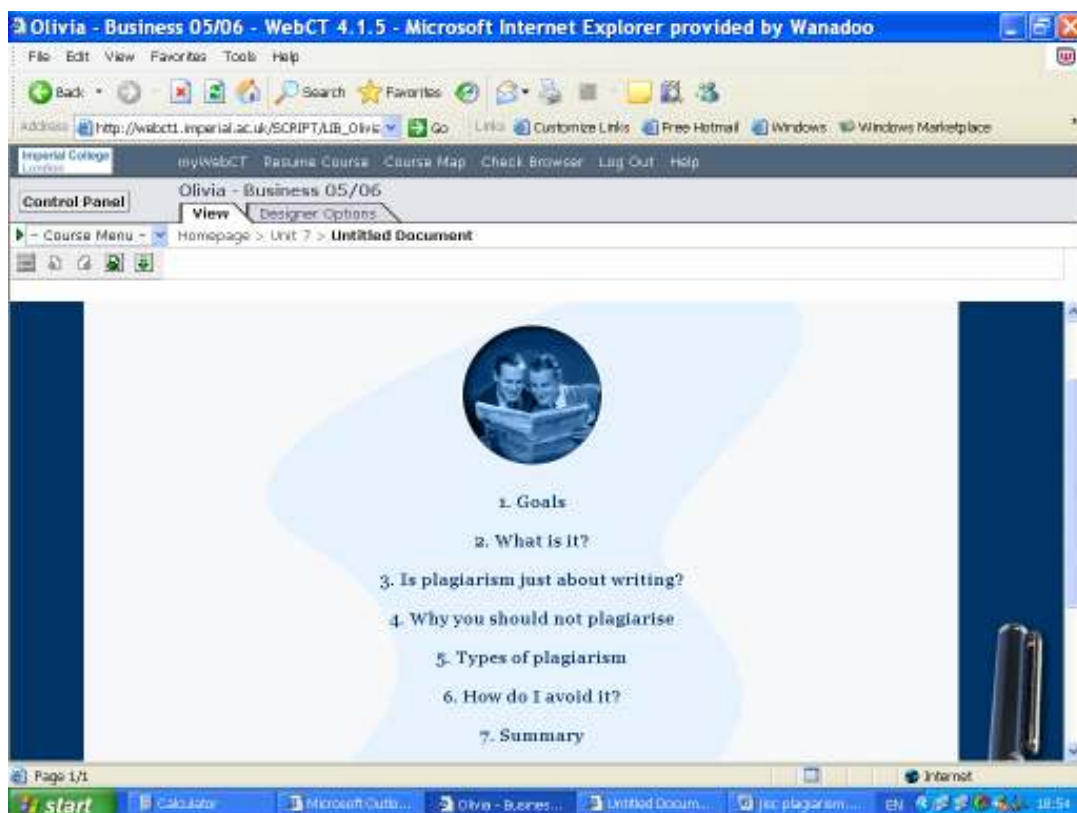


Illustration 2: OLIVIA: Online Information Assistant. Unit 7 - Plagiarism. WebCT Course. Imperial College London

OLIVIA has been well-received by the academics within Imperial who recognise the benefits of the education process that the programme can provide. Having used the programme, students produce well referenced essays and use quality information resources for their research. Olivia is now embedded into 75% of the UG curriculum. The aim is for 100% by 2008. The advantage of the course for the College is, not only do the students have a clear understanding of plagiarism, how to avoid it and how to reference their work appropriately; but should a student be accused of plagiarism and declare ignorance, there is a trail which can be followed which demonstrates at what point the student received OLIVIA teaching. Anecdotal evidence from certain departments suggests that the programme is helping. Students own feedback demonstrates that they have recognised their own responsibility regarding the ethical use of information. In the academic year 2006 / 07 two new Information Literacy programmes will be introduced aimed at Postgraduates and Post doctorates. Both will have units on academic integrity.

The College is now in the process of setting up a plagiarism working party to look at how further improvements can be made to the College's plagiarism policy. The library will be part of this group with an aim of lobbying for OLIVIA to become a mandatory part of the UG curriculum.

If institutions continue to concentrate only on policy and procedure then we will continue to create a situation where students will fall foul of accidental plagiarism. We are setting them up to fail! We know they are lacking in understanding about academic writing and they can not be expected not to plagiarise if they do not really understand what it is and we do not give them the skills to avoid it. The production of a play takes the collaboration of many, the director, the actors, the wardrobe, lighting technicians, prop makers, scene designers and stage crew. To fight the 'plagiarism plague' also takes collaboration, registry, academics, Centres of Education, librarians & ICT. The library however, does not always seem to be recognised as requiring a part in supporting the play. If we all work in isolation students will continue to be confused and fall into the trap of accidental plagiarism. Working together we can rewrite the script, we can provide a constructive and happy end to the play leaving the critics with nothing to say but - bravo!

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