TCX
TUTOR CONNEXXIONS

MAY 2010/ISSUE **28**

DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is universally recognized as "an act of fraud that involves both stealing (another's intellectual property) and lying (implying that the work is one's own)."

Yet, as most educational institutions around the world can attest, plagiarism is becoming increasingly rife, not least because the internet makes cheating as effortless as cutting and pasting.

TCX28 explores the causes and effects of plagiarism, and examines what tutors should do when plagiarism rears its ugly head.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Ideas spring forth from the mind, inspiring humanity to ever greater heights of thinking and material achievement. Ideas lead to inventions and innovations which revolutionise the way we live and the way we think.

Ideas are just like things. I have mine and you have yours. While it is a good idea to share ideas, boundaries must be established to ensure that one's intellectual rights are protected.

Plagiarism is a bane to the commerce of ideas. This is not because ideas are meant to be kept to oneself, but because there are unscrupulous people around who have no sense of respect when it comes to borrowing ideas from others.

In order to generate new, more complex ideas, there is a necessity to utilise pre-existing ideas. In academia, this is apparent when we work on our assignments, project papers, theses, and so on. However, in our mad rush for credits and credentials, there is a tendency to take the easy path of plagiarism.

TCX28 attempts to explore this issue from various angles – through interviews with our top people and academicians, through the opinions of tutors and learners, and through articles written by our editorial board members. Plagiarism is a thorny issue which blights the academic integrity of any institution; hence a concerted effort from all parties is required to effectively manage this menace.

It is our hope at TCX that some awareness may be raised about the seriousness of this matter among those concerned. Our tutors play an influential role in guiding our learners through the thickets and thistles of plagiarism. The first step is awareness. Our tutors need to create awareness in our learners about the moral and practical consequences of plagiarism. This will hopefully lead to a more honest, constructive approach in knowledge creation among our learners.

Here's to a more responsible and ethical learning environment.

Azahar Ahmad Nizar

Editor

ELEMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE TUTORING

Adult learning is an area that is worth looking into, especially when it comes to tutoring. Certain elements must be present for effective tutoring to happen.

Firstly, tutors must be a few steps ahead of his or her learners. Tutors must have the necessary paper qualifications and teaching experience to perform well during tutorials. Secondly, tutors must be disciplined in their approach. They should be well-prepared for tutorials and punctual so as not to waste the learners' time. Thirdly, tutors and learners alike must be responsible for making the tutorial an effective learning experience. The tutor does his or her part by facilitating quality educational experiences while learners also contribute by preparing beforehand with intelligent questions and suggestions.

Stevens Lahamin Wasibin
Tutor
OUM Main Campus, Kuala Lumpur

LEARNERS' EXPECTATIONS OF OUM TUTORS

Distance learning has been a trend in many parts of the world, especially in the United Kingdom. I for one am doing my doctoral degree with a British university via distance learning.

Hence, I strongly support this system as it provides an advantage to working adults who can work and study at the same time. In Malaysia, OUM stands out as it uses a lot of information technology such as the Internet and digital library.

However, in terms of getting knowledge, the learners may feel that they are not gaining much from tutors. From my observation, some tutors have less knowledge than learners, particularly those who have been in the job market for 40 years or more. In some cases, the learners have more experience than their tutors. Learners, of course, can still benefit from the tutors' theoretical knowledge.

Kiong Siew Wai
Tutor
Negeri Sembilan Learning Centre

TO BE A BETTER TUTOR

The article *10 Steps to Better Tutoring* in Issue 27 is good as it reflects what we've been doing as tutors. As tutors, we have to plan our lessons well with only 2 hours per tutorial and 10 topics to teach in 5 tutorials. We always tell the students to read the module so that we can discuss the gist of the topic. However, most students attend tutorials with no preparation and expect the tutors to go through each topic page by page. If you do this, it will definitely take hours to finish.

In addition, tutors should also spend time discussing assignments with learners. I write out guidelines on how to answer the assignment questions in detail every semester. This is an important point which I think should have been included in the article.

Dr Nor Fariza Mohd Nor
Tutor
Serdang Raya Learning Centre

We welcome letters from our readers on any issue that may be of concern to you. You may use a pseudonym if you wish but please mention which learning centre you are from. Please e-mail us at tcx@oum.edu.my.

IMPORTANT DATES

OMES Deadlines

PROGRAMME	ACTIVITY	DATE (2010)
Undergraduate	Key in marks for assignments and quizzes*	12-25 July
	Key in marks for online participation*	26 July – 1 August
	Except for MCQ-format subjects	
Postgraduate	Key in marks for Assignment 1	14-27 June
	Key in marks for Assignment 2	12-25 July
	Key in marks for online participation	26 July – 1 August

Upcoming Activities

ACTIVITY	DATE (2010)	REMARKS
Monitoring of New/ Senior Tutors and Facilitators	Tutorials/ Seminars 1-5	Observation during tutorials/seminars will be conducted by Lead Tutors and OUM academic staff.

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COPYING AND ITS AFTER-EFFECTS: NOTES FROM THE FIELD

By Dr David CL Lim (david@oum.edu.my)

I tutored a group of learners in the January 2010 semester, which was more or less routine until after the assignments were handed in. To my horror, I discovered that six out of 17 learners plagiarised extensively from the Internet, while one learner carelessly went off on the wrong path in answering the assignment question.

What surprised me was that these learners resorted to plagiarism despite having been informed repeatedly that plagiarism would not be tolerated and that it was often easy for tutors to pick up on telltale signs of plagiarism.

So, on the fifth tutorial, I went in and gave the learners the bad news: that seven of them "failed" their assignments, which instantly woke the class up, sending the ones who were present to telephone their missing peers who "failed".

Suddenly, those who could not come for the final tutorial came flooding in, all looking concerned.

Not wanting to fail these learners outright, I thought it would only be humane to give them one final chance to make up for their "indiscretion". In other universities, these learners would have been expelled.

They were given a serious pep talk and three days to redo their assignment and submit by e-mail.

They were also warned that their resubmitted assignment would be put through plagiarism-detection software, and that there would not be any more chance should they plagiarise again.

Of the six who plagiarised and were caught, one was caught plagiarising again – extensively, at that. The one who did not plagiarise in the first round but approached the assignment question wrongly surprisingly decided to send in plagiarised work.

In the end, these two were given zero.

What was eye-opening for me was not so much that some learners plagiarised but that they decided to plagiarise again despite having been caught once and given a chance to resubmit.
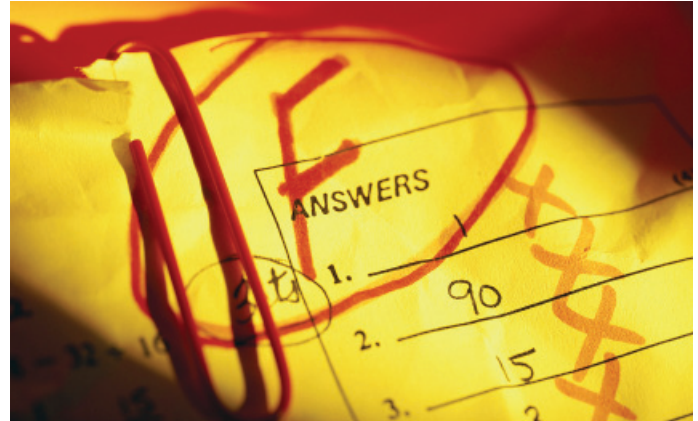
What was eye-opening for me was not so much that some learners plagiarised but that they decided to plagiarise again despite having been caught once and given a chance to resubmit.

Any tutor would ask: Why? Why do learners resort to blatant cheating despite everything that has happened? Did they think they could get away with it, that tutors would not be able to detect plagiarism, or would "collude" with them out of some misplaced sense of "compassion"? Or is it that they just don't care?

Fascinatingly, a learner even called me on the mobile to request that I give her "at least a C or even a D" no matter what, otherwise I would be seen as "ruining her life".

Undoubtedly, the Internet provides learners with a treasure trove of materials to conveniently cut and paste onto their assignments. Some tutors might feel compelled to pass their learners anyway, even though proof of plagiarism is irrefutable.

In the face of this, the question all tutors should ask themselves is whether they are prepared to do the right thing.

It would be easy for tutors to look the other way when confronted with acts of cheating in order to remain "popular" with learners. But is being "popular" necessarily good for the university? I think the answer to that is clear and obvious. **TCX**

INTERVIEW WITH PROF DR MANSOR FADZIL, SVP OF OUM

By Jimmy Teo Hui Thian (jteo@oum.edu.my)

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and much has been said about it. Besides being unethical, it can lead to disciplinary actions or expulsions. TCX spoke to PROF DR MANSOR FADZIL, Senior Vice President of OUM, to get his views on this topic.

Jimmy: How does OUM view plagiarism?

Prof Mansor: As a university, we strive to produce quality graduates who can write their own proposals, produce original assignments and uphold academic integrity at all times. In order for our country to progress, we need to produce graduates who embrace integrity as part of their nature.

So, instead of focusing merely on plagiarism, we would like to broaden our scope by inculcating "personal integrity". Soundness of moral character is important, especially in the academic world where a large part of one's education begins. I believe that lack of integrity and greed contributed to the recent financial crisis. It was so severe that it affected not only our country's economy but the world's financial system as well.

In our efforts to deal with plagiarism, we are looking at the bigger picture of promoting integrity among our staff, tutors and learners. We believe that by cultivating this culture of integrity, we will be able to eradicate plagiarism and other unethical practices in our institution as well.

Jimmy: Is plagiarism a problem at OUM?

Prof Mansor: We see plagiarism as a very serious issue. I would say that the situation is not very severe; I would put it between 10 to 15%. But this happens everywhere else as well. In fact, a lot of universities admit having plagiarised work submitted by their learners. Even the United Kingdom has a high plagiarism rate. Of course, this is not by way of excusing ourselves, but more a matter of stating the fact that it happens everywhere.

So, instead of focusing merely on plagiarism, we would like to broaden our scope by inculcating "personal integrity".

Jimmy: What are the key measures taken by OUM to reduce plagiarism?

Prof Mansor: One of the things that we are implementing this coming May semester is to get learners to submit their assignments online in order for us to feed them into our plagiarism detection software. We have both free and licensed software that we will use for this purpose.

Another thing we are doing is to come up with a more comprehensive plagiarism policy in order for us to address this menace. I have directed the Director of the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (CTLA), Prof Dr Shaari Abdul Hamid, to analyse, study and assess the best practices with regards to plagiarism prevention and make proper recommendations for us to adopt and tighten our plagiarism policy. This policy is to address issues like what actions are to be taken when a learner is caught plagiarising, who would be held responsible, and the severity of plagiarism and its consequences.

We also plan to display our plagiarism policy on our website, hopefully by the end of the year, to educate our learners on this issue. Learners should know that avoiding plagiarism is their responsibility.

Jimmy: Do you have any advice for our learners?

Prof Mansor: Learners who plagiarise are actually cheating themselves and not the university. At the end of the day, these learners will get grades that do not reflect their true capabilities. Consequently, they will face lots of challenges at their workplace when they are unable to perform as expected. They should take this opportunity to develop their skills and not resort to shortcut methods to get their work done. TCX

GUIDELINES FOR PLAGIARISM PREVENTION

Adapted by Azahar bin Ahmad Nizar (azahar_ahmad@oum.edu.my)

Plagiarism is a widespread problem which threatens the integrity of intellectual work in academic institutions all over the world. Is there anything that we can do to prevent plagiarism from happening? The following guidelines may be of some help:

1. *Explain what "plagiarism" means:* Most of the time, plagiarism happens because students honestly cannot tell the difference between proper citation and outright plagiarism. To prevent these "honest mistakes" from occurring, spend some time at the beginning of the course explaining the differences between the two by referring to clear examples.

2. *Explain what's wrong with plagiarism:* Plagiarism is wrong because it infringes on the intellectual property of others. At the same time, the learners are also doing themselves a disservice because they deprive themselves of the opportunity to learn and apply proper research skills. Finally, plagiarism is an act of injustice against fellow coursemates who have actually taken the trouble to complete their assignments honestly.

3. *Make the consequences clear:* Learners will think twice about committing plagiarism if they were made aware of the dire consequences of doing so. Lecturers should warn learners that they risk automatic failure should they be caught plagiarising in their assignments.

4. *Start off with clear expectations:* Lecturers should make it clear to learners from the start that a good assignment consists of original ideas, and not necessarily a long list of sources. Once they are clear about what they are expected to produce, they can focus on producing original work instead of churning page after page of useless information.

5. *Assign specific questions or topics:* Assigning specific questions or topics will reduce the likelihood of plagiarism. This is because your learners are unlikely to find ready-made essays online, because these tend to be very general in nature.

6. *Require students to submit thesis statements, introductions, outlines, or drafts:* During the early stages of research, learners should be required to submit drafts of their work. This is an effective way of deterring plagiarism as drafts are very difficult to forge, so they might as well come up with an original piece in the first place. Learners can then benefit from receiving feedback from the lecturers based on the drafts which they have prepared.

7. *Have your students annotate their bibliographies:* Students should be required to summarise the relevance and usefulness of their sources in their own words. This will reveal how much they actually know their sources. Plagiarisers will have a hard time with this exercise because they have not actually taken the time to read their sources.

8. *Assign oral presentations:* Your learners should be requested to give oral presentations on the research process which they went through. During the presentation, you can ask them to account for passages in their assignments which seem suspicious.

9. *Require recent and printed sources:* Online essays from cheating databases are usually already several years old. You should encourage your learners to incorporate as many recent and contemporary sources as they can. This way, they will be up to speed on current research trends while preventing them from resorting to online essays.

10. *Assign a paragraph on the composition process:* Learners should be asked to write a paragraph on the composition process explaining how they arrived at their topic, how they began researching it, what criteria they used for evaluating their sources, and what they learned from the research project. You can judge the genuineness of their efforts by how fluent they are in discussing the composition process.

11. *Encourage concision:* Learners should be discouraged from "padding" or filling up their research papers with unnecessary information. Assignments should be about substantive arguments, not word length. Assignments written for the sake of satisfying a word count tend to be uninspired and disjointed due to plagiarised content. TCX

Adapted From: plagiarism.org

INTERVIEW WITH
PROF DR RAHMAH HASHIM

By Dr Nurul Muiz Murad (nurul_muiz@oum.edu.my)

PROF DR RAHMAH HASHIM is the Director of the Centre for Graduate Studies (CGS) and a professor at the Faculty of Information Technology and Multimedia Communications (FITMC) and CGS. She has extensive experience teaching at various levels, which also includes education for the blind. Here she shares her views on plagiarism.

Muiz: Please tell us a bit about yourself.

Prof Rahmah: I earned my Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Communication from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in 1980. I served in UKM for twenty years from 1980 to 2000, beginning as a tutor at the Department of Communication and finishing my tenure there as the Head of the same department.

I graduated with a Master's degree in Instructional Media Technology from Central Missouri State University in 1982. In 1989, I was awarded a PhD in Telecommunication from The Ohio State University.

As the Malay saying goes: Menyesal dahulu pendapatan, menyesal kemudian tidak berguna.

Muiz: Is plagiarism a big concern at OUM especially with postgraduate students?

Prof Rahmah: In all fairness, plagiarism is not rampant at the postgraduate level but students need to be aware that it is NOT tolerated.

Plagiarism cases can usually be detected in assignments, research projects and dissertations at the Master's level. On the part of CGS, as soon as plagiarism is detected or reported, we would not hesitate to bring up such cases to the University Disciplinary Committee.

Muiz: Can you give us a few general examples of plagiarism that you have encountered in OUM especially with postgraduate students?

Prof Rahmah: Between January 2006 to September 2009, CGS detected eight plagiarism cases involving Master's dissertations. Two students were expelled from OUM for plagiarising almost 90% of the contents. The others were slapped with a fine of RM500, suspension of study for two semesters, and given a warning. In research cases, wrongdoers are directed to come up with a new research title and proposal, and to begin the research process all over again.

In January semester 2010, two more Master's projects were found to be plagiarised. Punitive measures were taken after the cases have been scrutinised by the University Disciplinary Committee. The students were given time to defend themselves. Evidence was produced and the students were expelled.

Muiz: What is being done at the moment in OUM to eliminate plagiarism? How can this be applied in CGS?

Prof Rahmah: I do hope the day will come when CGS can declare that plagiarism is eliminated at OUM's postgraduate programmes.

For the moment, OUM has taken the necessary steps to deter students from plagiarising.

For every course assignment question, instructions are given on how to avoid plagiarism by citing sources of information for the use of words, ideas or data from another source/person, or by paraphrasing and/or using quotation.

The University Policy, Rules and Regulations explicitly state that "No learner may plagiarise the intellectual property of others, including data, ideas, publications and inventions."

Plagiarism is considered a serious offence and a violation of the Learners' Code of Ethics. This information is published in the Learners' Handbook which is available in soft copy version in MyLMS.

Muiz: How can tutors/facilitators help OUM students so that they won't plagiarise?

Prof Rahmah: Tutors/facilitators can play their role by educating their students about the importance of maintaining high ethical values of academic integrity. They must constantly instil awareness on the need to be honest and trustworthy. They need to give clear explanations at the beginning of their courses about what constitutes plagiarism, ways to avoid plagiarism, and the dire consequences of plagiarism. In turn, all tutors and facilitators need to show exemplary conduct by not tolerating plagiarised work and not turning a blind eye when dealing with plagiarism.

Students need to be reminded that the tertiary degrees conferred to them will be devalued if they were to compromise academic integrity by paying someone else to write the article/assignment/thesis for them, or by submitting someone else's work as their own, whether with or without permission.

The tutor/facilitator may not be able to detect it then, but over time, the act of plagiarism will have an effect on the person. The feeling of guilt will always hang over the person's conscience. In the long term, he/she will reveal his/her inability to develop the essential skills of academic researching and writing which underlie postgraduate studies.

Getting a degree may be of paramount importance to the individual student, but every student must be aware that he/she cannot, must not and should never compromise academic integrity for the sake of obtaining a degree.

Muiz: What will be the challenge in OUM to eliminate plagiarism?

Prof Rahmah: OUM students have the added advantage of accessing numerous e-materials from the digital library besides the use of Google and other search engines to locate a wide range of information and knowledge. It is tempting to "cut and paste" chunks of information from those available sources under the false assumption that tutors/facilitators/examiners would not know that the work is not original. This becomes especially tantalising when students face deadlines and feel pressured to submit their work. Whatever the reasons, plagiarism is a white collar crime, an offence against the learners' code of ethics, against the University policy, rules and regulations, and is against OUM's noble values and intellectual conduct.

The challenge lies in monitoring all the assignments and documenting research projects/theses/dissertations to ensure that the students' work is plagiarism-free. To help prevent plagiarism, one of the immediate actions taken by OUM is to subscribe to plagiarism detection software.

Muiz: Do you think that OUM has to deal with more plagiarism cases, given that we are an ODL institution?

Prof Rahmah: Being an ODL institution does not make OUM more susceptible to plagiarism or less accountable for such unethical conduct. Plagiarism is a serious problem faced by all academic institutions in the world.

Muiz: Do you think postgraduate students plagiarise less compared to undergraduate students? Why?

Plagiarism occurs at all levels of academia. It can occur at the baccalaureate level, Master's level or doctorate level.

Though punishments are meant to deter offenders, it is hoped that learners (regardless of academic level) would seriously avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism. They should instead focus on the noble values of integrity and academic honesty.

Punishments for plagiarism are very harsh. So better steer clear of the offence before punishment is meted out. No point regretting and crying over spilt milk only after you have been expelled, or after seeing your name splashed in the front pages of newspapers for all the wrong reasons, or having your name deleted from the list of graduating students, or for the university to retract the award from you after having graduated, thus bringing shame to your family and/or workplace for the wrongdoing. As the Malay saying goes: *Menyesal dahulu pendapatan, menyesal kemudian tidak berguna.* TCX

INTERVIEW WITH PROF DR AHMAD HASHEM

Interview by Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh (harvinder@oum.edu.my)

PROF DR AHMAD HASHEM is the General Manager (Chief Technology Officer) of METEOR Technology & Consultancy Sdn Bhd. One of his projects is to implement a system called "similarity checker" as part of OUM's efforts to combat plagiarism. Let's here what he has to say about it.

Harvinder: Plagiarism is considered a serious problem in almost all learning institutions worldwide. I understand OUM is not spared this problem too and has lately been using a system called "similarity checker". Please tell us more about this system.

Prof Ahmad: A similarity checker is not a plagiarism detection system. All plagiarism detection systems compare each submitted essay against internal and external sources. The external sources include freely available material on the Internet, digital subscription databases of reference material and other proprietary sources. Plagiarism detection systems, such as Turnitin, work on a subscription plan where a fee is charged on each essay submission.

The similarity checker, on the other hand, compares essays, assignments and reports in a database against each other for similarity. It does not compare with external sources. The essays for a particular course can be compared with all essays in the current semester or with all essays in the database.

We use a system based on the free open source program called WCopyfind, developed by Lou Bloomfield who is a professor of Physics at the University of Virginia. The original program was designed for manual operations, whereas in OUM's case, with our large student numbers, the system must be automated and integrated with a database. Thus, the original program has been modified and extended to meet the current needs of OUM. More information on WCopyfind can be obtained at http://plagiarism.phys.virginia.edu/.

Writing an essay should be a learning experience. Research, analysis and thinking must take place.

Harvinder: Why has OUM preferred this system over the others and what are the benefits?

Prof Ahmad: The major compelling reason is that this system is free and can be customised to meet the exact needs of OUM. The usual subscription-based plagiarism detection system can be expensive for a large operation such as OUM. For instance, Turnitin charges RM7.00 per essay submission to be checked for plagiarism. Multiply this amount by the number of essays and it is easy to understand that free is much cheaper.

The other main reason is that a similarity checker system is faster than a subscribed plagiarism detection system. In a pilot trial, we found that our system can compare 1,000 essays contained in a database in less than one minute. On the other hand, the subscribed detection system takes a long time because comparisons are made against varied sources such as the Internet, databases of books, journals, and so on. A typical OUM course can easily take more than 24 hours for a plagiarism report to be produced.

Therefore, given that we have to check hundreds of thousands of essays, the plagiarism detection system is neither practical nor cost-effective.

Harvinder: What types of assessment can be scanned for plagiarism using this system?

Prof Ahmad: Any form of text document such as assignment essays and reports can be submitted for checking.

Harvinder: How does this system function in detecting plagiarism and how reliable are the detection results?

Prof Ahmad: This system does not detect plagiarism as such but highlights the extent of similarity among essays that are compared. Higher similarity between two essays means that the essays share many similar passages. The result of the comparison is shown in a report that presents the similarity index, which is the extent of similarity in percentages of the total text between every pair of essay being compared. The assessment of similarity is very accurate.

Harvinder: In your opinion, will this similarity checker system discourage learners from plagiarising in their assignment? To what extent will the system prevent plagiarism?

Prof Ahmad: We want to encourage learners to produce original work and to cite all works that were used as reference. Proper academic standards must be adhered to at all times. Writing an essay should be a learning experience. Research, analysis and thinking must take place.

The aim of using this system is to identify essays that may not be original and separate them from the rest of the documents in the database. It may not prevent plagiarism absolutely – no system can – but it is hoped that with the system in place, it will help to advance honesty and scholarship accordingly.

Harvinder: Will the similarity checker system be viable for future use in OUM or will it be outdated in time?

Prof Ahmad: Because this system does not rely on external sources and all essays are compared against each other within the internal database, it is apparent that this system will be useful as long as the comparison can take place.

Harvinder: What are OUM's future plans with regards to the use of the similarity checker system?

Prof Ahmad: This initiative on our part is still in its infancy. However, it is hoped that new approaches and strategies could be developed based on the learning experiences and lessons learnt from using this system. TCX

INTERVIEW WITH PROF IR DR ROSLI HAMIR

By Jimmy Teo Hui Thian (jteo@oum.edu.my)

As the Chairman of the Student Disciplinary Committee, PROF IR DR ROSLI HAMIR is well-positioned to speak about plagiarism from a disciplinary point of view.

Jimmy: In this Information Age, researching has become more like searching, cutting and pasting for many learners. What is your comment on this?

Prof Rosli: You are right. Many learners resort to this. Lifting someone else's work verbatim and then passing it off as your own is unethical and wrong. In fact, recently we expelled a postgraduate student who submitted 90% of someone else's thesis as his own. To us, this is a serious matter.

Jimmy: What types of plagiarism are common among learners in OUM?

Prof Rosli: There are many types of plagiarism. The most common is the cut and paste variety as you have already mentioned. This is clear-cut plagiarism.

Word switch plagiarism happens when learners take a sentence and change a few words, thinking that it is alright. However, this is still considered plagiarism. To avoid plagiarism, they should quote or paraphrase the person instead.

Another form of plagiarism among learners is style plagiarism. Here, even though the sentences in the paragraphs are different, the reasoning style of the author is the same.

Idea plagiarism is also rampant. This happens when an author's creative ideas are lifted without acknowledgement. Learners should learn to reference the source. To know more about plagiarism, learners can go to www.plagiarism.org.

Jimmy: What will happen to a learner if he or she is caught plagiarising?

Prof Rosli: Learners who are caught plagiarising in an assignment, project paper or thesis will face stern penalties as mentioned in the student handbook. Learners would have to face the Student Disciplinary Committee. Then the university will decide on the next course of action to

As for the learners, the university is a place to gain more knowledge and skills, so learn as much as you can, polish your research skills and submit original work.

be taken. I want to take this opportunity to send a strong message to learners – do not hand in plagiarised work. Once caught, the consequences for the learner are severe.

Jimmy: What is your advice to tutors and learners on plagiarism?

Prof Rosli: As I said earlier, do not risk it as the punishment is severe. To the tutors, please explain and help the learners understand the assignment questions or the task at hand. Our tutors are highly qualified and most of them are academicians. They should be able to guide the learners and advise them on how to avoid plagiarism. As for the learners, the university is a place to gain more knowledge and skills, so learn as much as you can, polish your research skills and submit original work. This would be more satisfying and rewarding in the end. TCX

Plagiarism FAQs

Adapted by Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh (harvinder@oum.edu.my

Plagiarism is a serious offence which learners should avoid committing at all cost. Of course, to do so one would have to be acquainted with the concept in the first place. The following frequently asked questions (FAQs) will hopefully steer you in the right direction:

1. **What is plagiarism?**

   Plagiarism is the incorporation of another's work into yours as though they were your own without acknowledging it. Plagiarism includes:
   - turning in someone else's work as your own.
   - copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit.
   - failing to put a quotation in quotation marks and without giving acknowledgement.
   - giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation.
   - changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit.
   - copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not.

   Simply put, plagiarism is a form of cheating! Therefore, by committing plagiarism, you have violated copyright law.

2. **Does it matter how much was copied?**

   Even if a small part of a work is plagiarised, it is still considered a copyright violation. The amount that was copied has bearing on the severity of the punishment.

3. **If I change the words, do I still have to cite the source?**

   You must cite a source whenever you borrow ideas as well as words. Changing only the words of an original source is not sufficient to prevent plagiarism.

4. **If I write something that somebody else had already written unknowingly, is this still considered plagiarism?**

   While it is possible that you might write on the same topic as someone else, chances are that you will not have exactly the same ideas or express them in exactly the same way. It is highly unlikely that you would be accused of plagiarising a source you have never read. Be careful, however, of "accidentally" plagiarising from sources you have read and forgotten -- if your ideas turn out to have been influenced by a source that you had read but failed to cite for any reason, you could be guilty of plagiarism.

5. **What are the punishments for plagiarism?**

   Plagiarism may result in failure for the assignment and for the course, and sometimes in expulsion. Plagiarism that involves money, prizes or job placement constitutes a crime punishable in court. Employees have lost their jobs or been denied career advancement as a result of plagiarism.

6. **How can plagiarism be avoided?**

   Citing sources, acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source are usually enough to prevent plagiarism. Topic 5 of the module *Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learners* provides more information on how to cite sources properly.

   Adapted From: plagiarism.org

VIEWS FROM TUTORS

By Norazlina Mohamad (norazlina_mohamad@oum.edu.my)

John Milton once said: *"Copy from one, its plagiarism; copy from two, its research."* This famous quote ironically reflects learners' views about plagiarism. How do tutors view plagiarism? Let's find out!

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Tutors play a leading role in guiding learners when it comes to assignments and proper referencing. This can be communicated during face-to-face tutorials as well as online discussion forums. It is important for tutors to constantly remind learners to shun any form of plagiarism. This can be achieved by hammering home the severe penalties which learners may suffer from if caught plagiarising.

If learners are caught plagiarising, immediate enforcement is crucial to show that we are treating it seriously. It would be a painful lesson for the learners but they would learn from it. Fear of punishment is a good deterrent and should be utilised to affect positive change.

Dr Kuan Soon Lye
Permatang Pauh Learning Centre

"Copy from one, its plagiarism; copy from two, its research."

John Milton

is our duty to ensure that plagiarism is nipped in the bud before it affects the academic integrity of the institution.

Haji Mohamad Umbaik bin Ismail
Petaling Jaya Learning Centre

CULTURE OF PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is not a new issue and in fact has become entrenched as a form of negative culture among many learners. The values of integrity and honesty are not honoured; as long as assignments are submitted on time, the ends justify the means.

This culture of plagiarism is perpetuated as a result of poor attitude among the learners. With work and family to worry about, coupled with poor time management and study skills, they are tempted to take the easy way out through plagiarism.

When they do this, they miss the opportunity to do real research. Naturally, our learners will not be experts in their field of learning if this culture persists. This will reflect badly on the university's reputation. As guardians of learning, it

LIKE TEACHER, LIKE LEARNER

Sometimes the learners are not entirely to blame when it comes to plagiarism. True, they are the ones who commit the crime, but were they the ones who condoned it in the first place? Apparently, schools today condone such acts of plagiarism by allowing, or worse, "teaching" learners to "copy and paste" information for the sake of completing the coursework. Surprisingly, the teachers actually spoonfeed the learners with information and appeal to the weaker ones to just copy. Isn't this an encouragement to plagiarise?

If Malaysia wants to have world-class education standards, then we need to educate our learners from young to be honest and critical in their quest for knowledge. We as educators should play our part as role models to ensure that our learners inherit good learning and research habits through example.

Anna Mary Perumal
Sibu Learning Centre

VIEWS FROM LEARNERS: WHY DO LEARNERS PLAGIARISE?

Compiled by Azahar Ahmad Nizar (azahar_ahmad@oum.edu.my)

*S*o far, we have heard from the academics and tutors about the issue of plagiarism. What about the learners themselves, often at the receiving end of accusations of plagiarism? Here, some learners share their views on why plagiarism happens among them.

TIME WAITS FOR NO MAN

Basically, there should be no compromise or leeway when it comes to plagiarism. Having said that, I have observed that learners are sometimes put in a situation where they are forced to plagiarise. The main reason is the learner's inability to understand the subject taught by the tutor during face-to-face sessions. This causes a lot of difficulty for the learner because he or she does not have the luxury of time to properly study the modules provided by OUM.

At the same time, the learner's inability to manage his or her time properly may also contribute to plagiarism. At the last minute, the learner would only be thinking about submitting the assignment on time, never mind making sure that the references are properly cited.

As a BEMATH learner, I find that assignments are useful because they help us prepare for the final examinations. It also goes without saying that BEMATH learners are unlikely to be found guilty of plagiarism because mathematics questions require application and problem-solving to derive the answers. Surely the learner won't find the answers in a mathematics textbook!

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THE ART OF THINKING

For some, education today is not so much about the pursuit of knowledge as it is about the pursuit of paper. When getting the necessary grades becomes the be all and end all of education, is it any wonder then that students would seek the speediest and easiest route to securing it? Learning is a lifelong exercise of connecting dots, and as each dot gets connected, new ones come into view. In order for these dots to get connected, students must be taught at a very

Learning is a lifelong exercise of connecting dots, and as each dot gets connected, new ones come into view.

early age the art of thinking, which is inextricably linked to questioning.

However, the reality is far removed from the ideal. Instead, they are often fed facts and directed to the desired conclusions by their teachers. When older, these learners show an inability to think for themselves. Unable to gather and analyse information, they are reduced to being casual observers, sorely lacking the ability to look beyond the obvious.

When tasked with assignments that require original thinking, they are like fish out of water. Unable to analyse other people's ideas and weave them into their own argument, they resort to the easy way out, reproducing someone else's work as their own. Plagiarism, although risky, provides an easy solution. In the short term, these students may proudly feel that they have cheated the system. In the long run, they will discover to their horror that they have only cheated themselves.

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TRENDS IN PLAGIARISM

By Lamjin Atoh (lamjin@oum.edu.my)

If you think that being trendy is limited to the world of fashion, then think again. Plagiarism also involves trends, and keeping up with them is crucial if we are to effectively manage this menace. This article attempts to trace trends in plagiarism with reference to some international studies.

A survey of high school students in the United States of America conducted by Donald McCabe and others suggests that most students entering college arrive with some kind of cheating experience during their high school years. This study reveals that although students entering college expect something different from their high school experience, the reality of plagiarism at college level reveals a different picture. Widespread cheating among the senior students convinces the junior students that nothing much has changed between high school and college.

Jam Bamford and Katerina Sergiou conducted a study which involved students from 35 different countries. The majority of respondents confirmed that they had started plagiarising at the university they were attending and most admitted copying direct from books. As the study indicates that plagiarism is prevalent among international students, this also implies that most of them were unaware of plagiarism before they enrolled in their international universities.

The trend has since changed from copying direct from books to "copying and pasting" direct from the Net. The internet's popularity has continued to grow, allowing easy access to ideas and knowledge for anyone, anywhere, anytime. However, this wealth of information can also be abused by unethical learners. In times of trouble, the Net becomes

Plagiarism also involves trends, and keeping up with them is crucial if we are to effectively manage this menace.

a "saviour" to learners in desperate need of information. This makes plagiarism more complicated and difficult to monitor.

As cheating trends in the academic world become more and more advanced, it is fitting that technology should be utilised to deal with plagiarism on the Net through plagiarism detection systems and similarity checkers. Whether committed digitally or otherwise, plagiarism should not be tolerated and should be condemned internationally. Those who are found guilty of plagiarism should be duly penalised to safeguard the integrity of the academic tradition.

ONLINE POLL

I can educate my learners about the wrongfulness of plagiarism by:

1. setting a good example i.e. not committing plagiarism myself in the notes or materials that I give them.

2. teaching them the correct way to quote references in their assignments.

3. explaining to them the difference between original work and plagiarised work.

4. severely penalising them whenever they hand in plagiarised work.

Please cast your votes online!

INTERVIEW WITH ALEX LEE HONG SIN

By Azahar Ahmad Nizar (azahar_ahmad@oum.edu.my)

*A*LEX LEE HONG SIN *is a highly qualified tutor and experienced module writer based in our Perak Learning Centre.*

Azahar: Please describe your educational background.

Alex: I graduated with a double major degree in Computer Science and Mathematics from Campbell University, US in 1992. I worked in the information technology industry for ten years and in the education industry for eight years. I enrolled at Open University Malaysia (OUM) in 2005 and graduated in July 2007 with a Masters in Information Technology.

Azahar: What is your tutoring experience like in OUM?

Alex: It has been an awesome and challenging experience. I am able to connect with the learners at their level of interest and experience due to my industrial experience. This helps me to understand my learners and their work commitments. We are able to draw on our work experiences and apply concepts to help solve problems and come up with alternative solutions. I hope the learners will study hard and be persistent in finishing their programme while enjoying the journey.

Azahar: What do you understand by "plagiarism"?

Alex: My definition of "plagiarism" is copying or using (digitally or non-digitally) an author's ideas or research findings without precisely acknowledging the author in your work.

Azahar: Why do you think learners plagiarise?

Alex: Firstly, I think learners plagiarise out of their ignorance of the seriousness of the offence. Secondly, learners are anxious about expressing their own ideas because of poor command of the English language. Lastly, learners lack confidence when it comes to justifying their recommendations through constructive argumentation.

Azahar: In your experience, how is plagiarism detected in your learners' work?

Alex: There are plenty of software and online websites which we can use to check for plagiarism, provided that the coursework is submitted in digital format. There are free

They are supposed to think critically to generate new ideas based on the original ideas of other scholars.

downloadable anti-plagiarism software, but these may not be as effective as the paid ones. For hardcopy assignments, the tutor is required to analyse the sentence structure, grammar, choice of words and context.

Azahar: If learners continue to plagiarise, how will this affect their learning?

Alex: If learners continue to plagiarise, they will not be able to express themselves well and create their own ideas. In Bloom's taxonomy, there is a cognitive level called "synthesis" in which the learners are required to read, understand and digest the content. They are supposed to think critically to generate new ideas based on the original ideas of other scholars.

Azahar: What steps should be taken to ensure that learners refrain from plagiarising?

Alex: On the first day of tutorials, we should inform them of the seriousness of the offence and that they will be punished severely if found cheating. I usually ask my learners to sign a written letter stating that they will not plagiarise their coursework or risk failure. We should guide our learners by showing them samples of plagiarised work as compared to properly cited ones. Those who refrain from plagiarism should be rewarded accordingly. TCX

THE SEED THAT NEVER GREW

Adapted by Azeezah Jameelah Mohamed Mohideen (azeezah@oum.edu.my)

The CEO of a company was growing old and wanted to choose a successor. Instead of choosing one of his directors or children, he decided to do something different. He called all the young executives in his company into the boardroom and told them: "It is time for me to appoint the next CEO and step down. I have decided to choose one of you."

He continued: "I will give each of you a seed today. It is a very special seed. I want you to plant it and come back here one year from today with what you have grown. I will then choose one plant. The person whose plant I choose will be the next CEO."

Jim was one of the executives who received a seed that day. He took it home and excitedly told his wife about it. She helped him get a pot, soil and compost. He planted the seed and watered it every day. After about three weeks, some of his colleagues began to talk about their plants which were beginning to grow. But Jim's seed was not growing. Several weeks went by with no sign of progress. Jim began to feel like a failure.

Six months went by with nothing growing in Jim's pot. He just knew he had killed the seed. Everyone else had trees and tall plants. Jim didn't say anything to his colleagues. Instead, he continued to water and fertilise the soil – he really wanted the seed to grow.

When a year finally went by, all the executives took their plants to the office for the CEO to inspect. Jim told his wife that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But she asked him to be honest about what had happened. Jim felt sick in his stomach. It was going to be the most embarrassing moment of his life but he knew his wife was right. So, he took his empty pot to work.

When Jim entered the boardroom, he was amazed. The other executives were holding a variety of plants which were lovely to look at. When they saw Jim's empty pot, some laughed while some felt sorry for him.

When the CEO arrived, Jim tried to hide in the back of the room with his pot. The CEO greeted the executives and exclaimed: "My, what great plants, trees, and flowers you have grown!" When he looked further, he spotted Jim and his empty pot. He asked him to come to the front.

Jim was terrified. He thought: "The CEO will see that I'm a failure. Maybe he will fire me!" When Jim got to the front, the CEO asked what had happened to his seed. Jim replied that he had tried everything he could but the seed would not grow. The CEO asked everyone to sit except Jim. He then announced: "Here is your next CEO!"

Jim was flabbergasted. His seed didn't grow at all, so how could he be chosen? The CEO spoke again: "The seeds I gave you were actually boiled seeds. They were dead so they could not have grown. When your seed did not grow, you replaced it with another seed. So today, all of you, except Jim, have brought me trees, plants and flowers. Jim was the only one honest enough to bring back the seed I had given. Therefore, he will be the new CEO!" TCX