

Plagiarism and academic writing

Introduction

Earlier this year I gave a presentation about our experiences with the use of the JISC plagiarism detection system (PDS) to a meeting of Departmental Managers. They thought it would be helpful to convey similar information to Conveners.

My own involvement with plagiarism detection arises from three main roles. First, when I was course tutor for MSc ADMIS I was responsible for bringing a number of allegations of plagiarism to the school, second, I was involved in a number of academic misconduct panels hearing cases brought by other Departments and finally I am part of a HEFCE FDTL5 funded research project on student diversity and academic writing (jointly with colleagues at Lancaster University).

Despite spending considerable time explaining to students about what we expect from their writing, we have unfortunately had to present a number of allegations of plagiarism to the School. However, despite rumours to the contrary, the School does take these allegations seriously and, if the students have been given proper advice about writing, they are prepared to penalise the students for this behaviour. For example, during the last academic year around half a dozen of our students received zero for their coursework where allegations of plagiarism were proven. In one case, a student had their degree withdrawn when plagiarism in his summer dissertation was discovered.

Plagiarism

The School's definition of plagiarism is given as:

All work for classes and seminars as well as scripts (which include, for example, examinations, essays, dissertations and any other work, including computer programs) must be the student's own work. The definition of a student's own work shall include work produced by collaboration expressly permitted by the department or institute concerned. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully and all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Infringing this requirement, whether deliberately or not, or the deliberate or accidental passing off of the work of others as the work of the student is plagiarism.

It therefore does not require intentionality on the part of the student. The regulations continue by explaining what is expected of Departments:

Each department and institute is responsible for instructing students on the conventions required for the citation and acknowledgement of sources in its disciplines. The term sources includes not only published primary and secondary material from any source whatever but also information and opinions gained directly from other people, including students and tutors. The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with the individual student.

Under the School's new regulations on plagiarism (see <http://www.lse.ac.uk/resources/schoolRegulations/regulationsOnAssessmentOffencesAndPlagiarism.htm>) any allegations of plagiarism are first presented to the convener/deputy for initial evaluation as to whether a formal allegation should be brought forward to the Academic Registrar.

Detecting plagiarism and copying

Plagiarism was traditionally suspected when markers were reading student work and noticed that the form and/or quality of writing changed noticeably. Typically the marker would then start to search (typically on the internet by typing key phrases into google) for the original source of the material. If the copied text could be found, then this would form the basis of the allegation ("in this essay, all of section 3 is a direct copy from source xxx as indicated on the marked copies attached").

The JISC Plagiarism Detection Service can assist in this process of searching for matched text. Once student essays are submitted to the service, the system automatically detects exact matches between the submitted essay and its database of materials (which is *not* necessarily complete—it is particularly strong on journals and web pages that do not have restrictions on their access, whereas coverage of books is far more limited). On the basis of these matches, each paper is given a 'score' which indicates the amount of copied text. Thus figure 1 shows a sample report for a class of essays. In this case, the first essay shows a large amount of copied text, whilst the second shows a small amount of copied text (which might well only be the formatted references at the end of the document).

The system *only* picks up exact matches, some of which may well be properly referenced as figure 2 shows. Here, the first highlighted text is properly enclosed in quotation marks and a proper intext citation is given as well, whilst the second is a common phrase that would appear in many texts. The system allows you to click through to the original source to see where the text appears in it.

In some cases, as in figure 3, problems with the student's writing are immediately apparent.

Inbox for: Assign. #1: Check

show these papers: low % ↔ high %

author	title	report	file	paper id	date
Anonymous	is143.doc	0	doc	11534	01-03-04
Anonymous	What shell we name that domain-FINAL.doc	0	doc	11533	01-03-04
Anonymous	VAMIN RESEARCH ESSAY.doc	0	doc	11532	01-03-04
Anonymous	TOTAL.doc	0	doc	11531	01-03-04
Anonymous	THEsdffsd.doc	0	doc	11530	01-03-04
Anonymous	The research essay by tim noparumpa.doc	0	doc	11529	01-03-04
Anonymous	THE NECESSITIES AND THE CONTRADICTIONS O...	0	doc	11528	01-03-04
Anonymous	the essay.doc	0	doc	11527	01-03-04
Anonymous	The Effect Of Privacy Concerns on E.doc	0	doc	11526	01-03-04
Anonymous	TABLE OF CONTENTS.doc	0	doc	11525	01-03-04
Anonymous	resech_essay.doc	0	doc	11524	01-03-04
Anonymous	ResearchEssayS143.doc	0	doc	11523	01-03-04
Anonymous	ResearchEssay.doc	0	doc	11522	01-03-04
Anonymous	research_essay2.doc	0	doc	11521	01-03-04
Anonymous	RESEARCH ESSAY.doc	0	doc	11520	01-03-04
Anonymous	Research_Essay_bibliography.doc	0	doc	11519	01-03-04
Anonymous	Research_Essay1.doc	0	doc	11518	01-03-04
Anonymous	Proect3.doc	0	doc	11517	01-03-04
Anonymous	P2P File Sharing Essay.doc	0	doc	11516	01-03-04
Anonymous	P2P File Sharing Essay Abstract and Tabl...	0	doc	11515	01-03-04
Anonymous	OffshoringPaper_raman_rajaopai.doc	0	doc	11514	01-03-04
Anonymous	my_essay.doc	0	doc	11513	01-03-04

Figure 1: Sample report on a class of essays

a large number of organizations worldwide. Indeed, the scale, cost and impact of this software drove some to proclaim that 'the business world's embrace of enterprise systems may in fact be the most important development in the corporate use of information technology in the 1990s' (Davenport 1998 p. 122). According to AMR Research (2002), ERP penetration among large corporations stands at 67%, accounts for 34% of a company's applications budget, and will remain so through 2004. A number of factors, both technical and organisational, have contributed to the large uptake of ERPs (Markus et al. 2000b; Somers et al. 2004), they include: the need to overcome the Y2K problem and other legacy problems; the need for increased computing power to accommodate growth; the need to improve procedures and decision making; the need to improve productivity; the need to achieve competitive advantage, and to satisfy customer demands.

ERP applications are large scale, commercial, standard, and modular software packages that 'promise the seamless integration of all the information flowing through a company - financial and accounting information, human resource information, supply chain information, and customer information' (Davenport 1998), in order to present 'a holistic view of business from a single information and IT architecture' (Klaus et

Figure 2: Properly referenced

A proactive strategy for dealing with corporate culture and human resource issues is fundamental to the success of mergers and acquisitions. However, these issues are rarely considered until serious difficulties arise. The personnel function was involved in only one-third of all the mergers and acquisitions he studied; management often fails to acknowledge that culture and human resource issues can actually cause a merger to fail. Acquisition managers must recognize that the role of people in determining merger and acquisition outcomes is in reality not a soft but a hard issue. Without the commitment of those who produce the goods and services, make decisions and conceive strategies, mergers and acquisitions will fail to achieve their synergizing potential as a wealth-creating strategy' [2 (p.142)].

This review has highlighted the importance of considering and strategically addressing corporate culture and human resource issues concurrently with financial issues. It has also illustrated the importance of dealing with these issues before, during, and after an acquisition or merger. Careful proactive planning by the acquiring organization to reduce the emotional fallout can ease the transition and reduce the risk of failure for an otherwise advantageous merger.

Much of the research on human resource strategies in mergers and acquisitions is reactive and descriptive, and only recently have tools been devised to proactively investigate and alleviate potential obstacles. Moreover, most of the research examines cultural and human resource matters for a relatively short period, but they need to be studied on a longitudinal basis. Caution should therefore be exercised in implementing the recommendations set out here, since they are only general guidelines and are not to be construed as remedies for all the ailments associated with mergers and acquisitions. Each transaction is unique. However, it is to be hoped that future research will provide human resources managers with better insights into both short- and long-term effects of mergers and acquisitions and with solutions to the problems inherent in them.

Figure 3: No original work

The JISC PDS therefore can be very helpful in identifying where copied text comes from, although as noted above, it only identifies *copied* text and will not identify all copied text. The process of evaluating the reports requires academic discretion (as the system may identify much copied text that has been properly referenced).

Departments may therefore wish to consider requiring students to submit electronic copies of all assessed work via WebCT so that it can be put through the JISC system. Although there are a number of operational practicalities associated with this, the process is relatively straightforward and it is as easy to submit *all* the student essays to JISC as it is to submit a sample of essays. A further benefit is that Departments would have an electronic archive of all student essays and staff would be able to take electronic copies rather than paper copies for marking. Student permission for their essays to be submitted to the JISC system is now included as part of their general registration with the School.

Preventing plagiarism

The use of the JISC system needs to be integrated into a broader education about expectations of essay writing. For example, our department gives students separate sessions about what is expected of essays and why, and what is expected in terms of referencing and why. It is important to ensure that students are given proper (and upto-date) advice on your expectations of writing and that Departmental expectations are widely discussed and shared.

Amongst the issues of Departmental expectations that we have noted are:

- What are the Departmental expectations about working together during the early stages of individual assignments? The instructions to students should be explicit about what level of collaboration is acceptable.
- Should students be allowed to reuse material from one essay to another (i.e. self-plagiarism)? Our departmental response to this has been to state explicitly that this is not permitted and that earlier work should be summarised / developed as though it was written by someone else.
- Should allowance be made for forms of patch-writing that non-native students often use when starting out in a new academic discipline? Any response to this has to be sensitive to the needs of native speakers who would not have such allowances.
- How should students present case studies that they take from other sources? Our response is that the case study should be presented as appendices (thus also freeing up words for the main essay).
- What level of copied text is acceptable? The issue here is to ensure a consistent level across the Department, so that students are not penalised on the basis of which option they take.
- What is the main purpose of the assessment? Is it for students to identify the key issues, or to present existing ideas in their own words? For example, would the example in figure 4 be seen as demonstrating a good understanding of the topic area, or problematic because the student had copied large sections of text without referencing them properly?

Mergers and acquisitions in the financial services sector are receiving a great deal of attention at present. The trend is toward the blurring of the boundaries that separated the various parts of the financial sector, particularly commercial banking, investment banking and insurance. More recently, we have been faced with the prospect of the formation of large financial conglomerates.

Mergers are occurring at a continually increasing rate. In 1998, there were 7,809 deals valued at \$1,192.9 billion. The number grew to 9,278 transactions in 1999 worth \$1,425.8 billion. In March 2000, the business world announced 1,506 deals worth \$324.6 billion. Global merger volume soared to a record \$1.14 trillion in the first quarter of 2000. In the U.S., alone deal volume jumped to \$587 billion. As M&A fever sweeps across all industries, business leaders should ask themselves if this is the most prudent strategy. Often, they will find that the answer is "no."

Newspapers often report on the larger mergers, including recent examples such as those involving Coopers & Lybrand with Price Waterhouse, forming the \$15.3 billion mega firm PricewaterhouseCoopers; the AT&T joint venture with British Telecom and Time Warner; America Online's purchase of Time Warner. Companies like Allied Signal, General Electric and Lucent Technologies all complete so many transactions that they now have dedicated personnel set up specifically to integrate acquired companies. High-tech companies are leading the wave of mergers and acquisitions. The fact that high-tech companies are growth stocks in today's market has made them very attractive. Of the 10,700 recorded merger deals in 1997, over 10 percent - more than \$90 billion - were in the telecommunications sector alone, according to Securities Data Co., a merger and financing information provider. Health care organisations seek collaboration through mergers, acquisitions, strategic alliances and networks, in order to enhance profit and reduce costs. While these structural changes have reduced in number since their peak in 1997, there were still over 700 deals encompassing \$21 billion in health care in 1999 in the US [1]

Despite optimistic expectations, corporate mergers and acquisitions frequently fail. 'at best, only half of all mergers and acquisitions meet initial financial expectations' [3 (p 57)]. Estimation says that up to two-thirds of all mergers do not work out as planned attributed to a failure to

Figure 4: An intelligent cut and paste.

Further advice

Rebecca Trumble (r.j.trumble@lse.ac.uk) in the Teaching and Learning Centre is the person to contact for detailed advice about the use of the plagiarism detection service.

I am, of course, also happy to take questions about our experiences with the JISC system and about the student diversity and academic writing project.

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Student Diversity & Academic Writing Project

A new project exploring the intersection of two crucial issues for the postgraduate higher education sector: international students and plagiarism

Following a successful bid to the Higher Education Funding Council for England under the FDTL 5 scheme researchers from Lancaster University and the London School of Economics are jointly investigating plagiarism, an area highly significant to policy and practice in UK universities today. The original bid was entitled: "Plagiarism, Computers and Values: Preventing Plagiarism among International Business and Management Post-graduate Students". The project started in January 2005 and will run until December 2007. It involves the following components:

Project A investigates educational practices in the biggest sending countries (China, Greece and India). The aim is not to judge these as either good or bad, but as a basis to understand where and why students may be experiencing difficulties as they are adapting to British academia. Country visits entail interviews and focus groups with students, lecturers, British Council staff and others involved in preparing students for their studies in the UK. Whilst the focus is on academic writing we recognise the need to place this in the wider context of students coming to the UK.

Project B consists of fieldwork with new international students. Enquiries will begin already during pre-sessional English classes. We will follow cohorts in London and Lancaster closely to gain a better understanding of how students write and will look carefully at the role and use of electronic sources. We seek to identify best-practice in terms of induction (study skills, academic writing, referencing, etc.) and examine how plagiarism policies and guidelines are actually understood by the students.

Project C takes a closer look at plagiarism detection software (PDSW), especially in terms of the assumptions that are embedded within it. PDSW is currently being implemented by many UK universities, but there is little critical discussion of how it works and of the implications that the technological specifications might have. Our aim is to open the 'black box' of plagiarism detection software in order to appreciate better how to use it appropriately in a formative rather than punitive manner.

Project D seeks to disseminate the project outcome not only through academic publication of research findings, but by producing user-friendly sources of information for international students and their lecturers at UK universities. Moreover, we are keen to inject our results into the ongoing policy debate about the way international students are recruited, prepared and taught and how plagiarism can be deterred.

Project team: Prof Lucas Introna, Dr Niall Hayes, Dr Anja Timm (Lancaster University Management School) and Dr Edgar Whitley (London School of Economics). For further information, please contact the SDAW project coordinator, Anja Timm at a.timm@lancaster.ac.uk or a.timm@lse.ac.uk
