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New Chalk Talk

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Teaching News

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The New Plagiarism

"...ethics, integrity, and honesty are flying out the window on digitized wings" (Howard, 2002)

As a "newcomer" to AUC, I attended this year's Newcomer's Orientation program, where plagiarism and cheating were discussed at length in one of the sessions. Although plagiarism is not new, it is apparently on the rise, and is a topic of great concern not only here at AUC, but at institutions of higher learning in the US and the UK among others.

In AUC's Student Handbook on Academic Honesty, plagiarism is defined as "passing off as one's own the ideas or words of another" (Webster's Dictionary). It seems simple and straightforward, but if you were to research the literature, you would find that there is more to plagiarism than meets the eye. **The experts say there is "auto-plagiarism, self-plagiarism, substantial plagiarism, incidental plagiarism and"**, believe it or not, **"unconscious plagiarism or cryptomnesia"** (Evans, 2000). Heaven forbid our students should ever hear about this one!

We are therefore advised to judge the severity of the infraction and act accordingly, while recognizing that students do not enter higher education knowing how to paraphrase or to attribute sources correctly. The Writing Program and other courses at AUC educate our students on these issues.

This, however, is not what this issue of "New Chalk Talk" is about. What concerns us is a new type of academic dishonesty dubbed the **New Plagiarism**, resulting from the ease with which information can be accessed from the Web.

Students can not only cut and paste their way through a complete term paper, they can access entire term papers online; and for a fee, they can order a custom-made term paper that is usually ready within 48 hours. This is a very serious matter that no professor can or should tolerate, and short of becoming a fulltime policeman, how can we respond?

It seems that the **most convenient detection methods make use of technology**. If it appears that a paper has been plagiarized, you can:

- Try searching for a key sentence with a search engine like www.google.com. This is *free of charge* but most probably time consuming.
- Use an anti-plagiarism tool. A number of different services (EVE2, "Essay Verification Engine"; Plagiarism.org) are available to help professors identify

plagiarized materials. Most of these services charge a fee. It is recommended that you **warn students that you will be using such a service** at the beginning of the semester. This, in itself, may serve as a deterrent to plagiarism before it starts. One of the most widely used software is **Turnitin.com** which AUC is seriously looking into licensing. When a suspect paper is submitted, it is compared with a very large database containing over one million papers and two billion Internet pages. At the end of the process an “originality” report is issued with a percentage probability that the paper was plagiarized. It also includes the plagiarized passages with live links to their sources on the Internet.

Most educators argue that the use of such anti-plagiarism tools alone, while effective, is not enough. As we know, plagiarism is only one aspect of the ugly face of academic dishonesty. Many institutions (including AUC) are responding by adopting other approaches as well: some have honor code statements that entering students are required to sign and uphold; others have established academic integrity offices that address pertinent issues. Whatever the means used, the discussion of ethics and the emphasis on academic integrity should be an integral part of our students’ education and would hopefully translate into a lifelong commitment on their part.

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- See <http://www.turnitin.com/static/index.html>

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